Introduction to English and American Literary Studies

Prof. Steppat

Textual materials: Poetry 1

You love us when we’re heroes, home on leave,
Or wounded in a mentionable place.
You worship decorations; you believe
That chivalry redeems the war’s disgrace.
You make us shells. You listen with delight,
By tales of dirt and danger fondly thrilled.
You crown our distant ardors while we fight,
And mourn our laureled memories when we’re killed.
You can’t believe that British troops ‘retire’
When hell’s last horror breaks them, and they run,
Trampling the terrible corpses—blind with blood.
O German mother dreaming by the fire,
While you are knitting socks to send your son
His face is trodden deeper in the mud.

Siegfried Sassoon, “Glory of Women“

The oldest man in the world wears shoes.
The oldest man in the world has a cowboy hat on his head.
The oldest man in the world speaks to me in English.
He rides in motor cars.
His body: fluid, capable—a perfect shock absorber.
One tooth knocked out in front, a red bandanna tied
around his neck, he names Names
as we bounce over the dirt track in the back
of a four-wheel drive.

'That tree is a digging stick
left by the giant woman who was looking
for honey ants;
That rock, a dingo's nose;
There, on the mountain, is the footprint
left by Tjangara on his way to Ulamburra;
Here, the rockhole of Warnampi—very dangerous--
and the cave where the nyi-nyi women escaped
the anger of marapulpa—the spider.
Wati Kutjarra—the two brothers--travelled this way.
There, you can see, one was tired
from too much lovemaking—the mark of his penis
dragging on the ground;
Here, the bodies of the honey ant men
where they crawled from the sand--
no, they are not dead—they keep coming
from the ground, moving toward the water at Warumpi--
it has been like this for many years:
the Dreaming does not end; it is not like the whiteman's way.
What happened once happens again and again.
This is the Law.
This is the power of the Song.
Through the singing we keep everything alive;
through the songs the spirits keep us alive.'

The oldest man in the world speaks
to the newest man in the world; my place
less exact than his.
We bump along together in the back of the truck
wearing shoes, belts, underwear.
We speak to each other in English
over the rumble of engine, over the roar of the wheels.
His body: a perfect shock absorber.

Billy Marshall-Stoneking, “Passage“

The jeweled steps are already quite white with dew,
It is so late that the dew soaks my gauze stockings,
And I let down the crystal curtain
And watch the moon through the clear autumn.

Ezra Pound, “The Jeweled Stairs’ Grievance“

Barefoot through the bazaar,
And with the same undulant grace
As the cloth blown back from her face,
She glides with a stone jar
High on her head
And not a ripple in her tread.

Watching her cross erect Stones,
garbage, excrement, and crumbs Of glass
in the Karachi slums,
I, with my stoop, reflect...
They stand most straight
Who learn to walk beneath a weight

Jon Stallworthy, “Sindhi Woman“

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou growest:
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this and this gives life to thee.

William Shakespeare, Sonnet 18

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come:
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

William Shakespeare, Sonnet 116

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

William Shakespeare, Sonnet 130

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
And how can body, laid in that white rush,
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead.

Being so caught up
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

William Butler Yeats, "Leda and the Swan"

Leda, the inside out lady of the swan
wants to knuckle the cold
grotter who fluttered her to bed.

Caught in the infinite wiggle
in a mesmerization of paint
here she is, propped in her voluptuous stay
maddened
for all who like a good sex object
shielding her feathered friend.

His beak pinches her demonstrable little
breasts, quacking all mine
her plump pubic mound pretty and public
her eyes abashed
how she blushes, the mystery!
my corrected darling!

The silent curly face
carries on talking backwards to the wall
no no no no

Judith Kazantzis, "Leda and Leonardo the Swan"

Those groans men use
passing a woman on the street
or on the steps of the subway

to tell her she is a female
and their flesh knows it,

are they a sort of tune,
an ugly enough song, sung
by a bird with a slit tongue

but meant for music?

Or are they the muffled roaring
of deafmutes trapped in a building that is
slowly filling with smoke?

Perhaps both.

Such men most often
look as if groan were all they could do,
yet a woman, in spite of herself,

knows it's a tribute:
if she were lacking all grace
they'd pass her in silence:

so it's not only to say she's
a warm hole. It's a word

in grief-language, nothing to do with
primitive, not an ur-language;
language stricken, sickened, cast down

in decrepitude. She wants to
throw the tribute away, dis-
gusted, and can't,

it goes on buzzing in her ear,
it changes the pace of her walk,
the torn posters in echoing corridors

spell it out, it
quakes and gnashes as the train comes in.
Her pulse sullenly

had picked up speed,
but the cars slow down and
jar to a stop while her understanding

keeps on translating:
'Life after life after life goes by
without poetry,
without seemliness,
without love.'

Denise Levertov, “The Mutes"

The firm house lingers, though averse to square
With the new city street it has to wear A number in.
But what about the brook
That held the house as in an elbow-crook?
I ask as one who knew the brook, its strength
And impulse, having dipped a finger length
And made it leap my knuckle, having tossed
A flower to try its currents where they crossed.
The meadow grass could be cemented down
From growing under pavements of a town;
The apple trees be sent to hearth-stone flame.
Is water wood to serve a brook the same?
How else dispose of an immortal force
No longer needed? Staunch it at its source
With cinder loads dumped down? The brook was thrown
Deep in a sewer dungeon under stone
In fetid darkness still to live and run -
And all for nothing it had ever done
Except forget to go in fear perhaps.
No one would know except for ancient maps
That such a brook ran water. But I wonder
If from its being kept forever under
The thoughts may not have risen that so keep
This new-built city from both work and sleep.

Robert Frost, “A Brook in the City“