**Leap Before You Look**

The sense of danger must not disappear:

The way is certainly both short and steep,

However gradual it looks from here;

Look if you like, but you will have to leap.

Tough-minded men get mushy in their sleep

And break the by-laws any fool can keep;

It is not the convention but the fear

That has a tendency to disappear.

The worried efforts of the busy heap,

The dirt, the imprecision, and the beer

Produce a few smart wisecracks every year;

Laugh if you can, but you will have to leap.

The clothes that are considered right to wear

Will not be either sensible or cheap,

So long as we consent to live like sheep

And never mention those who disappear.

Much can be said for social savoir-faire,

But to rejoice when no one else is there

Is even harder than it is to weep;

No one is watching, but you have to leap.

A solitude ten thousand fathoms deep

Sustains the bed on which we lie, my dear:

Although I love you, you will have to leap;

Our dream of safety has to disappear.

—W. H. Auden

**The Man with Night Sweats**

I wake up cold, I who

Prospered through dreams of heat

Wake to their residue,

Sweat, and a clinging sheet.

My flesh was its own shield:

Where it was gashed, it healed.

I grew as I explored

The body I could trust

Even while I adored

The risk that made robust,

A world of wonders in

Each challenge to the skin.

I cannot but be sorry

The given shield was cracked,

My mind reduced to hurry,

My flesh reduced and wrecked.

I have to change the bed,

But catch myself instead

Stopped upright where I am

Hugging my body to me

As if to shield it from

The pains that will go through me,

As if hands were enough

To hold an avalanche off.

—Thom Gunn

**The Soldier Who Guards the Frontier**

On the surface of the earth

despite all effort I continued

the life I had led in its depths.

So when you said cuckoo

hello and my heart

leapt up imagine my surprise.

From its depth some mouth

drawn by your refusals of love

fastened on them and fattened.

It’s 2004; now the creature

born from our union in 1983

attains maturity.

He guards the frontier.

As he guards the frontier he listens

all day to the records of Edith Piaf.

Heroic risk, Piaf sings. Love

is heroic risk, for what you are impelled

to risk but do not

kills you; as does, of course this voice

knows, risk. He is addicted

to the records of Edith Piaf.

He lives on the aroma, the intoxications

of what he has been spared.

He is grateful, he says, not to exist.

—Frank Bidart

**The Thing about Joe Sullivan**

The pianist Joe Sullivan,

jamming sound against idea

hard as it can go

florid and dangerous

slams at the beat, or hovers,

drumming, along its spikes;

in his time almost the only

one of them to ignore

the chance of easing down,

walking it leisurely,

he’ll strut, with gambling shapes,

underpinning by James P.,

amble, and stride over

gulfs of his own leaving, perilously

toppling octaves down to where

the chords grow fat again

and ride hard-edged, most lucidly

voiced, and in good inversions even when

the piano seems at risk of being

hammered the next second into scrap.

For all that, he won’t swing

like all the others;

disregards mere continuity,

the snakecharming business,

the ‘masturbator’s rhythm’

under the long variations:

Sullivan can gut a sequence

in one chorus—

—approach, development, climax, discard—

and sound magnanimous.

The mannerism of intensity

often with him seems true,

too much to be said, the mood

pressing in right at the start, then

running among stock forms

that could play themselves

and moving there with such

quickness of intellect

that shapes flaw and fuse,

altering without much sign,

concentration

so wrapped up in thoroughness

it can sound bluff, bustling,

just big-handed stuff—

belied by what drives him in

to make rigid, display,

shout and abscond, rather

than just let it come, let it go—

And that thing is his mood:

a feeling violent and ordinary

that runs in among standard forms so

wrapped up in clarity

that fingers following his

through figures that sound obvious

find corners everywhere,

marks of invention, wakefulness;

the rapid and perverse

tracks that ordinary feelings

make when they get driven

hard enough against time.

—Roy Fisher

**Small Frogs Killed on the Highway**

Still,

I would leap too

Into the light,

If I had the chance.

It is everything, the wet green stalk of the field

On the other side of the road.

They crouch there, too, faltering in terror

And take strange wing. Many

Of the dead never moved, but many

Of the dead are alive forever in the split second

Auto headlights more sudden

Than their drivers know.

The drivers burrow backward into dank pools

Where nothing begets

Nothing.

Across the road, tadpoles are dancing

On the quarter thumbnail

Of the moon. They can't see,

Not yet.

—James Wright