



# Reading RICHARD WILBUR:

A 90th Birthday Celebration

4:30 P.M.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2, 2011

COLE ASSEMBLY ROOM

CONVERSE HALL

AMHERST COLLEGE

**David Sofield**

Winter Spring (*The Beautiful Changes*)  
First Snow in Alsace (*The Beautiful Changes*)  
Still, Citizen Sparrow (*Ceremony*)

**Daniel Freije '11**

Love Calls Us to the Things of This World (*Things of This World*)  
A Black November Turkey (*Things of This World*)

**Laure Katsaros**

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE: L'Invitation au Voyage (*Things of This World*)

**Daniel Hall**

October Maples, Portland (*Advice to a Prophet*)

**Irina Troconis '11**

JORGE GUILLÉN: Death, from a Distance (*Advice to a Prophet*)

**Catherine Ciepiela**

ANNA AKHMATOVA: Lot's Wife (*Walking to Sleep*)

**Max Kaisler '11**

In the Field (*Walking to Sleep*)  
A Riddle (*Walking to Sleep*)

**William Pritchard**

C Minor (*The Mind-Reader*)  
A Storm in April (*The Mind-Reader*)

**Anthony Marx**

Cottage Street, 1953 (*The Mind-Reader*)

**Elena Serkin '11 (UMass)**

VINICIUS DE MORAES: Song (*New Poems in New and Collected Poems*)

**Christopher Spaide '11**

A Barred Owl (*Mayflies*)  
Excerpts from *The Disappearing Alphabet* and *The Pig in the Spigot*

**Karen Montanero '13**

from DANTE ALIGHIERI: Canto XXV of the *Inferno* (*Mayflies*)

**Magdalena Cervantes Cassel '12**

Asides (*New Poems*)  
The House (*Anterooms*)  
A Measuring Worm (*Anterooms*)

**Ilan Stavans**

JORGE LUIS BORGES: Everness (*Walking to Sleep*)  
The Proof (*Walking to Sleep* — translation into Spanish: Stavans)

## FIRST SNOW IN ALSACE

The snow came down last night like moths  
Burned on the moon; it fell till dawn,  
Covered the town with simple cloths.

Absolute snow lies rumped on  
What shellbursts scattered and deranged,  
Entangled railings, crevassed lawn.

As if it did not know they'd changed,  
Snow smoothly clasps the roofs of homes  
Fear-gutted, trustless and estranged.

The ration stacks are milky domes;  
Across the ammunition pile  
The snow has climbed in sparkling combs.

You think: beyond the town a mile  
Or two, this snowfall fills the eyes  
Of soldiers dead a little while.

Persons and persons in disguise,  
Walking the new air white and fine,  
Trade glances quick with shared surprise.

At children's windows, heaped, benign,  
As always, winter shines the most,  
And frost makes marvelous designs.

The night guard coming from his post,  
Ten first-snows back in thought, walks slow  
And warms him with a boyish boast:

He was the first to see the snow.

## LOVE CALLS US TO THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD

The eyes open to a cry of pulleys,  
And spirited from sleep, the astounded soul  
Hangs for a moment bodiless and simple  
As false dawn.

Outside the open window  
The morning air is all awash with angels.

Some are in bed-sheets, some are in blouses,  
Some are in smocks: but truly there they are.  
Now they are rising together in calm swells  
Of halcyon feeling, filling whatever they wear  
With the deep joy of their impersonal breathing;

Now they are flying in place, conveying  
The terrible speed of their omnipresence, moving  
And staying like white water; and now of a sudden  
They swoon down into so rapt a quiet  
That nobody seems to be there.

The soul shrinks

From all that it is about to remember,  
From the punctual rape of every blessed day,  
And cries,

“Oh, let there be nothing on earth but laundry,  
Nothing but rosy hands in the rising steam  
And clear dances done in the sight of heaven.”

Yet, as the sun acknowledges  
With a warm look the world's hunks and colors,  
The soul descends once more in bitter love  
To accept the waking body, saying now  
In a changed voice as the man yawns and rises,  
“Bring them down from their ruddy gallows;

Let there be clean linen for the backs of thieves;  
Let lovers go fresh and sweet to be undone,  
And the heaviest nuns walk in a pure floating  
Of dark habits,

keeping their difficult balance.”

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

L'INVITATION AU VOYAGE

My child, my sister,  
    dream  
How sweet all things would seem  
Were we in that kind land to live together,  
And there love slow and long,  
There love and die among  
Those scenes that image you, that sumptuous weather.  
Drowned suns that glimmer there  
Through cloud-disheveled air  
Move me with such a mystery as appears  
    Within those other skies  
    Of your treacherous eyes  
When I behold them shining through their tears.  
  
There, there is nothing else but grace and measure,  
Richness, quietness, and pleasure.

Furniture that wears  
The lustre of the years  
Softly would glow within our glowing chamber,  
Flowers of rarest bloom  
Proffering their perfume  
Mixed with the vague fragrances of amber;  
Gold ceilings would there be,  
Mirrors deep as the sea,  
The walls all in an Eastern splendor hung—  
Nothing but should address  
The soul's loneliness,  
Speaking her sweet and secret native tongue.

