The City That Never Sleeps
The City That Never Sleeps

Poems of New York

Edited by
Shawkat M. Toorawa

Foreword by
Anne Pierson Wiese

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For my favorite visitors to New York—
Asiya, Maryam, and Parvine
and
for my favorite New Yorkers—
Marc and Michael,
and Ivonne
Even in the ironies, the allusiveness, the formal self-reference, the simultaneous evasion and acknowledgment of literary tradition that marks the poetry of the later twentieth century, there is something of the truly urban that transcends the merely urbane. And there is something to remind us that cities—each one configured differently—can seem to be figures for poetry itself.

—John Hollander
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“My eye,” my great-aunt, Tante Ruby, used to say. It was, coming from her, an expression of mild wonderment, meant as encouragement to continue with whatever story one was telling. She said it the same way that other women of her generation said, “My stars!”

Tante Ruby, the wife of a Minnesota farmer whom she outlived by three decades, came to visit my family only once when I was growing up in Brooklyn. In those days there was still some thought of dressing up for airplane travel, and I remember that when she got off the plane at LaGuardia Airport her jacket matched her dress, her handbag matched her shoes, and she was wearing a big brooch shaped like a daisy. One night, we ordered take-out Chinese food to give her a real New York experience. Tante Ruby, gamely navigating her first-ever plastic packet of soy sauce, wound up squirting herself in the eye. We never forgot.

Many years later—decades later—when I flew from New York wearing jeans and a sweatshirt to visit Tante Ruby in Minnesota, she was over ninety years old and her eyesight had failed. Her wits were as sharp as could be, though, and she still lived in her own small house in town, which she kept neat as a pin despite being legally blind. We sat in her company room—spotless, with everything in it at right angles to everything else—and she gestured toward the open windows that faced out onto her front yard and Dodge Street, a vista that for her must have been an extensive blur dappled with the green light that filtered through
the grand old trees lining the block and disturbed by the occasional fin-and-ripple motion of a passing car. “Some folks like to keep their curtains closed,” she said. “I suppose they’re worried about people looking in. But what I say is, you got to look out while you can look out.”

To be a waitress in New York City you have to walk on windows. I am thinking in particular of a recent evening on which, having received my annual $30 Benihana Birthday Gift Certificate, I went with my husband for our once-a-year hibachi dinner at Benihana’s on 56th Street in Manhattan. We sat with our backs almost touching the floor-to-ceiling glass window overlooking 56th Street, at one of the many horseshoe-shaped counters designed to accommodate eight diners. In the center the chef, with his tall paper hat, his belt of knives, and sleight-of-hand skills to equal any magician, sliced, diced, and meticulously produced our eight different meals on an expanse of grill that was red hot in the center with descending levels of heat toward its edges, allowing him to cook different ingredients at different temperatures. Every year we wait with anticipatory glee for the onion-slice-volcano trick, the beautiful spinning egg, the shrimp-in-hat act, and every year a different chef performs these maneuvers flawlessly. Meanwhile, in order to deliver soup, salad, and beverages to those of us wedged in with our backs to 56th Street, the waitress edged behind us with balletic grace along the six-inch-wide bottom of the window—walking on what is technically known as a windowsill.

“It’s a poem,” I said.

“Write it down,” said my husband.

“I don’t have any paper,” I admitted as reluctantly as might a doctor caught without her stethoscope, facing a patient in the emergency room.

My husband silently handed me his paper napkin, only slightly soiled, and his felt-tip pen. The word window grew blurry green edges as I inscribed it on the napkin. In the dimness I squinted to see what I was writing.
New York, the city that never sleeps, contains more light than all the myriad heavens conceived of by its denizens of every possible race, religion, culture, color, and creed combined. All poets are besotted with light: It is the most transformative of all phenomena and we are permanently drunk on it—moon mad, sun blind, star struck.

Wherever you look in New York City there is light: Peering through the metal grates of the street sewers you glimpse needles of sky reflected in the wet, unseemly murk below; the sun shines so brightly one spring day as you walk through a neighborhood park in Brooklyn it takes a while to realize that what you have paused to admire is not just light caught and released into a pool at ground level by an infinity of heart-shaped leaves but a field of tiny white violets—flowers and light indistinguishable; at sunrise or sunset, if you stare down the streets in Manhattan that run east-west across the width of the island, you see a tunnel of river-refracted light, a tunnel lined with windows that catch that light and turn fleetingly into flocks of white birds; at night in New York, everything emits light: the swerving halogen gaze of each moving vehicle, the craning alien globes of the street lamps, the silent film flickering in every storefront, the half-lit skyscrapers looking like control panels for some enormous, obscure endeavor, and the lights in the houses and apartment buildings where people live—smaller and more explicable.

New York City is the place from which you famously cannot see the stars in the sky for all the interposing lights of our own human creations; it is also the place where, as Vachel Lindsay imagined, “The signs in the streets and the signs in the skies/Shall make a new Zodiac, guiding the wise. . . .” My eye.

—Anne Pierson Wiese
New York City, May 2013
Preface

On Wednesday mornings in the spring of 2010, I taught a seminar titled New York, Paris, Baghdad: Poetry of the City. Before class, we would meet in the Two Naked Guys Café at Cornell’s Johnson Museum of Art, where Kathy Straight cheerfully plied us with coffee, tea, and pastries as we began our conversations about that week’s poet and city. We discussed Adonis, Baudelaire, Cavafy, Lorca, Whitman, and many others to discover how these poets have read the city, how they have written it, and how other poets have responded.

One week, we hatched the idea of producing a class anthology of New York poetry—based on our readings and our sensibilities. Each of us selected four or five pieces for possible inclusion, and on two subsequently animated Wednesdays we refined our corpus to fifty-four poems. A conversation with then-director of the Johnson Museum, Frank Robinson, led to the idea of exhibiting some of those poems together with pieces from the museum’s collections. Guided by curator Nancy Green, and with input from the students, I selected poems and artwork. Thus was born the exhibit New York, New York . . . It’s a Hell of a Town, featuring twenty-four poems and twenty-four pieces of art. The aim was to have the juxtapositions give readers and visitors new ways of thinking about both the words and the images.

The poetry and artwork were not distributed around the exhibit chronologically or alphabetically but aesthetically—in ways that allowed the poems and paintings and photographs to
interact in the space. The exhibit gave me the idea of producing an anthology proper, notably one in which poems might similarly interact. While pondering how to accomplish this, I came upon Lisa Russ Spaar's wonderful collection, *All That Mighty Heart: London Poems*, which she organizes according to the four elements: Water, Earth, Fire, and Air. I reread the poems from the exhibit to see if there was a principle I could similarly apply, and I noticed that many, if not most, poems could be situated at specific points in a New York day: dawn (McKay), 5 o’clock (Cummings), evening (Wiese), night (Rich), midnight (Dylan), and so on. This is how I settled on Morning, Day, Evening, and Night.

In choosing material, I let myself be guided neither by the need to be representative (whatever that might in fact mean) nor by the need to be inclusive—there are already many comprehensive collections (see the list of further reading at the end of the volume). Nevertheless, like the exhibit, this anthology tries to range widely—and I hope deeply—and yet the goal has not been to seek out individual poets or specific poems. It is true that at times a particular poem seemed to want to find a way in, but I would decide it did not quite belong; at other times I wanted to include a personal favorite, but I resisted. Although I set almost every such poem aside, I did keep two: Valzyhna Mort’s magical “New York,” which I have placed at the beginning as an invitation into the collection and into New York; and Robert Clairmont’s plaintive “These Ever Just So Six Million Hearts and Dorothy,” which I have placed at the end as an envoi and as an invitation to return—both to the city and to the anthology. Ultimately, I did not choose poems because they fit one of the four rubrics, but because they were, to my mind, good poems, strong poems.

Many canonical New York poets are not represented in these pages, figures such as John Ashbery or David Lehman, but other avowedly New York poets missed by other anthologies are here: Luis Cabalquinto, Jessica Hagedorn, and Anna Margolin, for example. I also paid special attention to up-and-coming voices, such as Shokry Eldaly and Purvi Shah. The lyrics of New Yorker
Paul Simon and of Bob Dylan also find a natural place in this
collection. I also thought it essential to include New York poems
by world poets, such as Mahmoud Darwish and Nicanor Parra,
Derek Walcott and Tomas Tranströmer. This orchestra of local,
immigrant, and foreign voices is, it seems to me, apposite and
fitting.

A small measure of the new ground this collection breaks,
then, is that of the 149 poems (or extracts) in its most immedi-
ate predecessor, Stephen Wolf’s *I Speak of the City: Poems of New
York* (2007), only twenty appear here. Of the 128 poems in the
other major recent collection, Elizabeth Schmidt’s *Poems of New
York* (2002), only five appear here. When it comes to poets, the
numbers are admittedly higher: thirty-one out of the 138 poets
in Wolf’s anthology are included, as are twenty-three out of the
eighty-four poets in Schmidt’s. This higher degree of poet overlap
is not surprising, as those who have sung New York have done
so in ways that are hard to ignore. Song is partly why I chose
a phrase from Sinatra’s (properly, Kander and Ebb’s) “New York,
New York” as the collection’s title—*The City That Never Sleeps.*
But a more important reason is the fact that a great number of
poets long to be awake while everyone else is asleep and are
inspired by the New York night and its early morning light.
Senghor calls out, “Nights of insomnia, O Nights of Manhattan!"

Stephen Wolf and Elizabeth Schmidt will I trust forgive me for
saying that their earlier collections are nostalgic, reverential, even
patriotic. Wolf says of his anthology,

> All the poems in this book speak of New York, and
> many poems are intrinsically American as well. . . .
> New York remains a symbol to the world of both
> this nation and the modern cosmopolis. . . . *I Speak
> of the City* is a testament to the city’s spirit, preserved
> and newly created in the most ennobling expression
> of the human heart.

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Schmidt writes of hers,

The poems collected in this anthology . . . all share a desire to record the fleeting, shifting, “parti-colored” essences of New York life in their own particular form and diction. . . . Poets who have written about New York are masters at preserving, and allowing us to cherish, moments of life in this theater of chance and change.

To be sure, The City That Never Sleeps tries to capture New York City in its many moods and expressions—but it also tries to avoid being adulatory. Besides giving the reader the opportunity to experience twenty-four hours in New York through poetry, it tries to put poems and poets in new conversation with each other, in debate, even on occasion in conflict. And it attempts to illustrate some of the ways in which poetry has given imaginative reality to the city, just as much as urban changes have in turn transformed the poetic text.

Not every poet loves New York, but each and every one is mesmerized by it. Maybe it is because, as John Hollander has put it, “there is something to remind us that cities—each one configured differently—can seem to be figures for poetry itself.” There is evidently also something about poems—each one configuring differently—that seems to make them figures for the city. E. B. White recognized this sixty-five years ago in Here Is New York (1949): “The city is like poetry: it compresses all life, all races and breeds, into a small island and adds music and the accompaniment of internal engines.” When I first visited New York some twenty years after White wrote those lines, I was only four, but my most vivid memories are in fact of vibrant sounds—horns, engines, shouts, sirens, laughter, music . . . Paris, where I lived at the time, and London before that, were not as loud or brash or lively; Hong Kong, Singapore, Philadelphia, Cairo, Delhi, where I lived after, simply did not—do not—quite have what Lisa Russ
Spaar has described as New York’s “operatic bravado.”\textsuperscript{11} It is my earnest hope that \textit{The City That Never Sleeps} captures some of that, some of the city’s tumult, its arias, its rhythms.

