



# **PRELUDES**

## *I*

*The winter evening settles down  
With smell of steaks in passageways.  
Six o'clock.  
The burnt-out ends of smoky days.  
And now a gusty shower wraps  
The grimy scraps  
Of withered leaves about your feet  
And newspapers from vacant lots;  
The showers beat  
On broken blinds and chimney-pots,  
And at the corner of the street  
A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps.  
And then the lighting of the lamps.*

## *II*

*The morning comes to consciousness  
Of faint stale smells of beer  
From the sawdust-trampled street  
With all its muddy feet that press  
To early coffee-stands.*

*With the other masquerades  
That time resumes,  
One thinks of all the hands  
That are raising dingy shades  
In a thousand furnished rooms.*



## Those Winter Sundays

by Robert Hayden

Sundays too my father got up early  
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,  
then with cracked hands that ached  
from labor in the weekday weather made  
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

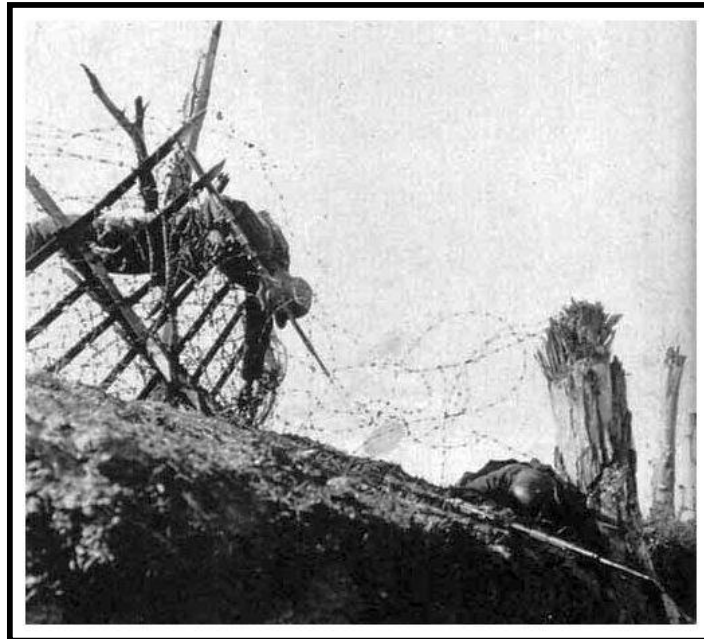
I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.  
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,  
and slowly I would rise and dress,  
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him,  
who had driven out the cold  
and polished my good shoes as well.  
What did I know, what did I know  
of love's austere and lonely offices?



## **THE SWANS by Clifford Dyment**

Midstream they met. Challenger and champion,  
They fought a war for honour  
Fierce, sharp, but with no honour:  
Each had a simple aim and sought it quickly.  
The combat over, the victor sailed away  
Broken, but placid as is the gift of swans,  
Leaving his rival to his shame alone.  
I listened for a song, according to story,  
But this swan's death was out of character-  
No giving up of the grace of life  
In a sad lingering music.  
I saw the beaten swan rise on the water  
As though to outreach pain, its webbed feet  
Banging the river helplessly, its wings  
Loose in a last hysteria. Then the neck  
Was floating like a rope and the swan was dead.  
It drifted away and all around it swan's-down  
Bobbed on the river like children little boats.



## THE CORNER by Ralph Pomeroy

The cop slumps alertly on his motorcycle,  
Supported by one leg like a leather stork.  
His glance accuses me of loitering.  
I can see his eyes moving like a fish  
In the green depths of his green goggles.

His ease is fake. I can tell.  
My ease if fake. And he can tell.  
The fingers armoured by his gloves  
Splay and clench, itching to change something.  
As if he were my enemy or my death,  
I just standing there watching.

I spit out my gum which has gone stale.  
I knock out a new cigarette -  
Which is my bravery.  
It is all imperceptible:  
The way I shift my weight,  
The way he creaks in his saddle.

The traffic is specific though constant.  
The sun surrounds me, divides the street between us.  
His crash helmet is whiter in the shade.  
It is like a bull ring as they say it is just before the  
fighting.  
I cannot back down. I am there.

Everything holds me back.  
I am in danger of disappearing into the sunny dust.  
My levis bake and my T shirt sweats.

My cigarette makes my eyes burn.  
But I don't dare drop it.

Who made him my enemy?  
Prince of coolness. King of fear.  
Why do I lean here waiting?  
Why does he lounge there watching?

I am becoming sunlight.  
My hair is on fire. My boots run like tar.  
I am hung-up by the bright air.

Something breaks through all of a sudden,  
And he blasts off, quick as a craver,  
Smug in his power; watching me watch.



## **THE WAR PHOTOGRAPHER by Carol Anne Duffy**

In his darkroom he is finally alone  
with spools of suffering set out in ordered rows.  
The only light is red and softly glows,  
as though this were a church and he  
a priest preparing to intone a Mass.  
Belfast. Beirut. Phnom Penh. All flesh is grass.

He has a job to do. Solutions slop in trays  
beneath his hands which did not tremble then  
though seem to now. Rural England. Home again  
to ordinary pain which simple weather can dispel,  
to fields which don't explode beneath the feet  
of running children in a nightmare heat

Something is happening. A stranger's features  
faintly start to twist before his eyes,  
a half-formed ghost. He remembers the cries  
of this man's wife, how he sought approval  
without words to do what someone must  
and how the blood stained into foreign dust.

A hundred agonies in black - and - white  
from which his editor will pick out five or six  
for Sunday's supplement. The reader's eyes prick  
with tears between the bath and pre-lunch beers.  
From the aeroplane he stares impassively at where  
he earns a living and they do not care.

