**Sonnet 129: ‘Th’ expense of spirit in a waste of shame’**

Th’ expense of spirit in a waste of shame

Is lust in action; and till action, lust

Is perjured, murd’rous, bloody, full of blame,

Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust,

Enjoyed no sooner but despisèd straight,

Past reason hunted; and, no sooner had

Past reason hated as a swallowed bait

On purpose laid to make the taker mad;

Mad in pursuit and in possession so,

Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;

A bliss in proof and proved, a very woe;

Before, a joy proposed; behind, a dream.

All this the world well knows; yet none knows well

To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

—William Shakespeare

**Missing Dates**

Slowly the poison the whole blood stream fills.

It is not the effort nor the failure tires.

The waste remains, the waste remains and kills.

It is not your system or clear sight that mills

Down small to the consequence a life requires;

Slowly the poison the whole blood stream fills.

They bled an old dog dry yet the exchange rills

Of young dog blood gave but a month’s desires.

The waste remains, the waste remains and kills.

It is the Chinese tombs and the slag hills

Usurp the soil, and not the soil retires.

Slowly the poison the whole blood stream fills.

Not to have fire is to be a skin that shrills.

The complete fire is death. From partial fires

The waste remains, the waste remains and kills.

It is the poems you have lost, the ills

From missing dates, at which the heart expires.

Slowly the poison the whole blood stream fills.

The waste remains, the waste remains and kills.

—William Empson

**Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy’s Farm**

**in Pine Island, Minnesota**

Over my head, I see the bronze butterfly,

Asleep on the black trunk,

Blowing like a leaf in green shadow.

Down the ravine behind the empty house,

The cowbells follow one another

Into the distances of the afternoon.

To my right,

In a field of sunlight between two pines,

The droppings of last year’s horses

Blaze up into golden stones.

I lean back, as the evening darkens and comes on.

A chicken hawk floats over, looking for home.

I have wasted my life.

—James Wright

**Conserving the Magnitude of Uselessness**

Spits of glitter in lowgrade ore,

precious stones too poorly surrounded for harvest,

to all things not worth the work

of having,

brush oak on a sharp slope, for example,

the balk tonnage of woods-lodged boulders,

the irreparable desert,

drowned river mouths, lost shores where

the winged and light-footed go,

take creosote bush that possesses

ground nothing else will have,

to all things and for all things

crusty or billowy with indifference,

for example, incalculable, irremovable water

or fluvio-glacial deposits

larch or dwarf aspen in the least breeze sometimes shiver in—

suddenly the salvation of waste betides,

the peerlessly unsettled seas that shape the continents,

take the gales wasting and in waste over

Antarctica and the sundry high shoals of ice,

for the inexcusable (the worthless abundant) the

merely tiresome, the obviously unimprovable,

to these and for these and for their undiminishment

the poets will yelp and hoot forever

probably,

rank as weeds themselves and just as abandoned:

nothing useful is of lasting value:

dry wind only is still talking among the oldest stones.

—A. R. Ammons

**Uptick**

We were sitting there, and

I made a joke about how

it doesn’t dovetail: time,

one minute running out

faster than the one in front

it catches up to.

That way, I said,

there can be no waste.

Waste is virtually eliminated.

To come back for a few hours to

the present subject, a painting,

looking like it was seen,

half turning around, slightly apprehensive,

but it has to pay attention

to what’s up ahead: a vision.

Therefore poetry dissolves in

brilliant moisture and reads us

to us.

A faint notion. Too many words,

but precious.

—John Ashbery