

Sonnet 18

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date;
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimmed;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:
 So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
 So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

—William Shakespeare

The Ivy Crown

The whole process is a lie,
 unless,
 crowned by excess,
it break forcefully,
 one way or another,
 from its confinement—
or find a deeper well.
 Antony and Cleopatra
 were right;
they have shown
 the way. I love you
 or I do not live
at all.

Daffodil time
 is past. This is
 summer, summer!
the heart says,
 and not even the full of it.
 No doubts
are permitted—
 though they will come
 and may
before our time
 overwhelm us.
 We are only mortal
but being mortal
 can defy our fate.
 We may
by an outside chance
 even win! We do not
 look to see
jonquils and violets
 come again
 but there are,
still,
 the roses!

Romance has no part in it.
 The business of love is
 cruelty *which*,
by our wills,
 we transform
 to live together.
It has its seasons,
 for and against,
 whatever the heart
fumbles in the dark

to assert
toward the end of May.
Just as the nature of briars
is to tear flesh,
I have proceeded
through them.
Keep
the briars out,
they say.
You cannot live
and keep free of
briars.
Children pick flowers.
Let them.
Though having them
in hand
they have no further use for them
but leave them crumpled
at the curb's edge.
At our age the imagination
across the sorry facts
lifts us
to make roses
stand before thorns.
Sure
love is cruel
and selfish
and totally obtuse—
at least, blinded by the light,
young love is.
But we are older,
I to love
and you to be loved,
we have,
no matter how,
by our wills survived
to keep
the jeweled prize
always
at our finger tips.
We will it so
and so it is
past all accident.

—William Carlos Williams

Psychoanalysis: An Elegy

What are you thinking about?

I am thinking of an early summer.
I am thinking of wet hills in the rain
Pouring water. Shedding it
Down empty acres of oak and manzanita
Down to the old green brush tangled in the sun,
Greasewood, sage, and spring mustard.
Or the hot wind coming down from Santa Ana
Driving the hills crazy,
A fast wind with a bit of dust in it
Bruising everything and making the seed sweet.
Or down in the city where the peach trees
Are awkward as young horses,
And there are kites caught on the wires
Up above the street lamps,
And the storm drains are all choked with dead branches.

What are you thinking?

I think that I would like to write a poem that is slow as a summer
As slow getting started
As 4th of July somewhere around the middle of the second stanza
After a lot of unusual rain
California seems long in the summer.
I would like to write a poem as long as California
And as slow as a summer.
Do you get me, Doctor? It would have to be as slow
As the very tip of summer.
As slow as the summer seems
On a hot day drinking beer outside Riverside
Or standing in the middle of a white-hot road
Between Bakersfield and Hell
Waiting for Santa Claus.

What are you thinking now?

I'm thinking that she is very much like California.
When she is still her dress is like a roadmap. Highways
Traveling up and down her skin
Long empty highways
With the moon chasing jackrabbits across them
On hot summer nights.
I am thinking that her body could be California
And I a rich Eastern tourist
Lost somewhere between Hell and Texas
Looking at a map of a long, wet, dancing California

That I have never seen.
Send me some penny picture-postcards, lady,
Send them.
One of each breast photographed looking
Like curious national monuments,
One of your body sweeping like a three-lane highway
Twenty-seven miles from a night's lodging
In the world's oldest hotel.

What are you thinking?

I am thinking of how many times this poem
Will be repeated. How many summers
Will torture California
Until the damned maps burn
Until the mad cartographer
Falls to the ground and possesses
The sweet thick earth from which he has been hiding.

What are you thinking now?

I am thinking that a poem could go on forever.

—Jack Spicer

Lake Echo, Dear

Is the woman in the pool of light
really reading or just staring
at what is written

Is the man walking in the soft rain
naked or is it the rain
that makes his shirt transparent

The boy in the iron cot
is he asleep or still
fingering the springs underneath

Did you honestly believe
three lives could be complete

The bottle of green liquid
on the sill is it real

The bottle on the peeling sill
is it filled with green

Or is the liquid an illusion
of fullness

How summer's children turn
into fish and rain softens men

How the elements of summer
nights bid us to get down with each other
on the unplanned floor

And this feels painfully beautiful
whether or not
it will change the world one drop

—C. D. Wright

No Name

What can I tell you? It was a summer that seemed to be making history — their personal history — almost before it began, and they stood back slightly, still in it, but observing it, saying “the summer this,” “the summer that,” all the while it was going on. They became obsessed with a fountain, for example, one they walked past each day, how abundantly it would reach upwards and yet be pouring back down itself the whole time — all winter this fountain had been dry, not saying a word. What more can I tell you? Oh, everything — like how they would walk home in the evenings when the light was soft, anything bad sliding off them, and they would feel owned, completely owned, in a good way, by the air, which would touch them constantly, sometimes urgently, sometimes lightly, just to let them know it was there, and they would think maybe this is what being alive is, when they saw how complicated a tree was and how it wanted them looking at it and saying this, how the color of a particular flower at this particular moment was redder even than the life force, whatever that is, if you could open it up and get right down inside it, if you could put your mouth to it and become as red as that rose even, it was still redder than that, and they wouldn’t know what to do with themselves so they wouldn’t do anything except listen to the songs in their heads which were sad ones like nearly all good songs and watch this feeling rolling in, sunshine or rain, we don’t know yet, it’s a good one, it’s the best one, though it has no name.

—Emily Berry