—Shawkat M. Toorawa  
Ithaca, NY, January 2014

Notes


Valzhyna Mort

New York

new york, madame,

is a monument to a city

it is

TA-DA

a gigantic pike

whose scales

bristled up stunned

and what used to be just smoke

found a fire that gave it birth

champagne foam

melted into metal

glass rivers

flowing upwards

and things you won’t tell to a priest

you reveal to a cabdriver

even time is sold out

when to the public’s “wow” and “shhh”

out of a black top hat

a tailed magician

is pulling new york out

by the ears of skyscrapers

—Translated from the Belarusian by Franz Wright and Elizabeth Oehlkers Wright
Morning
Maya Angelou

Awaking in New York

Curtains forcing their will against the wind, children sleep, exchanging dreams with seraphim. The city drags itself awake on subway straps; and I, an alarm, awake as a rumor of war, lie stretching into dawn, unasked and unheeded.
Dawn in New York

The Dawn! The Dawn! The crimson-tinted, comes
Out of the low still skies, over the hills,
Manhattan’s roofs and spires and cheerless domes!
The Dawn! My spirit to its spirit thrills.
Almost the mighty city is asleep,
No pushing crowd, no tramping, tramping feet.
But here and there a few cars groaning creep
Along, above, and underneath the street,
Bearing their strangely-ghostly burdens by,
The women and the men of garish nights,
Their eyes wine-weakened and their clothes awry,
Grotesques beneath the strong electric lights.
The shadows wane. The Dawn comes to New York.
And I go darkly-rebel to my work.
New York at Sunrise

When with her clouds the early dawn illumes
Our doubtful streets, wistful they grow and mild;
As if a sleeping soul grew happy and smiled,
The whole dark city radiantly blooms.
Pale spires lift their hands above the glooms
Like a resurrection, delicately wild,
And flushed with slumber like a little child,
Under a mist, shines forth the innocent Tombs.
Thus have I seen it from a casement high.
As unsubstantial as a dream it grows.
Is this Manhattan, virginal and shy,
That in a cloud so rapturously glows?
Ethereal, frail, and like an opening rose,
I see my city with an enlightened eye.
Donald Justice

Manhattan Dawn (1945)

There is a smoke of memory
That curls about these chimneys
And then uncurls; that lifts,
Diaphanous, from sleep

To lead us down some alleyway
Still vaguely riverward;
And so at length disperses
Into the wisps and tatters

That garland fire escapes.
—And we have found ourselves again
Watching, beside a misty platform,
The first trucks idling to unload

(New England's frost still
Unstippling down their sides).

Or turned
To catch blue truant eyes upon us

Through steam that rose up suddenly from a grate . . .

Grinning—
And the grin slid off across the storefronts.
Dawn always seemed to overtake us, though,

Down Hudson somewhere, or Horatio.
—And we have seen it bend
The long stripes of the awnings down
Toward gutters where discarded flowers
Lay washing in the night’s small rain—
Hints, glimmerings of a world
Not ours.

And office towers
Coast among lost stars.
Adonis (‘Ali Ahmad Sa‘id)

From “A Grave for New York”

I

Until now, the Earth has been depicted in the shape of a pear
by which I mean a breast
Yet, the difference between breast and tomb is a mere technicality:

New York

A four-legged civilization; in every direction is murder or a road
to murder
and in the distance are the moans of the drowned.

New York,

A woman—the statue of a woman
in one hand she holds a scrap to which the documents we call
history give the name “liberty,” and in the other she smothers
a child whose name is Earth.

New York,

A body the color of asphalt. Around her waist is a damp girdle,
her face is a closed window . . . I said: Walt Whitman will
open it—“I speak the password primeval”—but no one hears
it except an unreturning god. The prisoners, the slaves, the
despairing, the thieves, the diseased spew from his throat.
There is no outlet, no path. And I said: “The Brooklyn
Bridge!” But it’s the bridge that connects Whitman to Wall
Street, that connects leaves-grass to paper-dollars . . .

New York—Harlem,

Who comes in a guillotine of silk, who leaves in a grave the
length of the Hudson? Explode, you ritual of tears. Cling
together, you trifles of exhaustion. Blue, yellow, roses, jasmine:
the light sharpens its points, and in the pinprick the sun is
born. Have you ignited, O wound, concealed between thigh and thigh? Has the bird of death come to you and have you heard the death rattle? A rope, and the neck weaving melancholy; and in the blood, the melancholy of the Hour . . .

—Translated from the Arabic by Shawkat M. Toorawa
Federico García Lorca

New York (Office and Denunciation)

To Fernando Véla

Beneath the multiplications
is a drop of duck’s blood.
Beneath the divisions
is a drop of sailor’s blood.
Beneath the additions, a river of tender blood,
a wending river that sings
past the suburban bedrooms;
it is silver or concrete or wind
in the false dawn of New York.
Mountains exist, I know.
And eyeglasses for wisdom,
I know. But I have not come to see the sky.
I have come to see murky blood,
blood that carries the machines to the cataracts
and the spirit to the cobra’s tongue.
In New York, every day,
four million ducks,
five million pigs,
two thousand pigeons, are killed to please the dying,
one million cows,
one million lambs,
two million roosters,
leave the sky in tatters.
Better to sob, as you sharpen the blade
or to murder dogs on raving hunts,
than to resist in early morning
those interminable convoys of milk,
those interminable convoys of blood,
those convoys of roses handcuffed
by the perfume sellers.
The ducks and pigeons,
the pigs and lambs,
lay their drops of blood
under the multiplications,
the horrific shrieks of cows wrung dry,
fill the valley with pain
where the Hudson becomes drunk with oil.

I denounce all
who ignore the other half,
the irredeemable half,
who raise their mountains of cement
where the hearts
of small forgotten animals beat
and where all of us will fall
in the final feast of power drills.

I spit in your faces.
The other half are listening,
devouring, singing, making off in their purity
like the children of superintendants
carrying tiny brittle sticks
to hollows where insect
antennae are rusting away.
This isn’t hell, it’s the street.
This isn’t death, it’s the fruit stand.
There is a world of broken rivers and distances out of reach
in the small paw of a cat, shattered by a motorcar,
and I hear the earthworm’s song
in the hearts of countless young girls.
Rust, ferment, trembling earth.
You yourself are earth, swimming in office numbers.
What do I do? Rearrange the landscape?
Rearrange loves that will soon just be photographs,
that will soon just be pieces of wood and swigs of blood?
No, no; I denounce—
I denounce the connivance
of these deserted offices
that will not broadcast the suffering,
that stamp out the forest’s plans
and I offer myself as a meal for cows wrung dry
when their cries fill the valley
where the Hudson becomes drunk with oil.

—Translated from the Spanish by Shawkat M. Toorawa
The morning

breaks in splendor on
the window glass of
the French doors to
the shallow balcony
of my room with a
cast-iron balustrade
in a design of flowers,
mechanical and coarse
and painted black:
sunbursts of a coolish
morning in July. I
almost accept the fact
that I am not in
the country, where I
long to be, but in
this place of glass
and stone—and metal,
let’s not forget
metal—where traffic sounds and the day
is well begun. So
be it, morning.
Charles Simic

Early Morning in July

The streets were cool
After the heat of the night.
The dives, their doors open,
Smelled of stale beer.
Someone swept the floor
With even strokes.
He was pale as Confucius.
Martha Washington, her hair in a beehive,
Yawned in the glass booth
Of a movie theater.

Yesterday I saw Ulysses
Make Greek pastry.
Joan of Arc was at the dry cleaner’s
Standing on a chair
With pins in her mouth.
St. Francis sold piranhas in a pet store.
At midnight Circe’s daughters
Flew on a motorcycle.
Thomas Alva Edison
Roamed the streets in white socks
And blood on his shirt.

And now this sea breeze,
This unexpected coolness.
The small, sickly tree on your block
Hasn’t grown much in years.
It shivers with happiness
With its few remaining leaves,
As if Emanuel Swedenborg
Was now whispering to the spirits
On Eighth Avenue.
Kenneth McClane  

Sunday Morning

At the center it all doesn’t
matter: I’ve said it before. I’ve
tried all those things which promise to save
us, I mean, I’ve waded through the tennis
motionings, have roosted in
the pale ambiences (glass always warm
in hand), have
crisscrossed my family, darkened every
hatching of life, blotched even the sour
last thought of a prisoner. Nothing:

Nothing has given anything back.
I was thinking it is sad
that we see the world in language: we don’t
really know the wind, the thornberry, the raccoon

who so easily slips from country
to city: who grows fat in the sewers: who
realizes that a life is a life.

And I would walk along the Hudson,
see the condoms swelling
like ghosts, envision some aspect best not
included, reasoned with. I don’t like

myself. I don’t trust
a voice which so glibly
flashes in the morning, titillating in the absolute
denial of what is.
This is not pretty. It is a building
which stops short of its architect, a child
who finds his only need is air
and that breath fails.
Sasha Skenderija

West Side Story

A girl hurriedly crosses the street:
a Starbucks coffee in one hand,
pressing a phone to her ear with the other.

I try to develop the scene
to add some twist to the plot,
anything—
a traffic accident,
a puff on a cigarette,
melancholy.

In vain.

—Translated from the Bosnian by Wayles Browne
Cyclone

a child in rubber boots
wonders in the underground
at the dripping grates
holds up his hand to catch an emulsion
of machine oil and water
tells the rush hour crowd
how he captured the sky
there’s endless worrying about the simple fact
about a stormy season
the weather reports indicate showers
at more than half probability
and the shoulders in the underground deflate
umbrella sellers reach with extended hand
offering prayers in silence
to those in mourning
the pre-written obituary database
hasn’t been completely finished
MJ is dead
and from the second stories
records dusted off start turning
aimed at passersby
there’s the white space
yet to be filled up
Sonnet XXXVI

after Frank O'Hara

It’s 8:54 a.m. in Brooklyn it’s the 28th of July and it’s probably 8:54 in Manhattan but I’m in Brooklyn I’m eating English muffins and drinking pepsi and I’m thinking of how Brooklyn is New York city too how odd I usually think of it as something all its own like Bellows Falls like Little Chute like Uijongbu

I never thought on the Williamsburg bridge I’d come so much to Brooklyn just to see lawyers and cops who don’t even carry guns taking my wife away and bringing her back

and I never thought Dick would be back at Gude’s beard shaved off long hair cut and Carol reading his books when we were playing cribbage and watching the sun come up over the Navy Yard across the river

I think I was thinking when I was ahead I’d be somewhere like Perry street erudite dazzling slim and badly loved contemplating my new book of poems to be printed in simple type on old brown paper feminine marvelous and tough
Paul Simon

The 59th Street Bridge Song (Feelin’ Groovy)

Slow down, you move too fast
You got to make the morning last
Just kicking down the cobblestones
Looking for fun and feelin’ groovy
Ba da da da da da da, feelin’ groovy

Hello, lamppost, what’cha knowin’?
I’ve come to watch your flowers growin’
Ain’t’cha got no rhymes for me?
Doot-in doo-doo, feelin’ groovy
Ba da da da da da da, feelin’ groovy

I got no deeds to do
No promises to keep
I’m dappled and drowsy and ready to sleep
Let the morning time drop all its petals on me
Life, I love you
All is groovy
Victor Hernández Cruz

The Lower East Side of Manhattan

By the East River
of Manhattan Island
Where once the Iroquois
canoed in style—
A clear liquid
cressing another name
for rock,
Now the jumping
Stretch of Avenue D
housing projects
Where Ricans and Afros
Johnny Pacheco/Wilson Pickett
The portable radio night—
Across the Domino sugar
Neon lights of the Brooklyn shore

Window carnival of
megalopolis lights
From Houston Street
Twenty kids take off
On summer bikes
Across the Williamsburg
Bridge
Their hair flying
With bodega bean protein
Below the working class
jumping like frogs—
Parrots with new raincoats
swinging canes of bamboo
Like third legs
Down diddy-bop 6th Street
of the roaring Dragons
Strollers of cool flow

When winter comes they fly
In capes down Delancey
Past the bites of pastrami
Sandwiches in Katz's
Marching through red bricks
aglow dragging hind leg
Swinging arms
Defying in simalcas

Hebrew prayers inside
metallic containers
Rolled into walls
Tenement relic
Roofs of pigeon airports

Horse-driven carts
arrive with the morning
Slicing through venetian
blinds
Along with a Polish English
Barking peaches and melons
Later the ice man a-cometh
Selling his hard water
cut into blocks
The afternoon a metallic
slide intercourses buildings
Which start to swallow
coals down their basement
Mouts.

Where did the mountains go
The immigrants ask
The place where houses
and objects went back
Into history which guided
Them into nature

Entering the roots of plants
The molasses of fruit
To become eternal again,
Now the plaster of Paris
Are the ears of the walls
The first utterances in Spanish
Recall what was left behind.

People kept arriving
as the cane fields dried
Flying bushes from another
planet
Which had a pineapple for
a moon
Vegetables and tree bark
popping out of luggage
The singers of lament
into the soul of Jacob Riis
Where the prayers of Santa Maria
Through remaining fibers
of the Torah
Eldridge Street lelolai
A Spanish never before seen
Inside gypsies.
Once Cordova the cabala
Haberdasheries of Orchard Street
 Hecklers riddling bargains
Like in gone bazaars of
Some Warsaw ghetto.

Upward into the economy
Migration continues—
Out of the workers’ quarters
Pieces of accents
On the ascending escalator.

