

**Sonnet: On Being Cautioned Against Walking  
on an Headland Overlooking the Sea,  
Because It Was Frequented by a Lunatic**

Is there a solitary wretch who hies  
To the tall cliff, with starting pace or slow,  
And, measuring, views with wild and hollow eyes  
Its distance from the waves that chide below;  
Who, as the sea-born gale with frequent sighs  
Chills his cold bed upon the mountain turf,  
With hoarse, half-uttered lamentation, lies  
Murmuring responses to the dashing surf?  
In moody sadness, on the giddy brink,  
I see him more with envy than with fear;  
*He* has no *nice felicities* that shrink  
From giant horrors; wildly wandering here,  
He seems (uncursed with reason) not to know  
The depth or the duration of his woe.

—Charlotte Smith

## The Wood-Pile

Out walking in the frozen swamp one gray day,  
I paused and said, 'I will turn back from here.  
No, I will go on farther—and we shall see.'  
The hard snow held me, save where now and then  
One foot went through. The view was all in lines  
Straight up and down of tall slim trees  
Too much alike to mark or name a place by  
So as to say for certain I was here  
Or somewhere else: I was just far from home.  
A small bird flew before me. He was careful  
To put a tree between us when he lighted,  
And say no word to tell me who he was  
Who was so foolish as to think what *he* thought.  
He thought that I was after him for a feather—  
The white one in his tail; like one who takes  
Everything said as personal to himself.  
One flight out sideways would have undeceived him.  
And then there was a pile of wood for which  
I forgot him and let his little fear  
Carry him off the way I might have gone,  
Without so much as wishing him good-night.  
He went behind it to make his last stand.  
It was a cord of maple, cut and split  
And piled—and measured, four by four by eight.  
And not another like it could I see.  
No runner tracks in this year's snow looped near it.  
And it was older sure than this year's cutting,  
Or even last year's or the year's before.  
The wood was gray and the bark warping off it  
And the pile somewhat sunken. Clematis  
Had wound strings round and round it like a bundle.  
What held it though on one side was a tree  
Still growing, and on one a stake and prop,  
These latter about to fall. I thought that only  
Someone who lived in turning to fresh tasks  
Could so forget his handiwork on which  
He spent himself, the labor of his ax,  
And leave it there far from a useful fireplace  
To warm the frozen swamp as best it could  
With the slow smokeless burning of decay.

—Robert Frost

## Walking to Work

It's going to be the sunny side  
from now  
    on. Get out, all of you.

This is my traffic over the night  
and how  
    should I range my pride

each oceanic morning like a cutter  
if I  
    confuse the dark world is round  
round who  
    in my eyes at morning saves

nothing from nobody? I'm becoming  
the street.  
    Who are you in love with?  
me?  
    Straight against the light I cross.

—Frank O'Hara

## The Walk

Out of shape,  
my legs ache  
going down  
this steep  
hill. I hear  
the water  
rushing down  
beside me  
through the  
trees. Has  
the creek  
a name? It  
somewhere joins  
the brown Winooski.  
The ferns  
the frost  
has killed and  
curled: another  
kind it hasn't.  
One dandelion  
a frayed sun in sun-  
light that  
lights up the  
empurpled  
blackberry  
leaves. Remember  
when you picked  
them? A dog  
and a friendly  
voice that calls,  
"He's friendly."  
One horse in  
a field that  
stands stock  
still, soaking  
up the sun.  
And twelve  
cows, each doing  
something dif-  
ferent: munching,  
lying down.  
The way a  
white house  
takes late light  
and turns it  
back. A tumbled  
shed, once red,  
with missing  
windows and  
gear stowed

inside. A  
long and  
steady climb  
I've made before:  
now my legs  
ache, I only  
want to reach  
the top to where  
the road ambles  
down through  
woods between  
tumbled field-  
stone walls. This  
land once all  
was clear. The  
sun is on  
the trees on  
the far side  
of the pond  
on which they  
in image lie.  
The cabin, then  
the house. Clear  
air, warm  
Indian summer  
sun, the mosses  
that I saw, and  
delicate white  
lichens, the  
trees that make  
it and the  
trees that don't.  
Soon blue snow  
will shroud it  
all: why take  
a long walk  
with aching legs?  
For fun? Why  
not? I can-  
not tell you  
all I saw,  
but won't for-  
get the deer  
slot stamped  
in the muddy  
road. I love  
their white  
scuts when they  
bound away,  
deer at horseplay.