There, there is nothing else but grace and measure,  
Richness, quietness, and pleasure.

See, sheltered from the swells  
There in the still canals  
Those drowsy ships that dream of sailing forth;  
It is to satisfy  
Your least desire, they ply  
Hither through all the waters of the earth.  
The sun at close of day  
Clothes the fields of hay,  
Then the canals, at last the town entire  
In hyacinth and gold:  
Slowly the land is rolled  
Sleepward under a sea of gentle fire.

There, there is nothing else but grace and measure,  
Richness, quietness, and pleasure.

## OCTOBER MAPLES, PORTLAND

The leaves, though little time they have to live,  
Were never so unfallen as today,  
And seem to yield us through a rustled sieve  
The very light from which time fell away.

A showered fire we thought forever lost  
Redeems the air. Where friends in passing meet,  
They parley in the tongues of Pentecost.  
Gold ranks of temples flank the dazzled street.

It is a light of maples, and will go;  
But not before it washes eye and brain  
With such a tincture, such a sanguine glow  
As cannot fail to leave a lasting stain.

So Mary's laundered mantle (in the tale  
Which, like all pretty tales, may still be true),  
Spread on the rosemary-bush, so drenched the pale  
Slight blooms in its irradiated hue,

They could not choose but to return in blue.

JORGE GUILLÉN

## DEATH, FROM A DISTANCE

*Je soutenais l'éclat de la mort toute pure*  
— Valéry

When that dead-certainty appals my thought,  
My future trembles on the road ahead.  
There where the light of country fields is caught  
In the blind, final precinct of the dead,  
A wall takes aim.

But what is sad, stripped bare  
By the sun's gaze? It does not matter now,—  
Not yet. What matters is the ripened pear  
That even now my hand strips from the bough.

The time will come: my hand will reach, some day,  
Without desire. That saddest day of all,  
I shall not weep, but with a proper awe  
For the great force impending, I shall say,  
*Lay on, just destiny. Let the white wall  
Impose on me its uncapricious law.*

ANNA AKHMATOVA

### LOT'S WIFE

The just man followed then his angel guide  
Where he strode on the black highway, hulking and bright;  
But a wild grief in his wife's bosom cried,  
*Look back, it is not too late for a last sight*

*Of the red towers of your native Sodom, the square  
Where once you sang, the gardens you shall mourn,  
And the tall house with empty windows where  
You loved your husband and your babes were born.*

She turned, and looking on the bitter view  
Her eyes were welded shut by mortal pain;  
Into transparent salt her body grew,  
And her quick feet were rooted in the plain.

Who would waste tears upon her? Is she not  
The least of our losses, this unhappy wife?  
Yet in my heart she will not be forgot  
Who, for a single glance, gave up her life.

### A RIDDLE

*For M. M.*

Where far in forest I am laid,  
In a place ringed around by stones,  
Look for no melancholy shade,  
And have no thoughts of buried bones;  
For I am bodiless and bright,  
And fill this glade with sudden glow;  
The leaves are washed in under-light;  
Shade lies upon the boughs like snow.

## C MINOR

Beethoven during breakfast? The human soul,  
Though stalked by hollow pluckings, winning out  
(While bran-flakes crackle in the cereal-bowl)  
Over despair and doubt?

You are right to switch it off and let the day  
Begin at hazard, perhaps with pecker-knocks  
In the sugar bush, the rancor of a jay,  
Or in the letter box

Something that makes you pause and with fixed shadow  
Stand on the driveway gravel, your bent head  
Scanning the snatched pages until the sad  
Or fortunate news is read.

The day's work will be disappointing or not,  
Giving at least some pleasure in taking pains  
One of us, hoeing in the garden plot  
(Unless, of course, it rains)

May rejoice at the knitting of light in fennel-plumes  
And dew like mercury on cabbage-hide,  
Or rise and pace through too-familiar rooms,  
Balked and dissatisfied.

Shall a plate be broken? A new thing understood?  
Shall we be lonely, and by love consoled?  
What shall I whistle, splitting the kindling-wood?  
Shall the night-wind be cold?

How should I know? And even if we were fated  
Hugely to suffer, grandly to endure,  
It would not help to hear it all fore-stated  
As in an overture.

There is nothing to do with a day except to live it.  
Let us have music again when the light dies  
(Sullenly, or in glory) and we can give it  
Something to organize.

## COTTAGE STREET, 1953

Framed in her phoenix fire-screen, Edna Ward  
Bends to the tray of Canton, pouring tea  
For frightened Mrs. Plath; then, turning toward  
The pale, slumped daughter, and my wife, and me,

Asks if we would prefer it weak or strong.  
Will we have milk or lemon, she enquires?  
The visit seems already strained and long.  
Each in his turn, we tell her our desires.

It is my office to exemplify  
The published poet in his happiness,  
Thus cheering Sylvia, who has wished to die;  
But half-ashamed, and impotent to bless,

I am a stupid life-guard who has found,  
Swept to his shallows by the tide, a girl  
Who, far from shore, has been immensely drowned,  
And stares through water now with eyes of pearl.