The red Avenue B bus
disappearing down the
Needle holes of the garment
factories—
The drain of a city
The final sewers
Where the waste became antique
The icy winds
Of the river’s edge
Stinging lower Broadway
As hot dogs
Sauerkraut and all
Gush down the pipes
of Canal

After Forsyth Park
is the beginning of Italy
Florence inside Mott
Street windows—
Palermo eyes of Angie
Flipping the big
hole of a 45 record
The Duprees dusting
Like white sugar onto
Fluffed dough—
Crisscrossing
The fire escapes
To arrive at Lourdes’
railroad flat
With knishes
she threw next to
Red beans.
Broome Street Hasidics
with Martian fur hats
With those ultimatum brims
Puerto Ricans supporting
pra-pras
Atop faces with features
Thrown out of some bag
Of universal race stew—
Mississippi rural slang
With Avenue D park view
All in exile from broken
Souths
The horses the cows the
chickens
The daisies of the rural
road
All past tense in the urbanity
that remembers
The pace of mountains
The moods of the fields.

From the guayaba bushels
outside of a town
With an Arowak name
I hear the flute shells
With the I that saw
Andalusian boats
Wash up on the beach
To distribute Moorish
eyes.

The Lower East Side
was faster than the speed
Of light
A tornado of bricks
and fire escapes
In which you had to grab
on to something or take
Off with the wayward winds—

The proletariat stoop voices
Took off like Spauldine rubber balls
Hit by blue broomsticks
on 12th Street—
Wintertime summertime
Seasons of hallways and roofs
Between pachanga and doo-wop
A generation left
The screaming streets of
passage
Gone from the temporary
station of desire and disaster

I knew Anthony’s
and Carmen
Butchy
Little Man
Eddie
Andrew
Tiny
Pichon
Vigo
Wandy
Juanito
Where are they?
The windows sucked them up
The pavement had mouths that
ate them
Urban vanishment
Illusion
I too
Henry Roth
“Call It Sleep.”
Wikimedia Commons, “Sunrise over the city that never sleeps,” 2008. Wikimedia Commons. Used under terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License.
Day
Galway Kinnell

From “The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World”

Was diese kleine Gasse doch für ein Reich an sich war . . .

1
pcheek pcheek pcheek pcheek pcheek
They cry. The motherbirds thieve the air
To appease them. A tug on the East River
Blasts the bass-note of its passage, lifted
From the infra-bass of the sea. A broom
Swishes over the sidewalk like feet through leaves.
Valerio’s pushcart Ice Coal Kerosene
Moves clack
     clack
     clack
On a broken wheelrim. Ringing in its chains
The New Star Laundry horse comes down the street
Like aroofleak whucking into a pail.
At the redlight, where a horn blares,
The Golden Harvest Bakery brakes on its gears,
Squeaks, and seethes in place. A propane-
gassed bus makes its way with big, airy sighs.

Across the street a woman throws open
Her window.
She sets, terribly softly,
Two potted plants on the windowledge tic tic
And bangs shut her window.
A man leaves a doorway tic toc tic toc tic toc tic hurrah toc splat on Avenue C tic etc and turns the corner.
Banking the same corner
A pigeon coast 5th Street in shadows,
Looks for altitude, surmounts the rims of buildings,
And turns white.
The babybirds pipe down. It is day.
From “As Fate Would Have It”

To Rashed Hussein

On Fifth Avenue he greeted me and burst into tears.
He leaned against a wall of glass
. . . New York is without willows.
He made me cry, and water returned to it rivers.
We had coffee, and too soon went separate ways.

. . .

He was far away, vanishing
into the endless unseen.
He drank his glass like smoke,
then vanished
as a gazelle vanishes in the disappearing meadows
beneath the fog.

He stubbed his cigarette out in my heart and rested.
He didn’t look at his watch,
nor was he tempted by the trees
standing tall under our tenth-floor room in Manhattan.
He was wrapped in memories, and possessed
by the ringing of a mysterious bell.
Flocks of birds and familial deaths
flap at our hands and fly away.
This is not my time.
Another winter arrived.
Mares died grazing in the distant lands.

He said: This is not my time.
And I gave my heart for the collapse
of cities since life’s origin perhaps,
until the end of the dream.
Do we stay in this orange day going outward
just to embrace the darkness within?

Where did you come from?
A bird struck an arrow.
So I said: She discovered my heart.
Do we stay in this orange day going inward
just to face the harbor police?

Freed of memory, he raves.
I carry the weight of the land,
and the savior from this waywardness.
Young women shoed my soul and were gone.
Birds nested in my voice, tore me apart, then flew away.
Nothing has changed.

The songs took my place, took my place.
This is not my time.
No. This is not my homeland.
No. This is not my body.

~

As fate would have it,
an ear of wheat betrayed him
then a sparrow lead him
to the winds of the killers.

—Translated from the Arabic by Munir Akash and Carolyn Forché
Frank O’Hara

A Step Away from Them

It’s my lunch hour, so I go
for a walk among the hum-colored
cabs. First, down the sidewalk
where laborers feed their dirty
glistening torsos sandwiches
and Coca-Cola, with yellow helmets
on. They protect them from falling
bricks, I guess. Then onto the
avenue where skirts are flipping
above heels and blow up over
grates. The sun is hot, but the
cabs stir up the air. I look
at bargains in wristwatches. There
are cats playing in sawdust.

On
to Times Square, where the sign
blows smoke over my head, and higher
the waterfall pours lightly. A
Negro stands in a doorway with a
toothpick, languorously agitating.
A blonde chorus girl clicks: he
smiles and rubs his chin. Everything
suddenly honks: it is 12:40 of
a Thursday.

Neon in daylight is a
great pleasure, as Edwin Denby would
write, as are light bulbs in daylight.
I stop for a cheeseburger at JULIET’S
CORNER. Giulietta Masina, wife of
Federico Fellini, è bell’ attrice.
And chocolate malted. A lady in foxes on such a day puts her poodle in a cab.

There are several Puerto Ricans on the avenue today, which makes it beautiful and warm. First Bunny died, then John Latouche, then Jackson Pollock. But is the earth as full as life was full, of them? And one has eaten and one walks, past the magazines with nudes and the posters for BULLFIGHT and the Manhattan Storage Warehouse, which they’ll soon tear down. I used to think they had the Armory Show there.

A glass of papaya juice and back to work. My heart is in my pocket, it is Poems by Pierre Reverdy.
Meredith Shepard

Why I Hate New York

It’s the number that gets me. Immigrants sweeping streets, I expect—but so many? And the old white face with pockmarks like crater holes in the moon standing outside Port Authority crack addict, maybe, because he’s with young men who look like they can run and hate me because I don’t know a thing about this city, all I have is my ticket out.

I can’t hear the women’s high heels through the bus window, but they look bitchy, too high, too thin, too sharp to be passing without stopping the ones I’ve just noticed looking poor together.

Every iron seat is taken at an outdoor plaza. March, one of the first sunny days, of course New Yorkers want to eat paninis with their paled mouths in open air but there are so many together the only differences between suit, suit, suit-skirt are tie-colors, hair waviness, whether they’re wearing sneakers.

Women pictured on bus stops selling clothes and sex plaster themselves apart from the rest. The goal of any artist, to be noticed and apart for beauty. Even if they are no longer real.

The handwritten sign above the Chinese/Korean driver’s head, We drivers depend your tips, Thank You!!! I wonder how much minimum wage is, and pull out a few bucks.
There are people like me who have not come to New York for New York. We buy food in the airport and wait. The Ethiopians, the Indonesians, the local blacks sweep through. No matter how long we are delayed here, there is always another shift.
August Walk

I’m walking westbound on Fourteenth Street
to grab a late lunch at a Subway fastfood shop.
It’s unseasonably cool for the middle of August.
Two panhandlers at the corner on First Avenue
are busy working the thick pedestrian traffic—
when it hits me: I’m 7,000 miles away from home,
all the way to the other side of the world.
Does it matter after thirty years? Many city places
I’ve also called “home”: this self-declared planetary
citizen feels at home anywhere his foot touches ground.

I’ll wager on this one for the future: we’re all
going to end up world citizens, freely crossing
boundaries; simply—“Earthniks” of the universe!
I look up, assured by the same light blue sky from
my boyhood, the same rolling cloud that haunt us.

I go in for my daily veggie sandwich, no cheese.
If I keep this up I’ll lose another ugly ten pounds.
Twenty off should be about right, enough to bring me
to the creation of that long-awaited world government.
I’m getting ready to give up my current passport.
Purvi Shah

Made in India, Immigrant Song #3
(a note from a New York City streetwalker)

Some worker in the sweat
of Madras, some former weaver
from Kashmir, some hand in Ahmadabad’s dust,
has been pounding iron again.

The New York City streets swell with feet;
multihued tracks glide over the flat steel
disks which offer entry into the city’s interior
lairs. The writing seeps through our soles
though few fathom the signature, “Made
in India.” These alien

metal coins, transported
like my birth, mask
a labyrinth of tunnels
in a city where origin
and destination are confused.
Sometimes I wear the stamp
on myself; sometimes I feel
the wear of a surrounding world erase
the fine etchings. Here the imprint

of India is a traveler’s
mutation: the body’s chamber is made
hole, the skin not smooth, circular,
but cloaking a bumpy network
of channels, spirit mobile, expanding.
Nicanor Parra

Resurrection

One day in a park in New York City
A pigeon fell at my feet
She thrashed 4 a few seconds
And then died
But the most unexpected thing of all
Was that she revived on the spot
Without giving me time to react
And took off flying
As though she had never been dead at all

Bells were ringing somewhere far away

And I just stood there watching her zigzag and zigzag
Between the marble statues
& there was a noisy growling in my guts
& I got started spitting out this poem

—Translated from the Spanish by Liz Werner
“at the ferocious phenomenon”

at the ferocious phenomenon of 5 o’clock i find myself gently decomposing in the mouth of New York. Between its supple financial teeth deliriously sprouting from complacent gums, a morsel prettily wanders buoyed on the murderous saliva of industry. the morsel is i.

Vast cheeks enclose me.

a gigantic uvula with imperceptible gesticulations threatens the tubular downward blackness occasionally from which detaching itself bumps clumsily into the throat A meticulous vulgarity:

a sodden fastidious normal explosion; a square murmur, a winsome flatulence——

In the soft midst of the tongue sits the Woolworth building a serene pastile-shaped insipid kinesis or frail swooping lozenge. a ruglike sentience whose papillae expertly drink the docile perpendicular taste of this squirming cube of undiminished silence, supports while devouring the firm tumult of exquisitely insecure sharp algebraic music. For the first time in sorting from this vast nonchalant inward walk of volume the flat minute gallop of careful hugeness i am conjugated by the sensual mysticism of entire vertical being, i am skilfully construed by a delicately experimenting colossus whose irrefutable spiral antics involve me with the soothings of plastic hypnotism . . . i am accurately parsed by this gorgeous rush of upward lips. . . .

cleverly
perching on the sudden extremity of one immense tooth myself
surveys safely the complete important profane frantic inconse-
quential gastronomic mystery of mysteries
, life.

Far below myself the lunging leer of horizontal large distinct
ectasy wags and. rages Laughters jostle grins nudge smiles push—.
deep into the edgeless gloaming gladness hammers incessant
putrid spikes of madness (at

Myself’s height these various innocent ferocities are superseded
by the sole prostituted ferocity of silence, it is) still 5 o’clock
I stare only always into the tremendous canyon the

, tremendous canyon always only exhales a climbing dark exact
walloping human noise of digestible millions whose rich slov-
enly obscene procession always floats through the thin amorous
enormous only lips of the evening

And it is 5 o’clock

in the oblong air, from which a singular ribbon of com-
on sunset is hanging.

snow speaks slowly
I Had This Dream/the city of shadows

I had this dream where I was in the
Cockpit of a Seven-Forty-Seven
Flying over the city of shadows,
Looking down through the window
At the five boroughs of the Ghetto,
Flicking switches and dropping
Paradise bombs.

In this dream
The plane is trembling with every
Payload as, beneath me, swells
Of light and smoke erupt, hydrants combust,
And liquid color—hues like an automatic has met
An ink cartridge—are being showered through the air
As the shadows retract and burn like
New Rome, New Sodom, New Gomorrah,
With all the wrath of a love letter ablaze.

Ejected from the plane,
I fall through cross fire
Of brick and rock.
All around me shatterings
Drag ’cross ground and return to
Unabandon the buildings they’d left.

Paint chips and ashes are streaming
From babies’ mouths and
Covering gang signs on walls with
Murals that depict a house of reunion.
In empty forgotten lots,
Colorful *casitas* and
*Salsero* skeletons carrying
*Maracas, congas*, trumpets,
*Timbales* and guitars
Spring up like wild flowers.

