

Carriers of the Dream Wheel

This is the Wheel of Dreams
 Which is carried on their voices,
 By means of which their voices turn
 And center upon being.
 It encircles the First World,
 This powerful wheel.
 They shape their songs upon the wheel
 And spin the names of the earth and sky,
 The aboriginal names.
 They are old men, or men
 Who are old in their voices,
 And they carry the wheel among the camps,
 Saying: Come, come,
 Let us tell the old stories,
 Let us sing the sacred songs.

Mark Strand

b. 1934

White

for Harold Bloom

Now in the middle of my life
 all things are white.
 I walk under the trees,
 the frayed leaves,
 the wide net of noon,
 and the day is white.
 And my breath is white,
 drifting over the patches
 of grass and fields of ice
 into the high circles of light.
 As I walk, the darkness of
 my steps is also white,
 and my shadow blazes

under me. In all seasons
 the silence where I find myself
 and what I make of nothing are white,
 the white of sorrow,
 the white of death.
 Even the night that calls
 like a dark wish is white;
 and in my sleep as I turn
 in the weather of dreams
 it is the white of my sheets
 and the white shades of the moon
 drawn over my floor
 that save me for morning.
 And out of my waking
 the circle of light widens,
 it fills with trees, houses,
 stretches of ice.
 It reaches out. It rings
 the eye with white.
 All things are one.
 All things are joined
 even beyond the edge of sight.

Orpheus Alone

It was an adventure much could be made of: a walk
 On the shores of the darkest known river,
 Among the hooded, shoving crowds, by steaming rocks
 And rows of ruined huts half-buried in the muck;
 Then to the great court with its marble yard
 Whose emptiness gave him the creeps, and to sit there
 In the sunken silence of the place and speak
 Of what he had lost, what he still possessed of his loss,
 And, then, pulling out all the stops, describing her eyes,
 Her forehead where the golden light of evening spread,
 The curve of her neck, the slope of her shoulders, everything
 Down to her thighs and calves, letting the words come,
 As if lifted from sleep, to drift upstream,

Against the water's will, where all the condemned
 And pointless labor, stunned by his voice's cadence,
 Would come to a halt, and even the crazed, dishevelled
 Furies, for the first time, would weep, and the soot-filled
 Air would clear just enough for her, the lost bride,
 To step through the image of herself and be seen in the light.
 As everyone know's, this was the first great poem,
 Which was followed by days of sitting around
 In the houses of friends, with his head back, his eyes
 Closed, trying to will her return, but finding
 Only himself, again and again, trapped
 In the chill of his loss, and, finally,
 Without a word, taking off to wander the hills
 Outside of town, where he stayed until he had shaken
 The image of love and put in its place the world
 As he wished it would be, urging its shape and measure
 Into speech of such newness that the world was swayed,
 And trees suddenly appeared in the bare place
 Where he spoke and lifted their limbs and swept
 The tender grass with the gowns of their shade,
 And stones, weightless for once, came and set themselves there,
 And small animals lay in the miraculous fields of grain
 And aisles of corn, and slept. The voice of light
 Had come forth from the body of fire, and each thing
 Rose from its depths and shone as it never had.
 And that was the second great poem,
 Which no one recalls anymore. The third and greatest
 Came into the world as the world, out of the unsayable,
 Invisible source of all longing to be; it came
 As things come that will perish, to be seen or heard
 A while, like the coating of frost or the movement
 Of wind, and then no more; it came in the middle of sleep
 Like a door to the infinite, and, circled by flame,
 Came again at the moment of waking, and, sometimes,
 Remote and small, it came as a vision with trees
 By a weaving stream, brushing the bank
 With their violet shade, with somebody's limbs
 Scattered among the matted, mildewed leaves nearby,
 With his severed head rolling under the waves,

Breaking the shifting columns of light into a swirl
 Of slivers and flecks; it came in a language
 Untouched by pity, in lines, lavish and dark,
 Where death is reborn and sent into the world as a gift,
 So the future, with no voice of its own, nor hope
 Of ever becoming more than it will be, might mourn.

FROM *Dark Harbor*

I am sure you would find it misty here,
 With lots of stone cottages badly needing repair,
 Groups of souls, wrapped in cloaks, sit in the fields

Or stroll the winding unpaved roads. They are polite,
 And oblivious to their bodies, which the wind passes through,
 Making a shushing sound. Not long ago,

I stopped to rest in a place where an especially
 Thick mist swirled up from the river. Someone,
 Who claimed to have known me years before,

Approached, saying there were many poets
 Wandering around who wished to be alive again.
 They were ready to say the words they had been unable to say—

Words whose absence had been the silence of love,
 Of pain, and even of pleasure. Then he joined a small group,
 Gathered beside a fire. I believe I recognized

Some of the faces, but as I approached they tucked
 Their heads under their wings. I looked away to the hills
 Above the river, where the golden lights of sunset

And sunrise are one and the same, and saw something flying
 Back and forth, fluttering its wings. Then it stopped in mid-air.
 It was an angel, one of the good ones, about to sing.