

Dinner in the Courtyard

Emily Grosholz from *The River Painter* (1984)

*When summer tears the maple leaves
to lace, and blue shows through the green
like those imagined distances,
weaving through all things close at hand,
then sunset looms for hours upon
the scarlet tenements of day,
unraveling curtains, windowpanes
ablaze. The house is close, I say,
and move the table underneath
the arches of the maple tree.
Not even the curious neighbors know
if I am host or stranger here,
nor if this roof of leaf and air,
the little courtyard of the world, is home.*

Poem with a Moon

John Balaban from *Blue Mountain* (1982)

*One summer evening at an oak edged pond,
I saw shoals of frogs, or small toads, spawning,
bloated red, glued in pairs, rolling,
roiling the shallows under a full moon
which, oiled, sleek, dripping in the trees,
cast shadows from my hand onto the water.
Tonight, spring night, by your house the peepers trill,
and the moon, as you sit at your desk, looks in
to see if your face is still shadowed by mine.*

Eden

Emily Grosholz from *Eden* (1992)

*In lurid cartoon colors, the big baby
dinosaur steps backwards under the shadow
of an approaching tyrannosaurus rex.
“His mommy going to fix it,” you remark,
serenely anxious, hoping for the best.*

*After the big explosion, after the lights
go down inside the house and up the street,
we rush outdoors to find a squirrel stopped
in straws of half-gnawed cable. I explain, trying to fit
the facts, “The squirrel is dead.”*

*No, you explain it otherwise to me.
“He’s sleeping. And his mommy going to come.”
Later, when the squirrel has been removed,
“His mommy fix him,” you insist, insisting
on the right to know what you believe.*

*The world is truly full of fabulous
great and curious small inhabitants,
and you’re the freshly minted, unashamed
Adam in this garden. You preside,
appreciate, and judge our proper names.*

*Like God, I brought you here.
Like God, I seem to be omnipotent,
mostly helpful, sometimes angry as hell.
I fix whatever minor faults arise
with bandaids, batteries, masking tape, and pills.*

*But I am powerless, as you must know,
to chase the serpent sliding in the grass,
or the tall angel with the flaming sword
who scares you when he rises suddenly
behind the gates of sunset.*

The Eye in the Forest

John Haag from *The Mirrored Man* (1961)

*Beneath a cedar, buried in the moss
And needles, cloistered in a dim recess
Where only green light filters down, the doe
Has left her tissue skull. Facets of dew
Shine on a ring of bone about an eye
Replaced by violets. Tentatively
They linger, but the flower stays, and thrives,
Hiding the deathmask under living leaves
As roots explore and force the delicate
Faint unions where the accurate bone was knit.
The moss, intruding, swells between the teeth
And plucks them slowly; day by day this death
Becomes important as the forest dreams,
Covers and keeps, and silently reclaims.*

Night Journey

Theodore Roethke from *Open House* (1941)

*Now as the train bears west,
Its rhythm rocks the earth,
And from my Pullman berth
I stare into the night
While others take their rest.
Bridges of iron lace,
A suddenness of trees,
A lap of mountain mist
All cross my line of sight,
Then a bleak wasted place,
And a lake below my knees.
Full on my neck I feel
The straining at a curve;
My muscles move with steel,
I wake in every nerve.
I watch a beacon swing
From dark to blazing bright;
We thunder through ravines
And gullies washed with light.
Beyond the mountain pass
Mist deepens on the pane;
We rush into a rain
That rattles double glass.
Wheels shake the roadbed stone,
The pistons jerk and shove,
I stay up half the night
To see the land I love.*

Idyll

Theodore Roethke from *Open House* (1941)

*Now as from maple to elm the flittermice skitter and twirl,
A drunk man stumbles by, absorbed in self-talk.
The lights in the kitchens go out; moth wings unfurl;
The last tricycle runs crazily to the end of the walk.*

*As darkness creeps up on the well-groomed suburban town,
We grow indifferent to dog howls, to the nestling's last peep;*

*Dew deepens on the fresh-cut lawn;
We sit in the porch swing, content and half asleep.*

*The world recedes in the black revolving shadow;
A far-off train blows its echoing whistle once;
We go to our beds in a house at the edge of a meadow,
Unmindful of terror and headlines, of speeches and guns.*

Adam's Puzzle

Katey Lehman (1921-1980)

*If my spirit
differs from my soul,
and I concur with this conceit,
how do I deal
with my erratic spirit,
and where, thereafter,
goes my soul?*

*My spirit leaps
toward shining hair,
to sunlit butterflies, from there
to hummingbirds that hover
in the blossoms of my fragrant quince,
and then to anything that hovers
and, mid-air, turns my moods to altered colors.*

*My soul goes pressing toward the ground,
and then goes upward, falling
to the sound of geese,
and way beyond . . .
down and up and out and all around.*

*God gave Adam a body, a spirit,
and a soul.
My spirit goes with what I see.
My soul knows all the mystery.*

Note: This is the last poem Katey wrote before her death, January 3, 1981.