**I Saw in Louisiana A Live-Oak Growing**

I saw in Louisiana a live-oak growing,

All alone stood it and the moss hung down from the branches,

Without any companion it grew there uttering joyous leaves of dark green,

And its look, rude, unbending, lusty, made me think of myself,

But I wonder’d how it could utter joyous leaves standing alone there without its

friend near, for I knew I could not,

And I broke off a twig with a certain number of leaves upon it, and twined around it

a little moss,

And brought it away, and I have placed it in sight in my room,

It is not needed to remind me as of my own dear friends,

(For I believe lately I think of little else than of them,)

Yet it remains to me a curious token, it makes me think of manly love;

For all that, and though the live-oak glistens there in Louisiana solitary in a wide flat

space,

Uttering joyous leaves all its life without a friend a lover near,

I know very well I could not.

—Walt Whitman

**From *In Memoriam A. H. H.***

Old Yew, which graspest at the stones

That name the under-lying dead,

Thy fibres net the dreamless head,

Thy roots are wrapt about the bones.

The seasons bring the flower again,

And bring the firstling to the flock;

And in the dusk of thee, the clock

Beats out the little lives of men.

O not for thee the glow, the bloom,

Who changest not in any gale,

Nor branding summer suns avail

To touch thy thousand years of gloom:

And gazing on thee, sullen tree,

Sick for thy stubborn hardihood,

I seem to fail from out my blood

And grow incorporate into thee.

—Alfred, Lord Tennyson

**Bare Fig-Trees**

Fig-trees, weird fig-trees

Made of thick smooth silver,

Made of sweet, untarnished silver in the sea-southern air—

I say untarnished, but I mean opaque—

Thick, smooth-fleshed silver, dull only as human limbs are dull

With the life-lustre,

Nude with the dim light of full, healthy life

That is always half-dark,

And suave like passion-flower petals,

Like passion-flowers,

With the half-secret gleam of a passion-flower hanging from the rock.

Great, complicated, nude fig-tree, stemless flower-mesh,

Flowerily naked in flesh, and giving off hues of life.

Rather like an octopus, but strange and sweet-myriad-limbed octopus;

Like a nude, like a rock-living, sweet-fleshed sea-anemone,

Flourishing from the rock in a mysterious arrogance.

Let me sit down beneath the many-branching candelabrum

That lives upon this rock

And laugh at Time, and laugh at dull Eternity,

And make a joke of stale Infinity,

Within the flesh-scent of this wicked tree,

That has kept so many secrets up its sleeve,

And has been laughing through so many ages

At man and his uncomfortablenesses,

And his attempt to assure himself that what is so is not so,

Up its sleeve.

Let me sit down beneath this many-branching candelabrum,

The Jewish seven-branched, tallow-stinking candlestick kicked over the cliff

And all its tallow righteousness got rid of,

And let me notice it behave itself.

And watch it putting forth each time to heaven,

Each time straight to heaven,

With marvellous naked assurance each single twig,

Each one setting off straight to the sky

As if it were the leader, the main-stem, the forerunner,

Intent to hold the candle of the sun upon its socket-tip,

It alone.

Every young twig

No sooner issued sideways from the thigh of his predecessor

Than off he starts without a qualm

To hold the one and only lighted candle of the sun in his socket-tip.

He casually gives birth to another young bud from his thigh,

Which at once sets off to be the one and only,

And hold the lighted candle of the sun.

Oh many-branching candelabrum, oh strange up-starting fig-tree,

Oh weird Demos, where every twig is the arch twig,

Each imperiously over-equal to each, equality over-reaching itself

Like the snakes on Medusa's head,

Oh naked fig-tree!

Still, no doubt every one of you can be the sun-socket as well as every other of you.

Demos, Demos, Demos!

Demon, too,

Wicked fig-tree, equality puzzle, with your self-conscious secret fruits.

—D.H. Lawrence

**Some Trees**

These are amazing: each

Joining a neighbor, as though speech

Were a still performance.

Arranging by chance

To meet as far this morning

From the world as agreeing

With it, you and I

Are suddenly what the trees try

To tell us we are:

That their merely being there

Means something; that soon

We may touch, love, explain.

And glad not to have invented

Such comeliness, we are surrounded:

A silence already filled with noises,

A canvas on which emerges

A chorus of smiles, a winter morning.

Placed in a puzzling light, and moving,

Our days put on such reticence

These accents seem their own defense.

—John Ashbery

**The Cherry Tree**

In her gnarled sleep it

begins

though she seems

as unmoving as the statue

of a running man: her

branches caught in a

writhing, her trunk

leaning as if in mid-fall.

When the wind moves

against her grave body

only the youngest twigs

scutter amongst themselves.

But there’s something going on

in those twisted brown limbs,

it starts as a need

and it takes over, a need

to push

push outward

from the centre, to

bring what is not

from what is, pushing

till at the tips of the push

something comes about

and then

pulling it from outside

until yes she has them started

tiny bumps

appear at the ends of twigs.

Then at once they’re all here,

she wears them like a coat

a coat of babies,

I almost think that she

preens herself, jubilant at

the thick dazzle of bloom,

that the caught writhing has become

a sinuous wriggle of joy

beneath her fleece.

But she is working still

to feed her children,

there’s a lot more yet,

bringing up all she can

a lot of goodness from roots

while the petals drop.

The fleece is gone

as suddenly as it came

and hundreds of babies are left

almost too small to be seen

but they fatten, fatten, get pink

and shine among her leaves.

Now she can repose a bit

they are so fat.

She cares less

birds get them, men

pick them, human children wear them

in pairs over their ears

she loses them all.

That’s why she made them,

to lose them into the world, she

returns to herself,

she rests, she doesn’t care.

She leans into the wind

her trunk shines black

with rain, she sleeps

as black and hard as lava.

She knows nothing about babies.

—Thom Gunn

**I Was Taught Three**

names for the tree facing my window

almost within reach, elastic

with squirrels, memory banks, homes.

*Castagno* took itself to heart, its pods

like urchins clung to where they landed

claiming every bit of shadow

at the hem. *Chassagne*, on windier days,

nervous in taffeta gowns,

whispering, on the verge of being

anarchic, though well bred.

And then *chestnut*, whipped pale and clean

by all the inner reservoirs

called upon to do their even share of work.

It was not the kind of tree

got at by default—imagine that—not one

in which the only remaining leaf

was loyal. No, this

was all first person, and I

was the stem, holding within myself the whole

bouquet of three

at once given and received: smallest roadmaps

of coincidence. What is the idea

that governs blossoming? The human tree

clothed with its nouns, or this one

just outside my window promising more firmly

than can be

that it will reach my sill eventually, the leaves

silent as suppressed desires, and I

a name among them.

—Jorie Graham