And the ground, all day long, keeps glowing
Like a new born Sun looking to show off.

Later, when night falls and
The streets have had their fill,
The only darknesses that stand are
That of the opulence of night and the silhouettes
Of celebration, cast for television moments
By the warm and glowing streetlights.

The tenements are lit up like jukeboxes, dancing and
Bellowing through their neon colored mouths
Music of hope and salvation.
Even the saplings are beginning to revel and sway as
The music formerly played in ear buds
And above kitchen sinks in the backs of restaurants,
And in factories at low forgettable tones,
Now coming forth from the lips of windowsills,
Increases in volume and vigor as
They transition from *boleros* of hope
To songs of Deliverance.
The notes and rhythmic beats
Striking and reverberating against the formerly
Bare-boxed windowsill cemeteries are
Birthing gardens and vines that scale the buildings,
Fill the apartments and stretch out onto lampposts,
Before reaching down and lending
The homeless heart-healing ambrosias that
They’ve neither seen, nor spoke, nor heard of.
As I walk, cornflakes are falling from  
Dizzying heights like snow.

The people above are  
Emptying their cupboards,  
And crying the words  
“I will not eat you anymore!”

As citizens below prepare  
pasteles, platanos, tamales, y yuca  
There are some leaning out of windows,  
Shouting victory cries and  
Praying thanks to God, whilst others  
Use their lips to throw love onto the street.

There are two, in the middle, posing for a picture.  
The viejo hands his delicate flower a hibiscus (maga),  
As he, like a soldier home from war,  
Holds the small of her back and dips her.

Anyone who can—  
Speak is singing  
Move is dancing  
Feel is touching

Walking now through sugarcane valleys  
My toes are digging ground  
Where asphalt once suffocated earth.

People around me are lifting coconuts to their mouths,  
They’re laughing before bonfires that are  
Burning friendly in the warm fragrant night.

By the curb, babies coo as they  
Look at themselves in the reflections  
Of fire hydrant rivers.
A little one,
In the same shoes she’s worn for too long
To school, to church, to bed,
Motions for me to help her take them off.

After freeing the clasp
Of her white leather shackle,
I look up to see that she’s turned into a woman.

She points with a smile,
Down an empty street,
Before taking my hand.
Leading me the first few steps,
Our hands part from one another
As I see beside an open hydrant
An old leather chair,
Like the one that used to
Sit beside the bath in my
Grandmother’s washroom,
I begin walking quickly.

From the seat of the chair,
I pick up my bar of olive oil soap,
And wash my hair in the hydrant and
Watch as the last bits of yesterday
Drip into the gutter
As my curls grow long.

Looking down I can hear the voices of family,
And so I hesitate to lift my head.
On my shoulder is the warm hand
Of the woman
With a birthmark like her mother’s.
I look up, and before me is
The house I grew up in
And my child who
Only got to breathe the air of the world
For but a moment
Before joining her mother
In slumber.

She looks at me
And I hold her, bury myself into her,

And she says to me,
“‘Yes, Papa, it’s true. There is Home again.’”
David Semanki

Rain

Yesterday was the last day of summer.
And it makes sense
you weren’t with me
then. Or even
on this rainy afternoon—
you’re teaching me to live
apart from you, which has reduced to
breakfast dishes crowding the nightstand,
the TV droning with some Julie Christie drama,
my black hair unwashed for a fifth day.

After all what’s grief to someone
Who never tires of longing
except a manner of existing
in the present, where nothing is derivative.

Strange. It’s much easier now
to reconcile
the scene of when I first saw you—
crossing a city street on a busy September afternoon.
The one perfect moment, before language.
Central Park

Scaling small rocks, exhaling smog,
gasping at game-scents like a dog,
now light as pollen, now as white
and winded as a grounded kite—
I watched the lovers occupy
every inch of earth and sky:
one figure of geometry,
multiplied to infinity,
straps down, and sunning openly . . .
each precious, public, pubic tangle
an equilateral triangle,
lost in the park, half covered by
the shade of some low stone or tree.
The stain of fear and poverty
spread through each trapped anatomy,
and darkened every mote of dust.
All wished to leave this drying crust,
borne on the delicate wings of lust
like bees, and cast their fertile drop
into the overwhelming cup.

Drugged and humbled by the smell
of zoo-straw mixed with animal,
the lion prowled his slummy cell,
serving his life-term in jail—
glaring, grinding, on his heel,
with tingling step and testicle . . .

Behind a dripping rock, I found
a one-day kitten on the ground—
deprived, weak, ignorant and blind, 
squeaking, tubular, left behind—
dying with its deserter's rich 
Welfare lying out of reach: 
milk cartons, kidney heaped to spoil, 
two plates sheathed with silver foil.

Shadows had stained the afternoon; 
high in an elm, a snagged balloon 
wooed the attraction of the moon. 
Scurrying from the mouth of night, 
a single, fluttery, paper kite 
grazed Cleopatra's Needle, and sailed 
where the light of the sun had failed. 
Then night, the night—the jungle hour, 
The rich in his slit-windowed tower . . . 
Old Pharaohs starving in your foxholes, 
with painted banquets on the walls, 
fists knotted in your captives' hair, 
tyrians with little food to spare— 
all your embalming left you mortal, 
glazed, black, and hideously eternal, 
all your plunder and gold leaf 
only served to draw the thief . . .

We beg delinquents for our life. 
Behind each bush, perhaps a knife; 
each landscaped crag, each flowering shrub, 
hides a policeman with a club.
December cold, and the sun is burning on the furs
Of the old ladies in Central Park, one wearing
Sneakers with her coat, another cowboy boots.
And they are all ennobled in this light
The sea wind purifies, a Magnum filter making
Whatever’s small much bigger and whatever’s big
Into something quickly lost to sight, up to
The sky, or down the rows of houses. Why look up
When the unusual wanders the streets
As one of many themes
Of the music of this city. Andante cantabile,
Its feathers dragging, its little crown aslant
On its head, a peacock walked through the crowd,
And another peacock, and then another—
Three slowly striding, turkey-footed divas.
Where from? Where to? The people from Harlem
Knew that no more than the people from Queens.
No zoo had lost them, nor had the secret
Herb garden of the Neogothic cathedral.
Decadence could be had here cheap, an offer
Made in passing: three for the price of one.
Broadway took them, like everything that moves.

—Translated from the German by Andrew Shields
Sharon Olds

*Summer Solstice, New York City*

By the end of the longest day of the year he could not stand it, he went up the iron stairs through the roof of the building and over the soft, tarry surface to the edge, put one leg over the complex green tin cornice and said if they came a step closer that was it. Then the huge machinery of the earth began to work for his life, the cops came in their suits blue-grey as the sky on a cloudy evening

and one put on a bullet-proof vest, a black shell around his own life, life of his children’s father, in case the man was armed, and one, slung with a rope like the sign of his bounden duty, came up out of a hole in the top of the neighboring building like the gold hole they say is in the top of the head, and began to lurk toward the man who wanted to die. The tallest cop approached him directly, softly, slowly, talking to him, talking, talking, while the man’s leg hung over the lip of the next world and the crowd gathered in the street, silent, and the hairy net with its implacable grid was unfolded near the curb and spread out and stretched as the sheet is prepared to receive at a birth. Then they all came a little closer where he squatted next to his death, his shirt glowing its milky glow like something growing in a dish at night in the dark in a lab and then everything stopped as his body jerked and he stepped down from the parapet and went toward them and they closed in on him, I thought they were going to
beat him up, as a mother whose child has been lost will scream at the child when it’s found, they took him by the arms and held him up and leaned him against the wall of the chimney and the tall cop lit a cigarette in his own mouth, and gave it to him, and then they all lit cigarettes, and the red, glowing ends burned like the tiny campfires we lit at night back at the beginning of the world.
The Mexican Cabdriver’s Poem for His Wife, Who Has Left Him

We were sitting in traffic on the Brooklyn Bridge, so I asked the poets in the backseat of my cab to write a poem for you.

They asked if you are like the moon or the trees.

I said no, she is like the bridge when there is so much traffic I have time to watch the boats on the river.
Evening
Nikki Giovanni

The New Yorkers

In front of the bank building after six o’clock the gathering of the bag people begins

In cold weather they huddle around newspapers when it is freezing they get cardboard boxes

Someone said they are all rich eccentrics
Someone is of course crazy

The man and his buddy moved to the truck port in the adjoining building most early evenings he visits his neighbors awaiting the return of his friend from points unknown to me they seem to be a spontaneous combustion these night people they evaporate during the light of day only to emerge at evening glow as if they had never been away

I am told there are people who live underground in the layer between the subways and the pipes that run them they have harnessed the steam
to heat their corner
and cook their food
though there is no electricity
making them effectively moles

The twentieth century has been
two big wars and two small ones
the automobile and the SST
telephones and satellites in the sky
man on the moon and spacecraft on Jupiter

How odd to also see the people
of New York City living
in the doorways of public buildings
as if this is an emerging nation
though of course it is

Look at the old woman
who sits on 57th Street and 8th Avenue
selling pencils
I don’t know where she spends the night
she sits summer and winter
snow or rain humming
some white religious song
she must weigh over 250 pounds
the flesh on her legs has stretched
like a petite pair of stockings
onto a medium frame
beyond its ability to fit
there are tears and holes
of various purples in her legs
things and stuff ooze from them
drying and running again
there is never though a smell
she does not ask you to buy
a pencil nor will her eyes
condemn your health
it's easy really to walk by her
unlike the man in front
of Tiffany's she holds her pencils
near her knee
you take or not
depending upon your writing needs

He on the other hand is blind and walking
his german shepherd dog
his sign says THERE
BUT FOR THE GRACE OF GOD
GOES YOU and there is a long
explanation of his condition
It's rather easy for the Tiffany shopper
to see his condition
he is Black

Uptown on 125th Street is an old blind Black woman
she is out only in good
weather and clothes
her house is probably spotless
as southern ladies are wont to keep house
and her wig is always on straight
You got something for me, she called
What do you want, I asked
What's yo name? I know yo family
No, you don't, I said laughing You don't know
anything about me
You that Eyetalian poet ain't you? I know yo voice. I seen
you on television
I peered closely into her eyes
You didn't see me or you'd know I'm black
Let me feel yo hair if you Black Hold down yo head
I did and she did
    Got something for me, she laughed
You felt my hair    that's good luck
Good luck is money, chile    she said
Good luck is money
MacDougal Street

As I went walking up and down to take the evening air,
(Sweet to meet upon the street, why must I be so shy?)
I saw him lay his hand upon her torn black hair;
("Little dirty Latin child, let the lady by!")

The women squatting on the stoops were slovenly and fat,
(Lay me out in organdie, lay me out in lawn!)
And everywhere I stepped there was a baby or a cat;
(Lord, God in Heaven, will it never be dawn?)

The fruit-carts and clam-carts were ribald as a fair,
(Pink nets and wet shells trodden under heel)
She had haggled from the fruit-man of his rotting ware;
(I shall never get to sleep, the way I feel!)

He walked like a king through the filth and the clutter,
(Sweet to meet upon the street, why did you glance me by?)
But he caught the quaint Italian quip she flung him from the gutter;
(What can there be to cry about that I should lie and cry?)