How large is her refusal; and how slight  
The genteel chat whereby we recommend  
Life, of a summer afternoon, despite  
The brewing dusk which hints that it may end.

And Edna Ward shall die in fifteen years,  
After her eight-and-eighty summers of  
Such grace and courage as permit no tears,  
The thin hand reaching out, the last word *love*,

Outliving Sylvia who, condemned to live,  
Shall study for a decade, as she must,  
To state at last her brilliant negative  
In poems free and helpless and unjust.

VINICIUS DE MORAES

### SONG

Never take her away,  
The daughter whom you gave me,  
The gentle, moist, untroubled  
Small daughter whom you gave me;  
O let her heavenly babbling  
Beset me and enslave me.  
Don't take her; let her stay,  
Beset my heart, and win me,  
That I may put away  
The firstborn child within me,  
That cold, petrific, dry  
Daughter whom death once gave,  
Whose life is a long cry  
For milk she may not have,  
And who, in the night-time, calls me  
In the saddest voice that can be  
Father, Father, and tells me  
Of the love she feels for me.  
Don't let her go away,  
Her whom you gave—my daughter—  
Lest I should come to favor  
That wilder one, that other  
Who does not leave me ever.

### A BARRED OWL

The warping night air having brought the boom  
Of an owl's voice into her darkened room,  
We tell the wakened child that all she heard  
Was an odd question from a forest bird,  
Asking of us, if rightly listened to,  
"Who cooks for you?" and then "Who cooks for you?"

Words, which can make our terrors bravely clear,  
Can also thus domesticate a fear,  
And send a small child back to sleep at night  
Not listening for the sound of stealthy flight  
Or dreaming of some small thing in a claw  
Borne up to some dark branch and eaten raw.



DANTE ALIGHIERI

CANTO XXV OF THE *INFERNO*

The thief, when he had done with prophecy,  
made figs of both his lifted hands, and cried,  
“Take these, O God, for they are aimed at Thee!”

Then was my heart upon the serpents’ side,  
for ‘round his neck one coiled like a garrote  
as if to say, “Enough of ranting pride,”

And another pinned his arms, and tied a knot  
of head and tail in front of him again,  
so tightly that they could not stir one jot.

Alas, Pistoia, why dost thou not ordain  
that thou be burnt to ashes, since thou hast  
out-sinned the base begetters of thy strain?

In the dark rounds of Hell through which I passed,  
I saw no spirit so blaspheme his Lord,  
not him who from the Theban wall was cast.

He fled then, speaking not another word,  
and into sight a raging centaur came:  
“Where has that half-cooked sinner gone?” he roared.

So many snakes Maremma cannot claim  
as covered all his back in dense array,  
to where his form took on a human frame.

Behind his nape, upon his shoulders, lay  
a seething dragon with its wings outspread,  
which sets afire whatever comes its way.

“Him you behold is Cacus,” my master said,  
“who underneath the rock of the Aventine  
so often made a lake of bloody red.

He is not with his brothers, since condign  
justice has set him here, who to his den  
so craftily made off with Geryon’s kine:

For that, his crooked ways were ended then  
by the club of Hercules, which dealt him nigh  
a hundred blows, of which he felt not ten.”

While thus he spoke, the centaur hastened by,  
and from below three spirits came in view,  
whose coming neither my great guide nor I

Perceived until they shouted, “Who are you?”  
At that, we two broke off our talk together  
and turned our whole attention to that crew.

Who they might be I did not promptly gather;  
but, as may chance in meetings of the kind,  
one had occasion then to name another,

Saying, “Where’s Cianfa? Why did he fall behind?”  
I put my finger to my lips, to show  
my guide that he should wait and pay them mind.

## THE HOUSE

Sometimes, on waking, she would close her eyes  
For a last look at that white house she knew  
In sleep alone, and held no title to,  
And had not entered yet, for all her sighs.

What did she tell me of that house of hers?  
White gatepost; terrace; fanlight of the door;  
A widow's walk above the bouldered shore;  
Salt winds that ruffle the surrounding firs.

Is she now there, wherever there may be?  
Only a foolish man would hope to find  
That haven fashioned by her dreaming mind.  
Night after night, my love, I put to sea.

## THE PROOF

Shall I love God for causing me to be?  
I was mere utterance; shall these words love me?

Yet when I caused his work to jar and stammer,  
And one free subject loosened all his grammar,

I love him that he did not in a rage  
Once and forever rule me off the page,

But, thinking I might come to please him yet,  
Crossed out *delete* and wrote his patient *stet*.

## LA PRUEBA

Translated into Spanish by Ilan Stavans

¿Debo amar a Dios por permitir que fuera?  
Yo, que mero verbo soy; ¿si amor su expresión me diera?

Porque al yo hacer que su obra tropezara,  
Y un tema libre su gramática quebrara,

Lo amo porque hizo él desde su conmoción  
Que en la página yo tuviera mi ocasión,

Y creyendo que quizás de mí un placer saldría,  
Tachó *borrar* y un paciente *dejar* escribiría.