—James Schuyler

## A Walk

Sunday the only day we don't work:  
Mules farting around the meadow,  
                                Murphy fishing,  
The tent flaps in the warm  
Early sun: I've eaten breakfast and I'll  
                                Take a walk  
To Benson Lake. Packed a lunch,  
Goodbye. Hopping on creekbed boulders  
Up the rock throat three miles  
                                Piute Creek —  
In steep gorge glacier-slick rattlesnake country  
Jump, land by a pool, trout skitter,  
The clear sky. Deer tracks.  
Bad place by a falls, boulders big as houses,  
Lunch tied to belt,  
I stemmed up a crack and almost fell  
But rolled out safe on a ledge  
                                and ambled on.  
Quail chicks freeze underfoot, color of stone  
Then run cheep! away, hen quail fussing.  
Craggy west end of Benson Lake — after edging  
Past dark creek pools on a long white slope —  
Lookt down in the ice-black lake  
                                lined with cliff  
From far above: deep shimmering trout.  
A lone duck in a gunsightpass  
                                steep side hill  
Through slide-aspen and talus, to the east end,  
Down to grass, wading a wide smooth stream  
Into camp. At last.  
                        By the rusty three-year-  
Ago left-behind cookstove  
Of the old trail crew,  
Stoppt and swam and ate my lunch.

—Gary Snyder

## Living in History

Walk by the shore, it is  
a cool image, of water  
    a bearing into certain  
    distinctions, as  
    the stretch, out there  
the temple of which way  
he goes; and cannot shake  
    the haze, from  
    a list of small  
    flames.

    He wants  
only the patient ebb, as  
following the shore: that's  
    not honest, but where  
    his foot prints and  
    marks his track  
        in the fact of  
        the evening

the path where he grabs at  
motion, like a moist plant  
    or the worth, of  
    hearing the tide come in.

Walk on it, being a line, of rest  
and distinction, a hope now lived up  
    to, a coast in awkward  
    singular desires  
        thigh-bone of the  
        world

—J. H. Prynne

## Sundown

(*St. Laurent Sur Mer, June 5, 2009*)

Sometimes the day  
light winces  
behind you and it is  
a great treasure in this case today a man on  
a horse in calm full  
gallop on Omaha over my  
left shoulder coming on  
fast but  
calm not audible to me at all until I turned back my  
head for no  
reason as if what lies behind  
one had whispered  
*what can I do for you today* and I had just  
turned to  
answer and the answer to my  
answer flooded from the front with the late sun he/they  
were driving into—gleaming—  
wet chest and upraised knees and  
light-struck hooves and thrust-out even breathing of the great  
beast—from just behind me,  
passing me—the rider looking straight  
ahead and yet  
smiling without looking at me as I smiled as we  
both smiled for the young  
animal, my feet in the  
breaking wave-edge, his hooves returning, as they begin to pass  
by,  
to the edge of the furling  
break, each tossed-up flake of  
ocean offered into the reddish  
luminosity—sparks—as they made their way,  
boring through to clear out  
life, a place where no one  
again is suddenly  
killed—regardless of the “cause”—no one—just this  
galloping forward with  
force through the low waves, seagulls  
scattering all round, their  
screeching and mewling rising like more bits of red foam, the  
horse's hooves now suddenly  
louder as it goes  
by and its prints on  
wet sand deep and immediately filled by thousands of

sandfleas thrilled to the  
declivities in succession in the newly  
released beach—just  
at the right  
moment for some  
microscopic life to rise up through these  
cups in the hard upslant  
retreating ocean is  
revealing, sandfleas finding them just as light does,  
carving them out with  
shadow, and glow on each  
ridge, and  
water oozing up through the innermost cut of the  
hoofsteps,  
and when I shut my eyes now I am not like a blind person  
walking towards the lowering sun,  
the water loud at my right,  
but like a seeing person  
with her eyes shut  
putting her feet down  
one at a time  
on the earth.

—Jorie Graham