The Skylark

The rolls and harrows lie at rest beside

The battered road and spreading far and wide

Above the russet clods the corn is seen

Sprouting its spirey points of tender green

Where squats the hare to terrors wide awake,

Like some brown clod the harrows failed to break

While neath the warm hedge boys stray far from home

To crop the early blossoms as they come

Where buttercups will make them eager run

Opening their golden caskets to the sun

To see who shall be first to pluck the prize

And from their hurry up the skylark flies

And oer her half formed nest with happy wings

Winnows the air—till in the clouds she sings

Then hangs a dust-spot in the sunny skies

And drops and drops till in her nest she lies

Where boys unheeding passed—neer dreaming then

That birds which flew so high—would drop agen

To nests upon the ground where any thing

May come at to destroy had they the wing

Like such a bird themselves would be too proud

And build on nothing but a passing cloud

As free from danger as the heavens are free

From pain and toil—there would they build and be

And sail about the world to scenes unheard

Of and unseen—O were they but a bird

So think they while they listen to its song

And smile and fancy and so pass along

While its low nest moist with the dews of morn

Lye safely with the leveret in the corn.

—John Clare

Her Haunting-Ground

Can it be so? It must be so,

That visions have not ceased to be

In this the chiefest sanctuary

Of her whose form we used to know.

– Nay, but her dust is far away,

And ‘where her dust is, shapes her shade,

If spirit clings to flesh,’ they say:

Yet here her life-parts most were played!

Her voice explored this atmosphere,

Her foot impressed this turf around,

Her shadow swept this slope and mound,

Her fingers fondled blossoms here;

And so, I ask, why, why should she

Haunt elsewhere, by a slighted tomb,

When here she flourished sorrow-free,

And, save for others, knew no gloom?

—Thomas Hardy

April 5, 1974

The air was soft, the ground still cold.

In the dull pasture where I strolled

Was something I could not believe.

Dead grass appeared to slide and heave,

Though still too frozen-flat to stir,

And rocks to twitch, and all to blur.

What was this rippling of the land?

Was matter getting out of hand

And making free with natural law?

I stopped and blinked, and then I saw

A fact as eerie as a dream,

There was a subtle flood of steam

Moving upon the face of things.

It came from standing pools and springs

And what of snow was still around;

It came of winter's giving ground

So that the freeze was coming out,

As when a set mind, blessed by doubt,

Relaxes into mother-wit.

Flowers, I said, will come of it.

—Richard Wilbur

*from* Glanmore Sonnets (1)

Vowels ploughed into other: opened ground.

The mildest February for twenty years

Is mist bands over furrows, a deep no sound

Vulnerable to distant gargling tractors.

Our road is steaming, the turned-up acres breathe.

Now the good life could be to cross a field

And art a paradigm of earth new from the lathe

Of ploughs. My lea is deeply tilled.

Old ploughsocks gorge the subsoil of each sense

And I am quickened with a redolence

Of farmland as a dark unblown rose.

Wait then . . . Breasting the mist, in sowers’ aprons,

My ghosts come striding into their spring stations.

The dream grain whirls like freakish Easter snows.

—Seamus Heaney

*from* October (I)

Is it winter again, is it cold again,

didn’t Frank just slip on the ice,

didn’t he heal, weren’t the spring seeds planted

didn’t the night end,

didn’t the melting ice

flood the narrow gutters

wasn’t my body

rescued, wasn’t it safe

didn’t the scar form, invisible

above the injury

terror and cold,

didn’t they just end, wasn’t the back garden

harrowed and planted —

I remember how the earth felt, red and dense,

in stiff rows, weren’t the seeds planted,

didn’t vines climb the south wall

I can’t hear your voice

for the wind’s cries, whistling over the bare ground

I no longer care

what sound it makes

when was I silenced, when did it first seem

pointless to describe that sound

what it sounds like can’t change what it is —

didn’t the night end, wasn’t the earth

safe when it was planted

didn’t we plant the seeds,

weren’t we necessary to the earth,

the vines, were they harvested?

—Louise Glück

On the Ground

When the collie saw the child

break from the crowd,

he gave chase, and since they both

were border-crossers,

they left this world.

We were then made of—

affronted by—silence.

The train passed Poste 5, Paris,

late arrival, no luck, no

enlarging commentary

magnified in any glass.

“The ineffable

is everywhere in language”

the speaker had said

in the huge hall where

I sat amongst coughers,

students, in the late

February of that year,

at the end of a sinuous

inquiry on sense and sound—

“and very close to the ground,” he’d said.

Like mist risen above

the feet of animals

in a far field north of here.

—Saskia Hamilton