

Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)

THE BIRDS

1. Skylark

When a mounting skylark sings
 In the sunlit summer morn
I know that heaven is up on high
 And on earth are fields of corn

But when a nightingale sings
 In the moonlit summer even
I know not if earth is merely earth,
 Only that heaven is heaven.

2. Nightingale

Where sunless rivers weep
Their waves into the deep
She sleeps a charmed sleep
 Awake her not
Led by a single star,
She came from very far
To seek where shadows are
 Her pleasant lot.

She left the rosy morn
She left the fields of corn
For twilight cold and lorn
 And water springs
Through sleep, as through a veil,
She see the sky look pale
And hears the nightingale
 That sadly sings

3. Linnet

A linnet in a gilded cage,
 A linnet on a bough
In frosty winter one might doubt
 Which bird is luckier now

But let the trees burst out in leaf
 And nests be on the bough
Which linnet is the luckier bird,
 Oh who could doubt it now?

BUSH SONGS

Noel FIDGE
b. VIC 1926

1. A Drovin'

At daylight the cook brews the tea
the horses unhobbled and free...
The night watch returns to the camp
The long paddock awaits, but the pastures are lean;
cattle are reastless and eager to feed
The drovers eat quickly, there's pleny of food
for thei job is to tend them
and keep trhem subdued.

A drovin' a drovin' a drovin' we'll go!
Sleep under the stats, play the guitar.
Good mates, no worries, no need to hurry.
A drovin', a roamin', the free life for me.

The boss drover is worred, concerned for the team.
Ten miles to cover to make the next stream.
They'll need to keep moving, but never in haste.
For they can't lose condition, there's the owner to face!

They arrive at the water late in the day.
Then horses are hobbled, never to stray

A drovin' a drovin' a drovin' we'll go!
Sleep under the stats, play the guitar.
Good mates, no worries, no need to hurry.
A drovin', a roamin', the free life for me.

The cattle are quiet, chew cuds after food.
The drovers are smoking, get ready for bed.
The horses are hobbled, watered and tethered.
The Boss man's now calmer, he looks at the weather!

A drovin' a drovin' a drovin' we'll go!
Sleep under the stars, play the guitar.
Good mates, no worries, no need to hurry
A drovin' just roamin' roamin' and drovin'
A life meant for me.

2. The Stable Hand

I turn around and find you standing close, and then you speak.
Your auburn hair hangs loose,
your jacket's clean, crisp and pressed, and neat.

"Today I'll ride the grey, go saddle up, go quickly
Much to do I'm busy!"

Yes I say m'lady.

"Boot me up", commanding, "can't be late, he's waiting".
Breaks my heart but I know my place.

I'm just the stable hand, I clean and shovel sand.
You never seem to notice how my finger's tremble;
try to speak, yet mumble.

How I try to please you in every way
I walk the horses briskly, up each dawn, it's misty.
Muck the stables daily, keep it as you so desire
I'd do anything for you.
Wish you know, it's true!

Cast aside delusion, dreams unreal, confusion.
Worlds apart, so there's no chance our stars collide,
the Poet wrote, his words I quote
"Farewell, thou art too dear for my possessing".

But for just one word of thanks,
a smile, a touch, a glance.
Or that I'd be granted softer words than sharpened.
Then I'd find a purpose, happy in your service,
see you every day.

Turn around and find some pride you fool
Surely stronger fibres lie beneath this surface.
No more cowering, bowing, wretched moping, hoping.
Out with shy distress, find strength of mind, resist.
Oh what ancestral forces made you distant and pompous,
left behind the graces, substituted vainness?

Thank God I found my senses, shoulders straight, courageous
Dignity restored, found new friends, esprit de corps!

3. Ducks on Pond

They've switched on the power, the shed comes alive
which stirs up the sheep in the yards at the side.
The shearers arrive with a swagger and banter.
The shed hand and classer get ready and chatter.
The grind boy's at work on the combs and the cutters.
The penner up yells, to make the sheep move.
The catching pens full, so the shed's in the groove.
So now that they're ready, the old boss man says Go!
he's worked in the sheds for at least sixty years.
Growls at the men, but his back brings him tears

Nothing quite matches a shed when in action
a sequence in ballet, the movement with traction
The buzz of the cutters, the banter of men;
the bleating of sheep as they move in their pens.
The wool's thrown on tables
Skirted and classed.
Bundled and pressed, all very fast!

All's going steady, when the boss suddenly shouts.
Ducks on the floor, they're coming no doubt!
The men mumble softly "his brain's in a fog".
Too many years, spent on the grog.
The wife of the farmer, steps up to the floor.
Hi boys, don't stop, I'd like to see more!
So would my daughters - one two three four!
So would you be kind please start up again
and teach us, old bossman, she says with a grin.

There's a cry from the floor as the boss takes a stand/
He braces himself, takes the clippers in hand!
The old gun gets busy with perfect long blows.
In less than two minutes the fleece is disposed.
The men try to keep up so now it's a race!
The whole shed is humming to keep up the pace.
Fleeces are flying, the rouse abouts trying
The ladies excited and watching the fun.
One hour later the pens are all empty,
The clippers fall silent, the men tired and sweaty.
You're still the top gunner, says wife of the farmer;
Your eyesight is failing, but you're still quite a charmer!
So boys come to my garden, the grog is all free
The tables are set under shade of the trees.
Not like the old days, old boss man decries
We never were welcome, us or the flies!