He laid his darling hand upon her little black head,
(I wish I were a ragged child with ear-rings in my ears!)
And he said she was a baggage to have said what she had said;
(Truly I shall be ill unless I stop these tears!)
Allen Ginsberg

From “Mugging”

I
Tonite I walked out of my red apartment door on East tenth street’s dusk—
Walked out of my home ten years, walked out in my honking neighborhood
Tonite at seven walked out past garbage cans chained to concrete anchors
Walked under black painted fire escapes, giant castiron plate covering a hole in ground
—Crossed the street, traffic lite red, thirteen bus roaring by liquor store,
past corner pharmacy iron grated, past Coca Cola & Mylai posters fading scraped on brick
Past Chinese Laundry wood door’d, & broken cement stoop steps
For Rent hall painted green & purple Puerto Rican style
Along E. 10th’s glass splattered pavement, kid blacks & Spanish oiled hair adolescents’ crowded house fronts—
Ah, tonite I walked out on my block NY City under humid summer sky Halloween,
thinking what happened Timothy Leary joining brain police for a season?
thinking what’s all this Weathermen, secrecy & selfrighteousness beyond reason—F.B.I. plots?
Walked past a taxicab controlling the bottle strewn curb—
past young fellows with their umbrella handles & canes leaning against a ravaged Buick
—and as I looked at the crowd of kids on the stoop—a boy stepped up, put his arm around my neck
tenderly I thought for a moment, squeezed harder, his umbrella handle against my skull,
and his friends took my arm, a young brown companion tripped
his foot 'gainst my ankle—
as I went down shouting Om Ah Hūṃ to gangs of lovers on
the stoop watching
slowly appreciating, why this is a raid, these strangers mean strange
business
with what—my pockets, bald head, broken-healed-bone leg, my
softshoes, my heart—
Have they knives? Om Ah Hūṃ—Have they sharp metal wood
to shove in eye ear ass? Om Ah Hūṃ
& slowly reclined on the pavement, struggling to keep my woolen
bag of poetry address calendar & Leary-lawyer notes hung
from my shoulder
dragged in my neat orlon shirt over the crossbar of a broken
metal door
dragged slowly onto the fire-soiled floor an abandoned store,
laundry candy counter 1929—
now a mess of papers & pillows & plastic car seat covers cracked
cockroach-corpsed ground—
my wallet back pocket passed over the iron foot step guard
and fell out, stole by God Muggers’ lost fingers, Strange—
Couldn’t tell—snakeskin wallet actually plastic, 70 dollars my bank
money for a week,
old broken wallet—and dreary plastic contents—Amex card &
Manf. Hanover Trust Credit too—business card from Mr. Spears
British Home Minister Drug Squad—my draft card—member-
ship ACLU & Naropa Institute Instructor’s identification
Om Ah Hūṃ I continued chanting Om Ah Hūṃ
Putting my palm on the neck of an 18 year old boy fingering
my back pocket crying “Where’s the money”
“Om Ah Hūṃ there isn’t any”
My card Chief Boo-Hoo Neo American Church New Jersey &
Lower East Side
Om Ah Hūṃ—what not forgotten crowded wallet—Mobil
Credit, Shell? old lovers addresses on cardboard pieces, book-
sellers calling cards—
—“Shut up or we’ll murder you”—“Om Ah Hūṃ take it easy”
Lying on the floor shall I shout more loud?—the metal door
closed on blackness
one boy felt my broken healed ankle, looking for hundred dol-
lar bills behind my stocking weren’t even there—a third boy
untied my Seiko Hong Kong watch rough from right wrist
leaving a claspprick skin tiny bruise
“Shut up and we’ll get out of here”—and so they left,
as I rose from the cardboard mattress thinking Om Ah Hūṃ
didn’t stop em enough,
the tone of voice too loud—my shoulder bag with 10,000 dollars
full of poetry left on the broken floor—
West in Manhattan where the sun has set
The elevator rises calmly yet
In my dark tower, against the tower-dimmed sky,
Whose wide, old windows yield my narrower eye
Images no revision can defeat:
Newspapers blown along the empty street
At three A.M. (somewhere in between ‘odd,’
A guru told me long ago, and ‘God’);
Calm steam rising from manholes in the dark;
Clean asphalt of an avenue; the spark
Of gold in every mica window high
On westward faces of the peaks; the sky
Near dawn, framed in the zig-zag canyon rim
Of cross-streets; bits of distant bridge, the dim
Lustrous ropes of pale lights dipping low;
Rivers unseen beneath, sable and slow.
February Evening in New York

As the stores close, a winter light
  opens air to iris blue,
  glint of frost through the smoke,
  grains of mica, salt of the sidewalk.
As the buildings close, released autonomous
  feet pattern the streets
  in hurry and stroll; balloon heads
  drift and dive above them; the bodies
  aren’t really there.
As the lights brighten, as the sky darkens,
  a woman with crooked heels says to another woman
  while they step along at a fair pace,
  ‘You know, I’m telling you, what I love best
  is life. I love life! Even if I ever get
  to be old and wheezy—or limp! You know?
  Limping along?—I’d still . . . ’ Out of hearing.
To the multiple disordered tones
  of gears changing, a dance
  to the compass points, out, four-way river.
  Prospect of sky
  wedged into avenues, left at the ends of streets,
  west sky, east sky: more life tonight! A range
  of open time at winter’s outskirts.
Anne Pierson Wiese

Body Elite

For years I belonged to a neighborhood gym in Brooklyn: a brownstone transformed, crooked floors and all, by weight machines, rubber matting, turquoise paint galore, a youthful staff eating take-out from the Italian place next door. I’d thread my way between body builders taut and ornery as prize boars, performing my 20-pound reps, invisible, as I assumed.

When I moved to Manhattan I dropped the gym, but emerging from the subway one evening I glimpsed a man I recognized, a silent lifter of light weights who never socialized—compact of body and purpose—whose face in the crowd shone back like a private moon.
In the evening darkness in a place outside New York, a viewpoint where one single glance will encompass the homes of eight million people. The giant city becomes a long shimmering drift, a spiral galaxy seen from the side. Within the galaxy coffee cups are pushed across the counter, the shop windows beg from passersby, a flurry of shoes leave no prints. The climbing fire escapes, elevator doors glide shut, behind police-locked doors a perpetual seethe of voices. Slouched bodies doze in subway cars, the hurtling catacombs. I know too—without statistics—that right now Schubert is being played in a room over there and that for someone the notes are more real than anything else.

The endless expanses of the human brain are crumpled to the size of a fist. In April the swallow returns to last year’s nest under the guttering of this very barn in this very parish. She flies from Transvaal, passes the equator, flies for six weeks over two continents, makes for precisely this vanishing dot in the land-mass. And the man who catches the signals from a whole life in a few ordinary chords for five strings, who makes a river flow through the eye of a needle, is a stout young gentleman from Vienna known to his friends as “The Mushroom,” who slept with his glasses on and stood at his writing desk punctually in the morning.
And then the wonderful centipedes of his manuscript were set in motion.

3
The string quintet is playing. I walk home through warm forests with the ground springy under me, curl up like an embryo, fall asleep, roll weightless into the future, suddenly feel that the plants have thoughts.

4
So much we have to trust, simply to live through our daily day without sinking through the earth!
Trust the piled snow clinging to the mountain slope above the village.
Trust the promises of silence and the smile of understanding, trust that the accident telegram isn’t for us and that the sudden axe-blow from within won’t come.
Trust the axles that carry us on the highway in the middle of the three hundred times life-size bee swarm of steel.
But none of this is really worth our confidence.
The five strings say we can trust something else. And they keep us company part of the way.
As when the time-switch clicks off in the stairwell and the fingers—trustingly—follow the blind handrail that finds its way in the darkness.

5
We squeeze together at the piano and play with four hands in F minor, two coachmen on the same coach, it looks a little ridiculous.
The hands seem to be moving resonant weights to and fro, as if we were tampering with the counterweights in an effort to disturb the great scale arm’s terrible balance: joy and suffering weighing exactly the same.
Annie said, “This music is so heroic,” and she’s right.
But those whose eyes enviously follow men of action, who secretly despise themselves for not being murderers, don’t recognize themselves here, and the many who buy and sell people and believe that everyone can be bought, don’t recognize themselves here. Not their music. The long melody that remains itself in all its transformations, sometimes glittering and pliant, sometimes rugged and strong, snail track and steel wire. The perpetual humming that follows us—now—up the depths.

—Translated from the Swedish by Robin Fulton
Herman Spector

Wiseguy Type

The smart little gent with the shoebutton eyes
and the folded nose, twice-over, so;
with the diffident smile, and the spectacles
like a horned owl, so wise, so wise,

Is a sharpshooter born in a cabaret to a rattle
of drums and a spastic shudder;
By a pinkish floozie with powdered thighs,
and a monocled punk in a cutaway,
And a tinhorn song, and a clicking jig,
and a swift, pat fade
and a getaway . . .

Is a wise, wise baby who won’t take sides,
playing the middle against the ends;
shuffles the cards with a crack and a flutter,
looks sharp in the dark for omens and friends,
Concedes with a mutter, You may be right.
It may be true but I can’t decide,
If the cards are stacked then what does it matter?
If death is the answer, what’s the use?
I’m a lonesome wolf in a cold, hard winter, he says
And the rest is up to Youse.
Jessica Hagedorn

Latin Music in New York

made me dance with you
tito eddie n ray
somewhere with plumjam eyelids
i danced with you
in a roomful of mirrors
in miss harlow’s house

the white girl’s in town
and i smell death
the poet dying in a bar
body shaking in time
to lady day’s song
he’s dying in a nod
in a lullaby
of ambulance haze
and chloral hydrate
they burned his brain

somewhere
i saw the white girl smiling
la cucaracha was up all night
hiding her spoons her mirrors her revolutions
in the morning
the trace of vampires
still there
in the blood even after a bath

you can’t wash it away
you can’t hide it
again and again
i looked under my bed
   inside a perfume box
      in the argentinian dagger
         the baby wolf gave me
            in your eyes
               in a furtive smile
                  in a good fuck
                     in the boogaloo i do

there’s no escaping it
   somewhere with plumjam eyelids

i danced the tasty freeze shuffle with you
the reds the blues the tango con tu madre
it’s there
in town for the night
a guest appearance a quick solo
death gets hyped
and i’m in love again

latin music in new york
made me dance with you
azúcar y chocolaté
the alligator dream
of a tropical night

death makes a quick run
to las vegas
trying to take the poet
with him

latin music in new york
made me dance with you
tito eddie n ray

revolutions are creeping out
from under my bed!
and i sing a song for you
and you
and
you
Carl Sandburg

Broadway

I shall never forget you, Broadway
Your golden and calling lights.

I’ll remember you long,
Tall-walled river of rush and play.

Hearts that know you hate you
And lips that have given you laughter
Have gone to their ashes of life and its roses,
Cursing the dreams that were lost
In the dust of your harsh and trampled stones.
A Rhyme about an Electrical Advertising Sign

I look on the specious electrical light
Blatant, mechanical, crawling and white,
Wickedly red or malignantly green
Like the beads of a young Senegambian queen.
Showing, while millions of souls hurry on,
The virtues of collars, from sunset till dawn,
By dart or by tumble of whirl within whirl,
Starting new fads for the shame-weary girl,
By maggoty motions in sickening line
Proclaiming a hat or a soup or a wine,
While there far above the steep cliffs of the street

The stars sing a message elusive and sweet.
Now man cannot rest in his pleasure and toil
His clumsy contraptions of coil upon coil
Till the thing he invents, in its use and its range,
Leads on to the marvelous CHANGE BEYOND CHANGE
Some day this old Broadway shall climb to the skies,
As a ribbon of cloud on a soul-wind shall rise
And we shall be lifted, rejoicing by night,
Till we join with the planets who choir their delight.
The signs in the streets and the signs in the skies
Shall make a new Zodiac, guiding the wise,
And Broadway make one with that marvelous stair
That is climbed by the rainbow-clad spirits of prayer.
September 1, 1939

I sit in one of the dives
On Fifty-second Street
Uncertain and afraid
As the clever hopes expire
Of a low dishonest decade:
Waves of anger and fear
Circulate over the bright
And darkened lands of the earth,
Obsessing our private lives;
The unmentionable odour of death
Offends the September night.

Accurate scholarship can
Unearth the whole offence
From Luther until now
That has driven a culture mad,
Find what occurred at Linz,
What huge imago made
A psychopathic god:
I and the public know
What all schoolchildren learn,
Those to whom evil is done
Do evil in return.

Exiled Thucydides knew
All that a speech can say
About Democracy,
And what dictators do,
The elderly rubbish they talk
To an apathetic grave;
Analyzéd all in his book,
The enlightenment driven away,
The habit-forming pain,
Mismanagement and grief:
We must suffer them all again.

Into this neutral air
Where blind skyscrapers use
Their full height to proclaim
The strength of Collective Man,
Each language pours its vain
Competitive excuse:
But who can live for long
In an euphoric dream;
Out of the mirror they stare,
Imperialism’s face
And the international wrong.

Faces along the bar
Cling to their average day:
The lights must never go out,
The music must always play,
All the conventions conspire
To make this fort assume
The furniture of home;
Lest we should see where we are,
Lost in a haunted wood,
Children afraid of the night
Who have never been happy or good.

The windiest militant trash
Important Persons shout
Is not so crude as our wish:
What mad Nijinsky wrote:
About Diaghilev
Is true of the normal heart;
For the error bred in the bone
Of each woman and each man
Craves what it cannot have,
Not universal love
But to be loved alone.

From the conservative dark
Into the ethical life
The dense commuters come,
Repeating their morning vow;
“I will be true to the wife,
I’ll concentrate more on my work,”
And helpless governors wake
To resume their compulsory game:
Who can release them now,
Who can reach the deaf,
Who can speak for the dumb?

