**‘Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art—’**

Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art—

Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night

And watching, with eternal lids apart,

Like nature’s patient, sleepless Eremite,

The moving waters at their priestlike task

Of pure ablution round earth’s human shores,

Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask

Of snow upon the mountains and the moors—

No—yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,

Pillow’d upon my fair love’s ripening breast,

To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,

Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,

Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,

And so live ever—or else swoon to death.

—John Keats

**Drummer Hodge**

I

They throw in Drummer Hodge, to rest

Uncoffined—just as found:

His landmark is a kopje-crest

That breaks the veldt around;

And foreign constellations west

Each night above his mound.

II

Young Hodge the Drummer never knew—

Fresh from his Wessex home—

The meaning of the broad Karoo,

The Bush, the dusty loam,

And why uprose to nightly view

Strange stars amid the gloam.

III

Yet portion of that unknown plain

Will Hodge for ever be;

His homely Northern breast and brain

Grow up a Southern tree,

And strange-eyed constellations reign

His stars eternally.

—Thomas Hardy

**By Disposition of Angels**

Messengers much like ourselves? Explain it.

Steadfastness the darkness makes explicit?

Something heard most clearly when not near it?

Above particularities,

These unparticularities praise cannot violate.

One has seen, in such steadiness never deflected,

How by darkness a star is perfected.

Star that does not ask me if I see it?

Fir that would not wish me to uproot it?

Speech that does not ask me if I hear it

Mysteries expound mysteries.

Steadier than steady, star dazzling me, live and elate,

No need to say, how like some we have known; too like her,

Too like him, and a-quiver forever.

—Marianne Moore

**The Wit**

“Wait. Let me think a minute,” you said.

And in the minute we saw:

Eve and Newton with an apple apiece,

and Moses with the Law,

Socrates, who scratched his curly head,

and many more from Greece,

all coming hurrying up to now,

bid by your crinkled brow.

But then you made a brilliant pun.

We gave a thunderclap of laughter.

Flustered, your helpers vanished one by one;

and through the conversational spaces, after,

we caught,—back, back, far, far,—

the glinting birthday of a fractious star.

—Elizabeth Bishop

**Orion**

Far back when I went zig-zagging

through tamarack pastures

you were my genius, you

my cast-iron Viking, my helmed

lion-heart king in prison.

Years later now you're young

my fierce half-brother, staring

down from that simplified west

your breast open, your belt dragged down

by an oldfashioned thing, a sword

the last bravado you won't give over

though it weighs you sown as you stride

and the stars in it are dim

and maybe have stopped burning.

But you burn, and I know it;

as I throw back my head to take you in

an old transfusion happens again:

divine astronomy is nothing to it.

Indoors I bruise and blunder,

break faith, leave ill enough

alone, a dead child born in the dark.

Night cracks up over the chimney,

pieces of time, frozen geodes

come showering down in the grate.

A man reaches behind my eyes

and finds them empty

a woman's head turns away

from my head in the mirror

children are dying my death

and eating crumbs of my life.

Pity is not your forte.

Calmly you ache up there

pinned aloft in your crow’s nest,

my speechless pirate!

You take it all for granted

and when I look you back

it’s with a starlike eye

shooting its cold and egotistical spear

where it can so least damage.

Breathe deep! No hurt, no pardon

out here in the cold with you

you with your back to the wall.

—Adrienne Rich

**Winter Stars**

My father once broke a man’s hand

Over the exhaust pipe of a John Deere tractor. The man,

Rubén Vásquez, wanted to kill his own father

With a sharpened fruit knife, & he held

The curved tip of it, lightly, between his first

Two fingers, so it could slash

Horizontally, & with surprising grace,

Across a throat. It was like a glinting beak in a hand,

And, for a moment, the light held still

On those vines. When it was over,

My father simply went in & ate lunch, & then, as always,

Lay alone in the dark, listening to music.

He never mentioned it.

I never understood how anyone could risk his life,

Then listen to Vivaldi.

Sometimes, I go out into this yard at night,

And stare through the wet branches of an oak

In winter, & realize I am looking at the stars

Again. A thin haze of them, shining

And persisting.

It used to make me feel lighter, looking up at them.

In California, that light was closer.

In a California no one will ever see again,

My father is beginning to die. Something

Inside him is slowly taking back

Every word it ever gave him.

Now, if we try to talk, I watch my father

Search for a lost syllable as if it might

Solve everything, & though he can’t remember, now,

The word for it, he is ashamed . . .

If you can think of the mind as a place continually

Visited, a whole city placed behind

The eyes, & shining, I can imagine, now, its end—

As when the lights go off, one by one,

In a hotel at night, until at last

All of the travelers will be asleep, or until

Even the thin glow from the lobby is a kind

Of sleep; & while the woman behind the desk

Is applying more lacquer to her nails,

You can almost believe that the elevator,

As it ascends, must open upon starlight.

I stand out on the street, & do not go in.

That was our agreement, at my birth.

And for years I believed

That what went unsaid between us became empty,

And pure, like starlight, & that it persisted.

I got it all wrong.

I wound up believing in words the way a scientist

Believes in carbon, after death.

Tonight, I’m talking to you, father, although

It is quiet here in the Midwest, where a small wind,

The size of a wrist, wakes the cold again—

Which may be all that’s left of you & me.

When I left home at seventeen, I left for good.

That pale haze of stars goes on & on,

Like laughter that has found a final, silent shape

On a black sky. It means everything

It cannot say. Look, it’s empty out there, & cold.

Cold enough to reconcile

Even a father, even a son.

—Larry Levis