LETTERS FROM A BLACK SNAKE

Ned KELLY
1854-1880

1. To Sergeant Babington

I write you these lines
hoping to find you and Missus Nicholson
in good health as I am myself at present.
I have arrived safe
and I would like you would see
what you and Missus Nicholson can do for
me,
what could you do for me?
I have done all circumstances would allow
me,
which you now try what you can do.

Answer this letter as soon as possible.
Direct your letter to Daniel Kelly, Greta
Post Office,
that is my name.
No more at present. Edward Kelly.

Everyone looks at me like a black snake.
Answer me as soon as possible.

2. They Know I Have Been Wronged

They know I have been wronged
and my mother and four or five men lagged
innocent!

And is my brothers and my sisters
and my mother not to be pitied also.

no alternative but to put up
with brutal and cowardly conduct
of big, ugly, fatnecked wombat-headed
big-bellied, magpie legged,
narrow splaw-footed sons of Irish bailiffs,
big, ugly, fatnecked wombat-headed
big-bellied, magpie legged,
narrow splaw-footed sons of English landlords
which is better known as Officers of Justice!

They know I have been wronged
and my mother and four or five men lagged
innocent! innocent!
They know I have been wronged.

3. Bullock Creek

In Bullock Creek, one mile from Stringy Bark,
we had a house, two miles of fencing,
twenty acres of land cleared,
for the purpose of,
growing mangle worsels and barley
for the purpose of distilling whiskey.
We had a place excavated close to the house
for the purpose of erecting a small still.

This is unlawful but it goes to show that men
spending all their time, labour and money this way
had no intention of murdering police.

4. The Murder

I heard the troopers coming up the creek.
I told McIntyre to tell them to give up their arms.
Lonigan ran some six or seven yards
to a battery of logs
He had just got to the logs and put his head up to take aim
when I shot him that instant
or he would have shot me.
Scanlon, who carried the rifle.
slew his horse around to gallop away.
But the horse would not go.
Quick as thought he fired with the rifle
and was in the act of firing again
hen I shot him
I had to shoot him that instant
and he fell from his horse.
Kenneddy kept firing from behind the tree.
My brother, Dan, advanced and Kenneddy ran.
I followed him.
He stopped behind another tree and fired again,

he fired again.
I shot him in the armpit that instant
and he dropped his revolver and ran.
I fired again as he slewed around to
surrender.
I did not know that he had dropped the
revolver.
The bullet passed through the right side of
his chest
and he could not live.

Were they my own brothers
I could not have been more sorry.
I could not have been more sorry for them.

5. In Conclusion

There is one wish in conclusion
I would like you to grant me,
that is the release of my mother
before my execution
as detaining her in prison
could not make any difference now

the release of my mother
before my execution
could not make any difference now

For the day will come when all men will be judged.

For the day will come when all men will be judged
by their mercy and deeds,
by their mercy.

And also if you would grant permission for my
friends to have my body
that they might bury it in consecrated ground.

WHERE

From *The Rabbits*

Lally KATZ
b. New Jersey 1979

Now the land is bare and brown
And the wind blows empty 'cross the plains
I have walked these plains for the whole
Memory of my soul

And the soul of my mothers
And the soul of my father's fathers
We have been the life of these plains
Ghosts on these plains

The wind once full
The grass once green
There were plants in our hands
The time seems so long ago now
Where is the rich dark earth, brown and moist?
Where is the smell of rain dripping from gumtrees?

Everything familiar is gone
Everything I counted on
I can't run
I can't swim away from this land

Where is the rich dark earth, brown and moist?
Where is the smell of rain dripping from gumtrees?
Where are the billabongs?
The long-legged birds?

Where are the rivers?
They used to flow clear
Now they're eaten by mud
Who will save us
From the rabbits?

LAURIE'S SONG

From *The Tender Land*

Horace EVERETT
(Erik Johns)
1927 - 2001

Once I thought I'd never grow tall as this fence
Time dragged heavy and slow

But April came and August went
Before I knew just what they meant
And little by little I grew
And as I grew I came to know
How fast the time could go

Once I thought I'd never go outside this fence
This space was plenty for me

But I walked down the road one day
And just happened I can't say
But little by little it came to be
That line between the earth and sky
Came beckoning to me

Now the time has grown short
The world has grown so wide

I'll be graduated soon
Why am I strange inside?

What makes me think I'd like to try
To go down all those roads beyond that line
Above the earth and 'neath the sky?

Tomorrow when I sit upon
The graduation platform stand
I know my hand will shake
When I reach out to take that paper
With the ribboned band

Now that all the learning's done
O who knows what will now begin?

O it's so strange
I'm strange inside

The time has grown so short
The world so wide

SONG TO THE EVENING STAR

Richard WAGNER
1813-1883

From *Tannhäuser*

Dusk covers the land like a premonition of death,
Wraps the valley in her dark mantle;
The soul that longs for those heights
Dreads to take its dark and awful flight.
Then you appear, O loveliest of stars,
And shed your gentle light from afar;
Your sweet glow cleaves the twilight gloom,
And as a friend you show the way out of the valley.

O you, my fair evening star,
Gladly have I always greeted you:
Greet her, from the depths of this heart,
Which has never betrayed her,
Greet her, when she passes,
When she soars above this mortal vale
To become a holy angel there!

Translation by Richard Stokes