All I have is a voice
To undo the folded lie,
The romantic lie in the brain
Of the sensual man-in-the-street
And the lie of Authority
Whose buildings grope the sky:
There is no such thing as the State
And no one exists alone;
Hunger allows no choice
To the citizen or the police;
We must love one another or die.

Defenseless under the night
Our world in stupor lies;
Yet, dotted everywhere,
Ironic points of light
Flash out wherever the Just
Exchange their messages:
May I, composed like them
Of Eros and of dust,
Beleaguered by the same
Negation and despair,
Show an affirming flame.
Hart Crane

To Brooklyn Bridge

How many dawns, chill from his rippling rest
The seagull's wings shall dip and pivot him,
Shedding white rings of tumult, building high
Over the chained bay waters Liberty—

Then, with inviolate curve, forsake our eyes
As apparitional as sails that cross
Some page of figures to be filed away;
—Till elevators drop us from our day . . .

I think of cinemas, panoramic sleights
With multitudes bent toward some flashing scene
Never disclosed, but hastened to again,
Foretold to other eyes on the same screen;

And Thee, across the harbor, silver-paced
As though the sun took step of thee, yet left
Some motion ever unspent in thy stride,—
Implicitly thy freedom staying thee!

Out of some subway scuttle, cell or loft
A bedlamite speeds to thy parapets,
Tilting there momentarily, shrill shirt ballooning,
A jest falls from the speechless caravan.

Down Wall, from girder into street noon leaks,
A rip-tooth of the sky's acetylene;
All afternoon the cloud-flown derricks turn . . .
Thy cables breathe the North Atlantic still.
And obscure as that heaven of the Jews,
Thy guerdon . . . Accolade thou dost bestow
Of anonymity time cannot raise:
Vibrant reprieve and pardon thou dost show.

O harp and altar, of the fury fused,
(How could mere toil align thy choiring strings!)
Terrific threshold of the prophet’s pledge,
Prayer of pariah, and the lover’s cry,—

Again the traffic lights that skim thy swift
Unfractioned idiom, immaculate sigh of stars,
Beading thy path—condense eternity:
And we have seen night lifted in thine arms.

Under thy shadow by the piers I waited;
Only in darkness is thy shadow clear.
The City’s fiery parcels all undone,
Already snow submerges an iron year . . .

O Sleepless as the river under thee,
Vaulting the sea, the prairies’ dreaming sod,
Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend
And of the curveship lend a myth to God.
Willie Perdomo

123rd Street Rap

A day on
123rd Street
goes a little
something like
this:

Automatic bullets bounce
off stoop steps

It’s about time to pay
all my debts

Church bells bong for
drunken mourners

Baby men growing on
all the corners

Money that
ain’t mine

Sun that
don’t shine

Trees that
don’t grow

Wind that
won’t blow
Drug posses
ready to rumble

Ceiling starting
to crumble

Abuelas close
eyes and pray

While they watch
the children play

Not much I
can say

Except day turns
to night

And I can’t tell what’s
wrong from what’s right

on 123rd Street
Night
Walt Whitman

When I Heard at the Close of the Day

When I heard at the close of the day how my name had been receiv’d with plaudits in the capitol, still it was not a happy night for me that follow’d,

And else when I carous’d, or when my plans were accomplish’d,

still I was not happy,

But the day when I rose at dawn from the bed of perfect health,

refresh’d, singing, inhaling the ripe breath of autumn,

When I saw the full moon in the west grow pale and disappear in the morning light,

When I wander’d alone over the beach, and undressing bathed,

laughing with the cool waters, and saw the sun rise,

And when I thought how my dear friend my lover was on his way coming, O then I was happy,

O then each breath tasted sweeter, and all that day my food nourish’d me more, and the beautiful day pass’d well,

And the next came with equal joy, and with the next at evening came my friend,

And that night while all was still I heard the waters roll slowly continually up the shores,

I heard the hissing rustle of the liquid and sands as directed to me whispering to congratulate me,

For the one I love most lay sleeping by me under the same cover in the cool night,

In the stillness in the autumn moonbeams his face was inclined toward me,

And his arm lay lightly around my breast—and that night I was happy.
Anna Margolin

Evening on Fifth Avenue

I
It's April
and the pure stroke of a bell.
The street is raised up
on fiery hands
to the ebbing day.

How beautiful, how sad, the faces are.

It is April's sorrow,
black processions of cars,
pale, lightly-rustling clothing,
and on the marble steps of the hotel—
people set like gemstones
of delicate, idyllic, shining light.

2
Over the dusky avenue,
in the violet mist of the avenue
iridescent butterflies
flutter.

Limousines
float along the avenue
like mysterious ships,
and the raw shriek of sirens hangs
threateningly.

Carrying night in their eyes,
night and destruction and gold in their eyes,
like poems lulling themselves, young women stroll
and nervously spread their small wings
over the avenue
like demented butterflies.

—Translated from the Yiddish by Shirley Kumove
Gwendolyn Bennett

Street Lamps in Early Spring

Night wears a garment
All velvet soft, all violet blue . . .
And over her face she draws a veil
As shimmering fine as floating dew . . .
And here and there
In the black of her hair
The subtle hands of Night
Move slowly with their gem-starred light.
From “New York American Spell, 2001”

I / OMEN

What was going on in the New York American
Black/red/green helmeted neon night?
The elevator door was closing behind us, we were the ones

Plunging floor after floor after floor after floor
To the abyss—but it was someone else’s face
Staring from the screen out at us, someone else’s face

Saying something flashing from the teleprompter:
Though what the face said was meant to reassure,
Down in the abyss the footage kept playing,

All of it looping back like children chanting
The answers to nonsensical riddles, taunting
A classmate who doesn’t know the question:

“Because it’s too far to walk” “Time to get a new fence”
“A big red rock eater.” And as the images rewound
And the face kept talking, the clear night sky

Filled up with smoke and the smoke kept pouring
Itself out into the air like a voice saying something
It can’t stop saying, some murky omen

Like school kids asking: “Why do birds fly south?”
“What time is it when an elephant sits on the fence?”
“What’s big, red and eats rocks?”
Melanie Rehak

Autobiography: New York

Returning alone after long absence
I was engulfed. No novel, no play
had prepared me for this,
the arched November trees
glazed with ice, the night-emptied
sidewalks chipped with mica
in silent offering.
I had left it all behind
and here—it rose! The City’s
fiery parcels all undone.

It was the season of regret
and the great wave of first
love lost swept over me.
Catching the buildings’
hooded eyes from afar—
my true paramours!—I was
mournful in my traveling kit,
adolescent with longing
for everything laid out
before me, down on my knees
in the frigid air, on the first
night, asking for benevolence,
second chances without end.
Fay Chiang

Snow

snow falls in a hush under night lights, lampposts doing waltzes.

I feel hopeful, though logic says to worry. we run out of money with budget cuts in the arts, in unemployment, food stamps, medicaid, housing. we’ve got two hands apiece, we’ll figure something out.

it snows now. tops of buildings covered white and figures walking slowly past drifts on streets below. pure spirits smokelike float on each snowflake searching for kin.

put away the papers, stack the work for tomorrow, turn the calendar page. each time the ritual prepares for a new beginning. I walk slowly down seven flights of darkened wooden stairs, past other lofts filled with oiled machinery for small industries. the front door opens and my coat is caught by chill seeping through a hole in the right pocket. shuddering I walk towards spring street, past the iron security gates of the carpenter, the chinese family coffee shop, the rice and beans restaurant, the corner smoke shop. people have gone home. they must be eating supper, maybe watching t.v. or preparing a sandwich to take to work, school. or maybe sick in bed with this flu.

down spring street there are silent side streets, loading bays scattered in snow, by workers
hurrying home at 5 p.m. windows reflect snow, lamplight. they are eyes. I look past instead staring skyward and search the darkness for the source of this snow. but there are many snowflakes and they swirl in patterns like messengers, their secrets entwined in one another, my figure swept up by their dances, in motion.

I am excited: a warm glow in my chest expanding, breathing. there is a song about living, about being. I hear it when I walk through snow under lamplight in city streets.
Season of Death

This is the sixth winter:
this is the season of death
when lungs contract and the breath of homeless men
freezes on restaurant window panes—men seeking
the sight of rare food
before the head is lowered into the upturned collar
and the shoulders hunched and the shuffling feet
move away slowly, slowly disappear
into a darkened street.

This is the season when rents go up:
men die, and their dying is casual.
I walk along a street, returning
at midnight from my unit. Meet a man
leaning against an illumined wall
and ask him for a light.

   His open eyes
stay fixed on mine. And cold rain falling
trickles down his nose, his chin.
“Buddy,” I begin . . . and look more closely—
and flee in horror from the corpse’s grin.

The eyes pursue you even in sleep and
when you awake they stare at you from the ceiling;
you see the dead face peering from your shoes;
the eggs at Thompson’s are the dead man’s eyes.
Work dims them for eight hours, but then—
the machines silent—they appear again.

Along the docks, in the terminals, in the subway, on the street,
in restaurants—the eyes
are focused from the river
among the floating garbage
that other men fish for,
their hands around poles
almost in prayer—
wanting to live,
wanting to live! who also soon
will stand propped by death against a stone-cold wall.
Sara Teasdale

From the Woolworth Tower

Vivid with love, eager for greater beauty
Out of the night we came
Into the corridor, brilliant and warm.
A metal door slides open,
And the lift receives us.
Swiftly, with sharp unswerving flight
The car shoots upward,
And the air, swirling and angry,
Howls like a hundred devils.
Past the maze of trim bronze doors,
Steadily we ascend
I cling to you
Conscious of the chasm under us,
And a terrible whirring deafens my ears.

The flight is ended.

We pass through a door leading onto the ledge—
Wind, night and space!
Oh terrible height
Why have we sought you?
Oh bitter wind with icy invisible wings
Why do you beat us?
Why would you bear us away?
We look through the miles of air,
The cold blue miles between us and the city,
Over the edge of eternity we look
On all the lights,
A thousand times more numerous than the stars;
Oh lines and loops of light in unwound chains
That mark for miles and miles
The vast black mazy cobweb of the streets;
Near us clusters and splashes of living gold
That change far off to bluish steel
Where the fragile lights on the Jersey shore
Tremble like drops of wind-stirred dew.
The strident noises of the city
Floating up to us
Are hallowed into whispers.
Ferries cross through the darkness
Weaving a golden thread into the night,
Their whistles weird shadows of sound.

We feel the millions of humanity beneath us,—
The warm millions, moving under the roofs,
Consumed by their own desires;
Preparing food,
Sobbing alone in a garret,
With burning eyes bending over a needle,
Aimlessly reading the evening paper,
Dancing in the naked light of the café,
Laying out the dead,
Bringing a child to birth—
The sorrow, the torpor, the bitterness, the frail joy
Come up to us
Like a cold fog wrapping us round,
Oh in a hundred years
Not one of these blood-warm bodies
But will be worthless as clay.
The anguish, the torpor, the toil
Will have passed to other millions
Consumed by the same desires.
Ages will come and go,
Darkness will blot the lights
And the tower will be laid on the earth.
The sea will remain
Black and unchanging,
The stars will look down
Brilliant and unconcerned.

Beloved,
Tho’ sorrow, futility, defeat
Surround us,
They cannot bear us down.
Here on the abyss of eternity
Love has crowned us
For a moment
Victors.
Across a city from you, I’m with you,
just as an August night
moony, inlet-warm, seabathed, I watched you sleep,
the scrubbed, sheenless wood of the dressing-table
cluttered with our brushes, books, vials in the moonlight—
or a salt-mist orchard, lying at your side
watching red sunset through the screendoor of the cabin,
G minor Mozart on the tape-recorder,
falling asleep to the music of the sea.
This island of Manhattan is wide enough
for both of us, and narrow:
I can hear your breath tonight, I know how your face
lies upturned, the halflight tracing
your generous, delicate mouth
where grief and laughter sleep together.

