

The Poetry of Marjorie H. Thorpe

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*The following poems are from the anthology Music & Bread: an Anthology of the Poetry Group, Utica, New York, compiled by Marjorie H. Thorpe (Utica, N.Y. : The Widtman Press, C1966).*

*Reference Librarian* (p.47)

I love questions.  
They rise like trout, breaking the surface of a pool  
There, and there, and there,  
What? and Why? and Where?  
Always the unexpected.

Topics world-wide, from Apes to Zanzibar;  
(Without your questions, I should never know  
How long a baboon lives, the price of wheat in Argentina.)  
Topics mind-deep, like Peace and Existentialism,  
And what is a conservative?

A dangerous occupation? Of course!  
I answer the wakening light in a boy's eyes  
When he says, "Give me more by Bertrand Russell.  
I've never read anything like this before!"  
I stick pamphlets on freedom of thought  
Under the public's unsuspecting nose;  
I show them cartoons laughing at sacred cows –  
And some cows prove that they are worth defending  
By those who never fought for much before!

I live vicariously – an occupational hazard, perhaps,  
Fleetingly, in the lives of thousands,  
Shall I know in some far future  
What each one did with the nugget I pulled forth?

No matter! Tomorrow more questions will come,  
Furtively or shyly,  
Demanding or defiantly,  
Confident or wondering or quizzical –  
Ask on! Ask on!  
I love questions.

*Brown Seeds* (p.48)

I know how the brown seeds feel  
When snow lies deep and the March wind sweeps above them.  
The frozen earth still holds them rigidly;  
In their snug brown coats no crack appears,  
Not a movement, not a gleam, not a sound.

Yet deep within them all, a change has come;  
Nothing is quite as it had been before.  
Life stirs and throbs, disturbing their sleep;  
Knowledge of light flashes into their blindness,  
A prescience of color sings through the darkness,  
And "I am ready!" breathe a million seeds,  
While snow lies deep and the March wind sweeps above them.

*No Muting Hand* (p.48)

Beloved symbols of our Christmas-tide,  
Why must you vanish in the New Year's glow?  
In June, the firs still watch on every side  
As in December's mantling of snow.

In skies year-long, star-mysteries shine bright  
With age-old promise as did once that Star  
Which shepherds saw upon a winter night  
And wise men followed, journeying from far.

And every day of earth's sun-fettered round,  
The eyes of little children, unafraid,  
Look out with joy on worlds so newly found  
And mothers' hopes rise singing undismayed.

Then lay no muting hand on Christmas song;  
Its symbols, as its truth, abide year-long.

*Fall Day* (p.49)

A "puddly" day, with autos swishing and swaggering by  
cutting wide swaths of glittering drops;  
Unexpected pools of water on walks or at crossings –  
A roguish sun laughs suddenly out of a mist of cloud,  
People look up and smile or down at their spattered  
feet scowling – according to their dispositions.

A day for adventure, surely; else, why the eagerness  
in the little teasing breeze,  
The beckoning tracery of a road winding, over a hill,  
Each twig of every leafless tree a-quiver  
with anticipation?

Yet, here in my office, the vagrant breeze shut out,  
The sunlight filtering dimly through streaked windows,  
I am serenely content.

Here in the busy efficiency of desks in their places,  
trim pencils neatly sharpened,  
Books in straight rows, typewriters clicking  
with precise regularity,  
All that is outside is here too.  
In myself at my desk and around me  
Is the sun's laughter, the eagerness of the trees,  
and the road's far promise.

It is all here:  
So distinct I could reach out, taking it into my hand,  
So restfully real that it spreads like a roof-tree,  
so encompassing distant hills and me at my desk;  
So personal that I look up at it smiling.  
The chief, passing by, grins and says,  
"You feel great today, don't you?"

*Within* (p.50)

"Life's greatest burden is the incommunicability of love." – Thornton Wilder

Within the inmost soul of each, there dwells  
A Thing of rarest beauty, exquisite,  
Worthy of any on earth, even the highest.  
Quiet it stands,  
Shining, as burns a candle at a shrine,  
Or as a temple's symmetry serene.

But when expression, eager, would bring forth  
The Thing of Beauty to another's gaze,  
The clumsy touch of human hands or voice  
    Deforms and mars.

The candle snatched from off the altar-shrine  
And held aloft for all the world to see,  
(Or even for one, of all the world most dear)  
Becomes mere tallow-light tossed fitfully  
By violent gusts of wind.

Within, we see a temple's loveliness,  
The symmetry of arch, the soaring line,  
Delicate grace, that lifts the heart toward heaven.  
We too would build for all the world to see,  
(Or even that one, of all the world most dear).  
Word on impetuous word we pile on high –  
A very Babel-tower of protestation,  
Straining to reach the heaven that seemed so near.  
No vision now – perhaps it ne'er was true –  
Confusion grows, the pillars crashing fall,  
The stammering, futile tongue at last is mute,  
And in a contrite shame of impotence,  
Silence sinks down upon the grieving heart.  
Silence and healing...slowly from the ruin  
Arching anew and spired in pristine grace  
Arises once again the Thing of Beauty.  
One candle tall shines at the altar-shrine,  
With all the light of heaven in its flame:  
The Vision, dwelling deep within each soul,  
Never to be expressed, often unseen,  
But there, oh always there, in deepest truth!

*What?* (p.51)

What is the shape of a week?

"A long, straight line," said the young man.

"A circle," murmured the old man.

"A creepy thing, hardly moving in the grass,"  
sighed an adolescent.

"Some spots and a big, bright BANG!" shouted the child.

And God, turning to Gabriel, asked, "What is a week?"

*Unbidden* (p.51)

In church, with anthem filling all with sound,  
Lifting the soul above its hearkening,  
Sometimes – Perhaps –

In Meeting-house, austere, full-lighted, still,  
In the waiting hush that presses like a goad,  
Sometimes – Perhaps –

On rhythmic, speeding wheels, on fresh-blown hills,  
In dusty, quiet book-stacks, or at home,  
Sometimes – Perhaps –

He – It – The Love Unthinkable –  
Comes.

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*The following poems is from the Mohawk Valley Anthology of Poetry, a collection of poetry by the Mohawk Valley Chapter of the Academy of American Poets (Utica, New York: American Poetry Press, c1988).*

*I Am a Cat* (p.66)

I am a cat.  
When I am pleased, I purr.  
Seldom am I hungry;  
Then, of course, I howl.  
I have a good home here –  
No bugs to burrow into my fur.

Humans have hair that gets snarled.  
I am not like that.  
I am always sleek.  
My eyes have no color,  
But they flash from one view to another.

I have paws like my cousin, the lion.  
I am ready to claw people who say  
“Scat!” or “Shsh!”

I am served my meals from a china bowl  
under the sink.  
There I am queen.  
I am a cat.  
Every one in this family is my slave.