

**OLLI Poetry, January 12, 2024, chosen by Kendall Rafter****FROST by Charles Tomlinson (1927 - 2015)**

The sky is blank with a single vapour trail  
 Warmed by a sunset we cannot see:  
The coming freeze is hurrying it away,  
 But listen: owls are shaping out the spaces  
With their map of sounds. Sparks of stars  
 Pierce through where darkness deepens,  
Sharp with an undiluted light. Tomorrow we shall wake  
 At the crackle of first footsteps grinding white.

**The Snow Man by WALLACE STEVENS (pub 1921)**

One must have a mind of winter  
To regard the frost and the boughs  
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;  
  
And have been cold a long time  
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,  
The spruces rough in the distant glitter  
  
Of the January sun; and not to think  
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,  
In the sound of a few leaves,  
  
Which is the sound of the land  
Full of the same wind  
That is blowing in the same bare place  
  
For the listener, who listens in the snow,  
And, nothing himself, beholds  
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

**There's a certain Slant of light by EMILY DICKINSON (written 1861, pub. 1890)**

There's a certain Slant of light,  
Winter Afternoons –  
That oppresses, like the Heft  
Of Cathedral Tunes –

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us –  
We can find no scar,  
But internal difference –  
Where the Meanings, are –

None may teach it – Any –  
'Tis the seal Despair –  
An imperial affliction  
Sent us of the Air –

When it comes, the Landscape listens –  
Shadows – hold their breath –  
When it goes, 'tis like the Distance  
On the look of Death –

**Art. 52, Wynter wakeneth al my care (anon, early 14th century)**

¶ Wynter wakeneth al my care;  
 Nou this lewes waxeth bare.  
 Ofte Y sike ant mourne sare  
 When hit cometh in my thoht  
 Of this worldes joie:  
 Hou hit geth al to noht!

Nou hit is, ant nou hit nys,  
 Also hit ner nere, ywys!  
 That moni mon seith, soth hit ys:  
 Al goth bote Godes wille;  
 Alle we shule deye,  
 Thath us like ylle.

Al that gren me graveth grene;  
 Nou hit faleweth al bydene.  
 Jesu, help that hit be sene,  
 Ant shild us from helle,  
 For Y not whider Y shal,  
 Ne hou longe her duelle.

¶ Winter awakens all my sorrow;  
 Now these leaves grow barren.  
 Often I sigh and sadly mourn  
 When it enters into my thought  
 Regarding this world's joy:  
 How it goes all to nought!

Now it is, and now it isn't,  
 As if it had never been, indeed!  
 What many a man says, true it is:  
 All passes except God's will;  
 We all shall die,  
 Though we dislike it.

All that seed men bury unripe;  
 Now it withers all at once.  
 Jesus, help that this be known,  
 And shield us from hell,  
 For I know not whither I'll go,  
 Nor how long here dwell.

**THE COLD by Wendell Berry (1934 – )**

How exactly good it is  
to know myself  
in the solitude of winter,  
my body containing its own  
warmth, divided from all  
by the cold; and to go  
separate and sure  
among the trees cleanly  
divided, thinking of you  
perfect too in your solitude,  
your life withdrawn into  
your own keeping  
—to be clear, poised  
in perfect self-suspension  
toward you, as though frozen.  
And having known fully the  
goodness of that, it will be  
good also to melt.

**Snow by Naomi Shihab Nye (1952 – )**

Once with my scarf knotted over my mouth  
I lumbered into a storm of snow up the long hill  
and did not know where I was going except to  
the top of it.

In those days we went out like that.

Even children went out like that.

Someone was crying hard at home again,  
raging blizzard of sobs.

I dragged the sled by its rope,  
which we normally did not do  
when snow was coming down so hard,  
pulling my brother whom I called by our secret  
name  
as if we could be other people under the skin.  
The snow bit into my face, prickling the rim  
of the head where the hair starts coming out.  
And it was a big one. It would come down and  
down  
for days. People would dig their cars out like  
potatoes.

How are you doing back there? I shouted,  
and he said Fine, I'm doing fine,  
in the sunniest voice he could muster  
and I think I should love him more today  
for having used it.

At the top we turned and he slid down,  
steering himself with the rope gripped in  
his mittened hands. I stumbled behind  
sinking deeply, shouting Ho! Look at him go!  
as if we were having a good time.  
Alone on the hill. That was the deepest  
I ever went into the snow. Now I think of it  
when I stare at paper or into silences  
between human beings. The drifting  
accumulation. A father goes months  
without speaking to his son.

How there can be a place  
so cold any movement saves you.

Ho! You bang your hands together,  
stomp your feet. The father could die!  
The son! Before the weather changes.

**An Old Man's Winter Night by Robert Frost (1874 – 1963) (pub. 1916)**

All out of doors looked darkly in at him  
Through the thin frost, almost in separate stars,  
That gathers on the pane in empty rooms.  
What kept his eyes from giving back the gaze  
Was the lamp tilted near them in his hand.  
What kept him from remembering what it was  
That brought him to that creaking room was age.  
He stood with barrels round him—at a loss.  
And having scared the cellar under him  
In clomping there, he scared it once again  
In clomping off;—and scared the outer night,  
Which has its sounds, familiar, like the roar  
Of trees and crack of branches, common things,  
But nothing so like beating on a box.  
A light he was to no one but himself  
Where now he sat, concerned with he knew what,  
A quiet light, and then not even that.  
He consigned to the moon,—such as she was,  
So late-arising,—to the broken moon  
As better than the sun in any case  
For such a charge, his snow upon the roof,  
His icicles along the wall to keep;  
And slept. The log that shifted with a jolt  
Once in the stove, disturbed him and he shifted,  
And eased his heavy breathing, but still slept.  
One aged man—one man—can't fill a house,  
A farm, a countryside, or if he can,  
It's thus he does it of a winter night.

**Lines for Winter by MARK STRAND (1934 – 2014) (pub. 1979)**

for Ros Krauss

Tell yourself  
as it gets cold and gray falls from the air  
that you will go on  
walking, hearing  
the same tune no matter where  
you find yourself—  
inside the dome of dark  
or under the cracking white  
of the moon's gaze in a valley of snow.  
Tonight as it gets cold  
tell yourself  
what you know which is nothing  
but the tune your bones play  
as you keep going. And you will be able  
for once to lie down under the small fire  
of winter stars.  
And if it happens that you cannot  
go on or turn back  
and you find yourself  
where you will be at the end,  
tell yourself  
in that final flowing of cold through your limbs  
that you love what you are.