That conversation we were always on the edge
of having, runs on in my head,
at night the Hudson trembles in New Jersey light
polluted water yet reflecting even
sometimes the moon
and I discern a woman
I loved, drowning in secrets, fear wound round her throat
and choking her like hair. And this is she
with whom I tried to speak, whose hurt, expressive head
turning aside from pain, is dragged down deeper
where it cannot hear me,
and soon I shall know I was talking to my own soul.
Derek Walcott

God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen

Splitting from Jack Delaney’s, Sheridan Square, that winter night, stewed, seasoned in bourbon, my body kindled by the whistling air snowing the Village that Christ was reborn, I lurched like any lush by his own glow across towards Sixth, and froze before the tracks of footprints bleeding on the virgin snow. I tracked them where they led across the street to the bright side, entering the wax-sealed smell of neon, human heat, some all-night diner with its wise-guy cook his stub thumb in my bowl of stew and one man’s pulped and beaten face, its look acknowledging all that, white-dark outside, was possible: some beast prowling the block, something fur-clotted, running wild beyond the boundary of will. Outside, more snow had fallen. My heart charred. I longed for darkness, evil that was warm. Walking, I’d stop and turn. What had I heard wheezing behind my heel with whitening breath? Nothing. Sixth Avenue yawned wet and wide. The night was white. There was nowhere to hide.
Arriving in the City

In the loose-fitting hospital gown, holding a juglike container of blood like a lantern, the vein of a clear plastic tube running out of it up one baggy sleeve, disheveled and pale, you approached down the aisle: on the night Greyhound somewhere between New York City and Cleveland, I abruptly woke up with the distinct impression I’d screamed, the one seated next to me still fast asleep—I am walking alone down Third Avenue now—those around me all still fast asleep.

I find the address—it is on one of those unlighted, unfrequented side streets that are like passages marked in a book for undiscernible reasons. The light is on.

I look up in the dark faintly luminous blue hall of sky between the walls of locked warehouses. Incontrovertibly, the light is on.
I look up in the moon,
bathing the bones of my face in the cold
of that gray immaterial city
inhabited by eyeless millions, gazing
interminably at the world.
City Lyrics

Argument.—The poet starts from the Bowling Green to take his sweetheart up to Thompson’s for an ice, or (if she is inclined for more) ices. He confines his muse to matters which any every-day man and young woman may see in taking the same promenade for the same innocent refreshment.

Come out, love—the night is enchanting!
   The moon hangs just over Broadway;
The stars are all lighted and panting—
   (Hot weather up there, I dare say!)
’Tis seldom that “coolness” entices,
   And love is no better for chilling—
But come up to Thompson’s for ices,
   And cool your warm heart for a shilling!

What perfume comes balmily o’er us?
   Mint juleps from City Hotel!
A loafer is smoking before us—
   (A nasty cigar, by the smell!)
Oh Woman! thou secret past knowing!
   Like lilachs that grow by the wall,
You breathe every air that is going,
   Yet gather but sweetness from all!

On, on! by St. Paul’s, and the Astor!
   Religion seems very ill-plann’d!
For one day we list to the pastor,
   For six days we list to the band!
The sermon may dwell on the future,
   The organ your pulses may calm—
When—pest!—that remember’d cachucha
   Upsets both the sermon and psalm!
Oh, pity the love that must utter
While goes a swift omnibus by!
(Though sweet is I scream* when the flutter
Of fans shows thermometers high)—
But if what I bawl, or I mutter,
Falls into your ear but to die,
Oh, the dew that falls into the gutter
Is not more unhappy than I!

*Query.—Should this be Ice cream, or I scream?—Printer’s Devil.
Maria’s Journey

She was sitting there
The lonely traffic passing by
Thinking of yesterday when Mommy
Used to cry in protest
The warm air freezing her body
Listening to broken down voices of edited confusion
Subway rides traveling to nowhere
The wino on the corner learning to read
The New York Times
The polluted smell of everything hanging around her body
Thinking of yesterday when Fernando told her
“If you love me—you have to prove it”
She was sitting there
Hating the endless hours of the night
Those that passed looked at her with inviting eyes
That wanted to come out after her
Black and Puerto Rican kids playing Cowboys and Indians
After dark in the backyard streets
Where all of them
The Rats, the Dogs, the Cats, and the Pushers
Hold their daily meetings
She was sitting there
Hating herself for accepting a defeat that loved her
The lonely traffic passing by
Bars and liquor stores on every corner conditioning the younger victims
While drug dealers count their money of death
Thinking of yesterday
Her trip from the island and her first introduction
To the New York cold that ravaged her body
Sitting there
Thinking of yesterday when Freddie played her wrong
Accusing her of being a puta for no reason at all
He is now happily married to a girl
From Queens who makes love to the Dog next door
Thinking of yesterday
The dances, the parties, and the James Bond movies
She loved so much
And now
Waiting for the overdose
Of everything to take effect.
Amy Lowell

New York at Night

A near horizon whose sharp jags
Cut brutally into a sky
Of leaden heaviness, and crags
Of houses lift their masonry
     Ugly and foul, and chimneys lie
And snort, outlined against the gray
     Of lowhung cloud. I hear the sigh
The goaded city gives, not day
Nor night can ease her heart, her anguished labours stay.

Below, straight streets, monotonous,
     From north and south, from east and west,
Stretch glittering; and luminous
     Above, one tower tops the rest
And holds aloft man’s constant quest:
Time! Joyless emblem of the greed
     Of millions, robber of the best
Which earth can give, the vulgar creed
Has seared upon the night its flaming ruthless screed.

O Night! Whose soothing presence brings
     The quiet shining of the stars.
O Night! Whose cloak of darkness clings
     So intimately close that scars
Are hid from our own eyes. Beggars
By day, our wealth is having night
     To burn our souls before altars
Dim and tree-shadowed, where the light
Is shed from a young moon, mysteriously bright.
Where art thou hiding, where thy peace?
    This is the hour, but thou art not.
Will waking tumult never cease?
    Hast thou thy votary forgot?
Nature forsakes this man-begot
And festering wilderness, and now
    The long still hours are here, no jot
Of dear communing do I know;
Instead the glaring, man-filled city groans below!
Bob Dylan

From “Desolation Row”

They’re selling postcards of the hanging
They’re painting the passports brown
The beauty parlor is filled with sailors
The circus is in town
Here comes the blind commissioner
They’ve got him in a trance
One hand is tied to the tight-rope walker
The other is in his pants
And the riot squad they’re restless
They need somewhere to go
As Lady and I look out tonight
From Desolation Row

. . .
Now the moon is almost hidden
The stars are beginning to hide
The fortune-telling lady
Has even taken all her things inside
All except for Cain and Abel
And the hunchback of Notre Dame
Everybody is making love
Or else expecting rain
And the Good Samaritan, he’s dressing
He’s getting ready for the show
He’s going to the carnival tonight
On Desolation Row

. . .
Now at midnight all the agents
And the superhuman crew
Come out and round up everyone
That knows more than they do
Then they bring them to the factory
Where the heart-attack machine
Is strapped across their shoulders
And then the kerosene
Is brought down from the castles
By insurance men who go
Check to see that nobody is escaping
To Desolation Row
Léopold Sédar Senghor

To New York

(for jazz orchestra: trumpet solo)

1
New York! At first, I was confused by your beauty
those big, long-legged golden girls.
So shy at first, before your blue metal eyes, your frosty smile
So very shy. And the anguish in the depth of the skyscraper streets
owlish eyes raised in the eclipse of the sun.
Sulphurous your light and pale spires, whose tops
strike into the sky,
Skyscrapers with muscles of steel and skins of burnished stone,
defying tempests.
Fifteen days on the bare sidewalks of Manhattan
—at the end of the third week the fever grips you
with a jaguar’s pounce—
Fifteen days and no well, no pasture, all the birds in flight
drop dead just like that beneath the high ashen terraces
No laugh from a flowering child, his hand in my cool hand
No mother’s breast, just nylon legs. Legs and breasts
without sweat, without smell.
No tender words, no lips, nothing but artificial hearts
paid for with hard cash.
And not a single book with wisdom. The painter’s palette
can only make coral crystals bloom.
Nights of insomnia, O nights of Manhattan! will-o-the-wisps
swirling, as horns blare the empty hours
As murky waters carry hygienic loves, like rivers bursting
with children’s corpses.
It is the time of signs and reckoning
New York! And yet, it is the time of manna and hyssop.
Just listen to God’s trombones, to your
    heart beating to the rhythm of blood your blood.
I saw in Harlem buzzing with sounds with ceremonial colors
    with showy smells
—It’s tea-time at the home of the pharmaceuticals
    delivery-man—
I saw preparations for the Night festival at the retreat of day.
    I proclaim Night more truthful than the day.
It is that pure hour, when God makes life from before memory
    arise in the streets
And all the amphibious elements shine like suns.
Harlem Harlem! Here is what I saw Harlem Harlem!
    A wind green with corn rise up from pavements
        furrowed by the feet of Dans dansers
Hips silken waves, breasts iron spear, ballets
    of waterlilies and fabulous masks
And mangoes of love rolling from low houses
    upto the feet of police horses.
And all along the sidewalks I saw streams of white rum
    streams of black milk in the blue fog of cigars.
At night I saw the sky snow down cotton flowers and angels’
    wings and wizards’ feathers.
Listen, New York! O listen to your male voice of brass
    your vibrant oboe voice, anguish clogged with your tears
        falling as great clots of blood
Listen to your nocturnal heart beating in the distance, rhythm
    and blood of the tom-tom, tom-tom blood, tom-tom.

New York! New York I say, let black blood
    flow in your blood
Let it clear rust from your steel joints, like an
    oil of life
Let it give your bridges the curve of hips
and the suppleness of vines.
It is the ancient times again, unity is rediscovered
    the Lion, the Bull and the Tree are reconciled.
Idea linked to act ear to heart sign to meaning.
See your rivers rustling with musk caimans and mirage-eyed
    manatees. No need to invent Sirens.
All you need do is open your eyes to the April rainbow
And your ears, especially your ears, to God, who with
    a saxophone’s laugh created the heavens and the
    earth in six days.
And on the seventh day, he slept a deep Negro slumber.

—Translated from the French by Shawkat M. Toorawa
Langston Hughes

Juke Box Love Song

I could take the Harlem night
and wrap around you,
Take the neon lights and make a crown,
Take the Lenox Avenue busses,
Taxis, subways,
And for your love song tone their rumble down.
Take Harlem’s heartbeat,
Make a drumbeat,
Put it on a record, let it whirl,
And while we listen to it play,
Dance with you till day—
Dance with you, my sweet brown Harlem girl.
These Ever Just So Six Million New York Hearts
and Dorothy

Girl, you have breathed the scent of New York and now,
no greens, no flowers, no daisies . . . not even the wind on
greens and flowers can hold you long.
You will not stay on prairie wastes, girl, for you have listened to
the rivers of Manhattan at nighttime: you have been quite too
near these ever just so six million New York hearts: you have
watched quite too many New York sunsets and dawns.
You’ll come back, girl: quite soon these ever just so New York floors
and stones will feel your quick, sharp walk.
You cannot stay with prairie wastes and flowers, girl, for you have
breathed the scent of New York too long.
You have been quite too near these ever just so six million New York
hearts; and they will someday call you back, girl.
Further Reading

(Listed chronologically)


Biographical Details

Poets

Adonis (b. ‘Ali Ahmad Sa’id in Latakia, Syria, 1930) is an Arab poet, critic, translator and artist. Adonis: Selected Poems (2010), translated by Khaled Mattawa, received a PEN Award for Literary Translation. In 2011, Adonis was awarded the Goethe Prize.

Maya Angelou (b. St. Louis, Missouri, 1928; d. Winston-Salem, North Carolina, 2014) was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize for her first collection, Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water ‘Fore I Diie (1971). She has received three Grammys for spoken word albums and in 2000 received the National Medal of Arts.


Gwendolyn Bennett (b. Gidding, Texas, 1902; d. Reading, Pennsylvania, 1981) was active in the Harlem Renaissance, notably as an organizer of a writers’ support group. Her poems appeared principally in the journal Opportunity, published by the National Urban League.

Ted Berrigan (b. Providence, Rhode Island, 1934; d. New York City, 1983) was active in Chicago and then as a member of

**Anna Hempstead Branch** (1875–1937, New London, Connecticut) was a poet and social worker associated with Christodora House, a social settlement in New York City’s Lower East Side. *Sonnets from a Lock Box* appeared in 1929 and the posthumous *Last Poems* in 1944.


**Alberto O. Cappas** (b. Yauco, Puerto Rico, 1946) has published three volumes of poetry, the most recent of which is *Doña Julia* (2009). In 2007, he founded the Educational Pledge Partnership and has been its president since. Cappas lives in New York City.

**Fay Chiang** (b. New York City, 1952) founded the Basement Workshop in the Lower East Side, as well as Project Reach. Her first collection, *In the City of Contradictions*, appeared in 1979. She has edited several anthologies and is currently working on a book-length poem.

