

Classic Poetry Series

Laura Riding

- poems -

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In Due Form

I do not doubt you.
I know you love me.
It is a fact of your indoor face,
A true fancy of your muscularity.
Your step is confident.
Your look is thorough.
Your stay-beside-me is a pillow
To roll over on
And sleep as on my own upon.

But make me a statement
In due form on endless foolscap
Witnessed before a notary
And sent by post, registered,
To be signed for on receipt
And opened under oath to believe;
An antique paper missing from my strong-box,
A bond to clutch when hail tortures the chimney
And lightning circles redder round the city,
And your brisk step and thorough look
Are gallant but uncircumstantial,
And not mentionable in a doom-book.

Laura Riding

The Poet's Corner

Here where the end of bone is no end of song
And the earth is bedecked with immortality
In what was poetry
And now is pride beside
And nationality,
Here is a battle with no bravery
But if the coward's tongue has gone
Swording his own lusty lung.
Listen if there is victory
Written into a library
Waving the books in banners
Soldierly at last, for the lines
Go marching on, delivered of the soul.

And happily may they rest beyond
Suspicion now, the incomprehensibles
Traitorous in such talking
As chattered over their countries' boundaries.
The graves are gardened and the whispering
Stops at the hedges, there is singing
Of it in the ranks, there is a hush
Where the ground has limits
And the rest is loveliness.

And loveliness?
Death has an understanding of it
Loyal to many flags
And is a silent ally of any country
Beset in its mortal heart
With immortal poetry.

Laura Riding

The Quids

The little quids, the million quids,
The everywhere, everything, always quids,
The atoms of the Monoton—
Each turned three essences where it stood
And ground a gisty dust from its neighbors' edges
Until a powdery thoughtfall stormed in and out,
The cerebration of a slippery quid enterprise.
Each quid stirred.
The united quids
Waved through a sinuous decision.

The quids, that had never done anything before
But be, be, be, be, be,
The quids resolved to predicate
And dissipate in a little grammar.
Oh, the Monoton didn't care,
For whatever they did—
The Monoton's contributing quids—
The Monoton would always remain the same.

A quid here and there gyrated in place-position,
While many essential quids turned inside-out
For the fun of it
And a few refused to be anything but
Simple, unpredicated copulatives.
Little by little, this commotion of quids,
By threes, by tens, by casual millions,
Squirming within the state of things—
The metaphysical acrobats,
The naked, immaterial quids—
Turned inside on themselves
And came out dressed,
Each similar quid of the inward same,
Each similar quid dressed in a different way—
The quid's idea of a holiday.

The quids could never tell what was happening.
But the Monoton felt itself differently the same
In its different parts.
The silly quids upon their rambling exercise
Never knew, could never tell
What their pleasure was about,
What their carnival was like,
Being in, being in, being always in
Where they never could get out
Of the everywhere, everything, always in,
To derive themselves from the Monoton.

But I know, with a quid inside of me,
But I know what a quid's disguise is like,
Being one myself,
The gymnastic device

That a quid puts on for exercise.

And so should the trees,
And so should the worms,
And so should you,
And all the other predicates,
And all the other accessories
Of the quid's masquerade.

Laura Riding

The Simple Line

The secrets of the mind convene splendidly,
Though the mind is meek.
To be aware inwardly
of brain and beauty
Is dark too recognizable.
Thought looking out on thought
Makes one an eye:
Which it shall be, both decide.
One is with the mind alone,
The other is with other thoughts gone
To be seen from afar and not known.

When openly these inmost sights
Flash and speak fully,
Each head at home shakes hopelessly
Of being never ready to see self
And sees a universe too soon.
The immense surmise swims round and round
And heads grow wise
With their own bigness beatified
In cosmos, and the idiot size
Of skulls spells Nature on the ground,
While ears listening the wrong way report
Echoes first and hear words before sounds
Because the mind, being quiet, seems late.
By ears words are copied into books,
By letters minds are taught self-ignorance.
From mouths spring forth vocabularies
To the assemblage of strange objects
Grown foreign to the faithful countryside
Of one king, poverty,
Of one line, humbleness.
Unavowed and false horizons claim pride
For spaces in the head
The native head sees outside.
The flood of wonder rushing from the eyes
Returns lesson by lesson.
The mind, shrunken of time,
Overflows too soon.
The complete vision is the same
As when the world-wideness began
Worlds to describe
The excessiveness of man.

But man's right portion rejects
The surplus in the whole.
This much, made secret first,
Now makes
The knowable, which was
Thought's previous flesh,
And gives instruction of substance to its intelligence
As far as flesh itself,

As bodies upon themselves to where
Understanding is the head
And the identity of breath and breathing are established
And the voice opening to cry: I know,
Closes around the entire declaration
With this evidence of immortality—
The total silence to say:
I am dead.

For death is all ugly, all lovely,
Forbids mysteries to make
Science of splendor, or any separate disclosing
Of beauty to the mind out of body's book
That page by page flutters a world in fragments,
Permits no scribbling in of more
Where spaces are,
Only to look.

Body as Body lies more than still.
The rest seems nothing and nothing is
If nothing need be.
But if need be,
Thought not divided anyway
Answers itself, thinking
All open and everything.
Dead is the mind that parted each head.
But now the secrets of the mind convene
Without pride, without pain
To any onlookers.
What they ordain alone
Cannot be known
The ordinary way of eyes and ears
But only prophesied
If an unnatural mind, refusing to divide,
Dies immediately
Of too plain beauty
Foreseen within too suddenly,
And lips break open of astonishment
Upon the living mouth and rehearse
Death, that seems a simple verse
And, of all ways to know,
Dead or alive, easiest.

Laura Riding

The World And I

This is not exactly what I mean
Any more than the sun is the sun.
But how to mean more closely
If the sun shines but approximately?
What a world of awkwardness!
What hostile implements of sense!
Perhaps this is as close a meaning
As perhaps becomes such knowing.
Else I think the world and I
Must live together as strangers and die—
A sour love, each doubtful whether
Was ever a thing to love the other.
No, better for both to be nearly sure
Each of each—exactly where
Exactly I and exactly the world
Fail to meet by a moment, and a word.

Laura Riding

With The Face

With the face goes a mirror
As with the mind a world.
Likeness tells the doubting eye
That strangeness is not strange.
At an early hour and knowledge
Identity not yet familiar
Looks back upon itself from later,
And seems itself.

To-day seems now.
With reality-to-be goes time.
With the mind goes a world.
With the heart goes a weather.
With the face goes a mirror
As with the body a fear.
Young self goes staring to the wall
Where dumb futurity speaks calm,
And between then and then
Forebeing grows of age.

The mirror mixes with the eye.
Soon will it be the very eye.
Soon will the eye that was
The very mirror be.
Death, the final image, will shine
Transparently not otherwise
Than as the dark sun described
With such faint brightnesses.

Laura Riding

Yes And No

Across a continent imaginary
Because it cannot be discovered now
Upon this fully apprehended planet—
No more applicants considered,
Alas, alas—

Ran an animal unzoological,
Without a fate, without a fact,
Its private history intact
Against the travesty
Of an anatomy.

Not visible not invisible,
Removed by dayless night,
Did it ever fly its ground
Out of fancy into light,
Into space to replace
Its unwritable decease?

Ah, the minutes twinkle in and out
And in and out come and go
One by one, none by none,
What we know, what we don't know.

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