

Twice

I took my heart in my hand
 (O my love, O my love),
I said: Let me fall or stand,
 Let me live or die,
But this once hear me speak—
 (O my love, O my love)—
Yet a woman's words are weak;
 You should speak, not I.

You took my heart in your hand
 With a friendly smile,
With a critical eye you scanned,
 Then set it down,
And said: It is still unripe,
 Better wait awhile;
Wait while the skylarks pipe,
 Till the corn grows brown.

As you set it down it broke—
 Broke, but I did not wince;
I smiled at the speech you spoke,
 At your judgement I heard:
But I have not often smiled
 Since then, nor questioned since,
Nor cared for cornflowers wild,
 Nor sung with the singing bird.

I take my heart in my hand,
 O my God, O my God,
My broken heart in my hand:
 Thou hast seen, judge Thou.
My hope was written on sand,
 O my God, O my God:
Now let thy judgement stand—
 Yea, judge me now.

This condemned of a man,
 This marred one heedless day,
This heart take Thou to scan
 Both within and without:
Refine with fire its gold,
 Purge Thou its dross away—
Yea, hold it in Thy hold,
 Whence none can pluck it out.

I take my heart in my hand—
 I shall not die, but live—
Before Thy face I stand;
 I, for Thou callest such:
All that I have I bring,
 All that I am I give,
Smile Thou and I shall sing,
 But shall not question much.

Midnight

The stars are soft as flowers, and as near;
The hills are webs of shadow, slowly spun;
No separate leaf or single blade is here—
All blend to one.

No moonbeam cuts the air; a sapphire light
Rolls lazily, and slips again to rest.
There is no edgèd thing in all this night,
Save in my breast.

—Dorothy Parker

My Heart

I'm not going to cry all the time
nor shall I laugh all the time,
I don't prefer one "strain" to another.
I'd have the immediacy of a bad movie,
not just a sleeper, but also the big,
overproduced first-run kind. I want to be
at least as alive as the vulgar. And if
some aficionado of my mess says "That's
not like Frank!," all to the good! I
don't wear brown and grey suits all the time,
do I? No. I wear workshirts to the opera,
often. I want my feet to be bare,
I want my face to be shaven, and my heart—
you can't plan on the heart, but
the better part of it, my poetry, is open.

—Frank O'Hara

The City Limits

When you consider the radiance, that it does not withhold
itself but pours its abundance without selection into every
nook and cranny not overhung or hidden; when you consider

that birds' bones make no awful noise against the light but
lie low in the light as in a high testimony; when you consider
the radiance, that it will look into the guiltiest

swervings of the weaving heart and bear itself upon them,
not flinching into disguise or darkening; when you consider
the abundance of such resource as illuminates the glow-blue

bodies and gold-skeined wings of flies swarming the dumped
guts of a natural slaughter or the coil of shit and in no
way winces from its storms of generosity; when you consider

that air or vacuum, snow or shale, squid or wolf, rose or lichen,
each is accepted into as much light as it will take, then
the heart moves roomier, the man stands and looks about, the

leaf does not increase itself above the grass, and the dark
work of the deepest cells is of a tune with May bushes
and fear lit by the breadth of such calmly turns to praise.

—A. R. Ammons

Love Incarnate

(Dante, *Vita Nuova*)

To all those driven berserk or humanized by love
this is offered, for I need help
deciphering my dream.
When we love our lord is LOVE.

When I recall that at the fourth hour
of the night, watched by shining stars,
LOVE at last became incarnate,
the memory is horror.

In his hands smiling LOVE held my burning
heart, and in his arms, the body whose greeting
pierces my soul, now wrapped in bloodred, sleeping.

He made him wake. He ordered him to eat
my heart. He ate my burning heart. He ate it
submissively, as if afraid, as LOVE wept.

—Frank Bidart

Love After Love

The time will come
when, with elation
you will greet yourself arriving
at your own door, in your own mirror
and each will smile at the other's welcome,

and say, sit here. Eat.
You will love again the stranger who was your self.
Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you

all your life, whom you ignored
for another, who knows you by heart.
Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,

the photographs, the desperate notes,
peel your own image from the mirror.
Sit. Feast on your life.

—Derek Walcott