**Robert Clairmont** (b. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1902), a prominent figure in Greenwich Village, was the founder of *New Cow of Greenwich Village* and the editor of *Pegasus* in the 1950s. His poetry collections include *Quintillions* (1928) and *Forever X* (1951).


BOB DYLAN (b. Duluth, Minnesota, 1941) has received eleven Grammys for his music and lyrics, was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1982, and in 2008 received both a Pulitzer Prize Special Citation and the National Medal of Arts. His latest album is *Tempest* (2012).

SHOKRY ELDALY (b. New York City, 1986) is a 2011 Pushcart Prize nominee and recipient of the Blanche Colton Williams Fellowship. His poetry has appeared in several journals, including the *Sixers Review*. He is presently at work on a novel.


ALLEN GINSBERG (b. Newark, New Jersey, 1926; d. New York City, 1997) was a prominent poet of the 1950’s Beat Generation. *The
Fall of America (1973) shared the National Book Award for Poetry. The long poem Howl (1956) is Ginsberg’s best-known work.


Durs Grünbein (b. Dresden, East Germany, 1962) is one of Germany’s most important poets. In 1995, he received the Georg-Büchner-Preis. In 2006, Ashes for Breakfast: Selected Poems (translated by Michael Hoffman) was shortlisted for the International Griffin Poetry Prize.

Jessica Hagedorn (b. Manila, Philippines, 1949) moved to San Francisco in 1963, then to New York City in 1978. She is a playwright, novelist, multimedia artist, anthologist, and poet. Her novel Dogeaters was nominated for a 1990 National Book Award.


Langston Hughes (b. Joplin, Missouri, 1902; d. New York City, 1967) was a poet, novelist, playwright, and children’s author active during the Harlem Renaissance. He was made a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1961. The Collected Poems appeared in 1994.

Galway Kinnell (b. Providence, Rhode Island, 1927) won the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award in 1982 for *Selected Poems*. From 1989 to 1993 he was Poet Laureate of Vermont. He has translated Yves Bonnefoy, François Villon, and Rainer Marie Rilke.

Stephanie Krueger (b. Sioux Falls, South Dakota, 1971) has published poems in *Spirit of Bosnia* and *Diwan*. Krueger became a New York City resident in 2005 and since then has been living in SoHo, West Harlem, and Astoria.

Denise Levertov (b. Ilford, England, 1923; d. Seattle, Washington, 1997) moved to New York City in 1948. She wrote twenty books of poetry and criticism, for which she received several awards, including the Robert Frost Medal of the Poetry Society of America.

Vachel Lindsay (1879–1931, Springfield, Illinois) was known as the “Prairie Troubadour” for his views on singing poetry, detailed in his correspondence with Yeats. *Poetry* magazine awarded him a lifetime achievement award in 1928. His *Complete Poetry* was published in 1984.


Amy Lowell (1874–1925, Brookline, Massachusetts) won the Pulitzer Prize posthumously in 1926 for *What's O'Clock*. *The Complete Poetical Works of Amy Lowell* appeared in 1925. It was published again with some missing material in 1955.

Anna Margolin (b. Brest, Belarus, 1887; d. 1952, New York City) was the pen name of the Yiddish poet Rosa Harning Lebensboym. She traveled to New York City in 1906 and settled there in 1913. In 1929, she published Poems, her one volume of poetry.

Kenneth McClane (b. 1951, New York City) is a poet and essayist. His most recent book, *Color: Essays on Race, Family, and History*, won the 2009 Book of the Year Award for Essays from *ForeWord* magazine.


Edna St. Vincent Millay (b. Rockland, Maine, 1892; d. Austerlitz, New York, 1950) moved to New York City in 1917. *The Ballad of the Harp-Weaver* won the 1923 Pulitzer Prize. In 1943, she was awarded the Robert Frost Medal of the Poetry Society of America.


Frank O’Hara (b. Baltimore, Maryland, 1926; d. Fire Island, New York, 1966) was a member of the New York School. Lawrence Ferlinghetti commissioned *Lunch Poems* (1964) for City Lights. His posthumous *Collected Poems* shared the National Book Award in 1972.

Sharon Olds (b. San Francisco, California, 1942) received the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1984 for *The Dead and
Living. From 1998 to 2000 she was New York State Poet Laureate. In 2012, she became the first American to win the T. S. Eliot Prize, for Stag’s Leap.


Willie Perdomo (b. 1967, New York City) is a poet and children’s author. He received the New York Foundation for the Arts Award in 2001, and Smoking Lovely (2003) received a PEN Beyond Margins Award. He is founder and codirector of Cypher Books.

Melanie Rehak (b. New York City, 1971) is a journalist, writer, poet, and critic. While on fellowship at New York Public Library’s Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers, she wrote the Edgar Award-winning novel Girl Sleuth.

Adrienne Rich (b. Baltimore, Maryland, 1929; d. Santa Cruz, California, 2012) received numerous awards for her poetry, including a National Book Award for Diving into the Wreck (1974), the inaugural Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize in 1986, and a MacArthur Fellowship in 1994.


Carl Sandburg (b. Galesburg, Illinois, 1878; d. Flat Rock, North Carolina, 1967) received the Pulitzer Prize for Corn Huskers (1919) and The Complete Poems (1951). In 1959 he received a Grammy for his recording of Copland’s “Lincoln Portrait” with the New York Philharmonic.
JAMES SCHUYLER (b. Chicago, Illinois, 1923; d. New York City, 1991) moved to New York City in the late 1940s where he was part of the New York School of poets. He received the Pulitzer Prize for his 1980 collection, *The Morning of the Poem*.


PURVI SHAH (b. Ahmedabad, India, 1972) was a poetry editor for the *Asian Pacific American Journal* and is now a consultant on violence against women, and language and media issues in New York City. *Terrain Tracks* (2006) won the Many Voices Project competition.

MEREDITH SHEPARD (b. Berkeley, California, 1987) studied literature and human rights at Cornell University, where she wrote “Why I Hate New York.” She is writing a memoir about working in Rwanda.


PAUL SIMON (b. Newark, New Jersey, 1941) has won twelve Grammys for his music and lyrics and in 2007 was the first recipient of the Library of Congress Gershwin Award for Popular Music. In 2011, he was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.


Herman Spector (1905–1959, New York City) was associated with the magazines Dynamo and Blues in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Bastard in the Ragged Suit: Writings of, with Drawings by, Herman Spector appeared in 1977.

Sara Teasdale (b. Saint Louis, Missouri, 1884; d. New York City, 1933) moved to New York City in 1916 and in 1918 won the Pulitzer Prize and the annual award of the Poetry Society of America for Love Songs (1917).

Tomas Tranströmer (b. Stockholm, Sweden, 1931) has been translated into sixty languages. In 1990, he received the Neustadt International Prize for Literature and in 2011 the Nobel Prize in Literature. An updated Collected Poems appeared in 2011.


Walt Whitman (b. West Hills, New York, 1819; d. Camden, New Jersey, 1892) was a poet, journalist, government clerk, and volunteer nurse during the American Civil War. He continuously revised Leaves of Grass, which first appeared in 1855.

NATHANIEL PARKER WILLIS (b. Portland, Maine, 1806; d. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1867) was a poet, playwright, and journalist whose popularity declined in his later years. As editor of the *Home Journal,* he promoted the work of women poets.

FRANZ WRIGHT (b. Vienna, Austria, 1953) won the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for *Walking to Martha’s Vineyard.* His most recent collection is *Kindertotenwald: Prose Poems* (2011). He is also an accomplished translator.

Translators


E. WAYLES BROWNE teaches languages and linguistics at Cornell University, is an editor of Slavic journals in several countries, and translates widely from Slavic languages. He has been Sasha Skenderija’s principal translator since 1993.

CAROLYN FORCHÉ is an award-winning poet, anthologist, and translator, and also a teacher, activist, and human rights advocate. She has translated the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish (with Munir Akash), Claribel Alegría, and Robert Desnos (with William Kulick).

ROBIN FULTON is a Scottish poet and translator who spent most of his adult life as a university lecturer in Norway. He has translated
many Scandinavian poets, including Kjell Espmark, Olav Hauge, Harry Martinson, and Tomas Tranströmer.

Shirley Kumove has published two bilingual collections of Yiddish folk sayings, and edited and translated the collected poems of Anna Margolin in *Drunk for the Bitter Truth* (2005).

Andrew Shields teaches English language and literature at the University of Basel. He is a poet, translator, songwriter, and guitarist. He has translated, among numerous others, Ilma Rakusa from German and Jacques Réda from French.


Liz Werner is a poet, novelist, and essayist who translates between English and Spanish. She has lived and worked in Chile and has translated Jimmy Santiago Baca and Nicanor Parra.

Elizabeth Oehlkers Wright translates contemporary German poets, including the German-Turkish Zafer Şenocak and Zehra Çırak. With her husband, Franz Wright, she has translated Valzhyna Mort’s *Factory of Tears* (2008) from Belarusian.

Franz Wright, a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, has translated René Char from French, Rainer Maria Rilke from German, and, with his wife, Elizabeth Oehlkers Wright, Valzhyna Mort from Belarusian.
Chronology of Poems

1844  “City Lyrics,” by Nathaniel Parker Willis
1860, 1867  “When I Heard at the Close of the Day,” by Walt Whitman
1905  “New York at Sunrise,” by Anna Hempstead Branch
1906  “Broadway,” by Carl Sandburg
1912  “New York at Night,” by Amy Lowell
1914  “A Rhyme about an Electrical Advertising Sign,” by Vachel Lindsay
1915  “From the Woolworth Tower,” by Sara Teasdale
1922  “Dawn in New York,” by Claude McKay
          “MacDougal Street,” by Edna St. Vincent Millay
1924  “at the ferocious phenomenon,” by E. E. Cummings
1925  “These Ever Just So Six Million New York Hearts and Dorothy,” by Robert Clairmont
1926  “Street Lamps in Early Spring,” by Gwendolyn Bennett
1927  “To Brooklyn Bridge,” by Hart Crane
1929  “Evening on Fifth Avenue,” by Anna Margolin
1931 “New York (Office and Denunciation),” by Federico García Lorca
1935 “Season of Death,” by Edwin Rolfe
1939 “Wiseguy Type,” by Herman Spector
         “September 1, 1939,” by W. H. Auden
1950 “Juke Box Love Song,” by Langston Hughes
1956 “A Step Away from Them,” by Frank O’Hara
         “To New York,” by Léopold Séder Senghor
1957 “February Evening in New York,” by Denise Levertov
1960 “The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World,” by Galway Kinnell
1964 “Sonnet XXXVI,” by Ted Berrigan
1965 “Desolation Row,” by Bob Dylan
         “God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen,” by Derek Walcott
1966 “The 59th Street Bridge Song (Feelin’ Groovy),” by Paul Simon
1967 “Central Park,” by Robert Lowell
1974 “Mugging,” by Allen Ginsberg
         “Twenty-One Love Poems,” by Adrienne Rich
1975 “As Fate Would Have It,” by Mahmoud Darwish
         “Latin Music in New York,” by Jessica Hagedorn
1978  “The New Yorkers,” by Nikki Giovanni
       “Schubertiana,” by Tomas Tranströmer
1981  “Sunday Morning,” by Kenneth McClane
1982  “Snow,” by Fay Chiang
       “Arriving in the City,” by Franz Wright
1983  “Awaking in New York,” by Maya Angelou
1984  “Manhattan Dawn (1945),” by Donald Justice
       “The morning,” by James Schuyler
1985  “Resurrection,” by Nicanor Parra
1987  “Summer Solstice, New York City,” by Sharon Olds
1992  “Early Morning in July,” by Charles Simic
1996  “123rd Street Rap,” by Willie Perdomo
1997  “The Lower East Side of Manhattan,” by Victor Hernández Cruz
2000  “The Mexican Cabdriver’s Poem for His Wife, Who Has Left Him,” by Martin Espada
2001  “August Walk,” by Luis Cabalquinto
2002  “Maria’s Journey,” by Alberto O. Cappas
       “New York American Spell, 2001,” by Tom Sleigh
2006  “Made in India, Immigrant Song #3,” by Purvi Shah
2007  “New York,” by Valzhyna Mort
       “Body Elite,” by Anne Pierson Wiese

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2009  “Cyclone,” by Stephanie Krueger

2010  “Why I Hate New York,” by Meredith Shepard
“`I Had This Dream/the city of shadows,” by Shokry Eldaly
“Rain,” by David Semanki

2011  “West Side Story,” by Sasha Skenderija
“Peacocks on Broadway,” by Durs Grünbein

*Note that, in some cases, the date perforce reflects year of publication rather than year of composition.
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