

The Refusal

by James Wright

When we get back, the wagon will be gone,
The porchlight empty in the wind, no doubt;
 And everybody here,
Who damned us for the conscience of a stone,
 Will tell us to get out
And do our sniffing in the dark somewhere.

It may not be delight to hear that word,
The pride of mourners mocking in our faces.
 I offer no delight,
nor a soft life, nor a grave deferred.
 I have known other places
ugly as this, and shut them from my sight.

Inside the house, somebody we could love,
Who labored for us till the taut string gave,
 Stares from a half-closed eye.
Why should we gaze back in that pit of love?
 All the beloved lie
In the perpetual savagery of graves.

Come here to me; I will not let you go
To suffer on some relative's hard shoulder--
 Weeping woman or man.
God, I have died so many days ago,
 The funeral began
When I was born, and will go on forever:--

Unless I shut the door myself, and take
Your elbow, drag you bodily, out of breath
 And let the house grow dark.
Inside, that lamentation for the sake

Of numbers on a rock
Starves me and freezes you, and kills us both.

Must we reel with the wine of mourning like a drunk?
Look there, the doors are latched, the windows are close,
 And we are told to go.
When we come back, the granite will be sunk
 An inch or more below
The careful fingers of the healing snows.

Preacher and undertaker follow the cars;
They claimed the comfort of the earth, and lied.
 Better to trust the moon
Blown in the soft bewilderment of stars;
 The living lean on pain,
The hard stones of the earth are on our side.

Saint Judas

by James Wright

When I went out to kill myself, I caught
A pack of hoodlums beating up a man.
Running to spare his suffering, I forgot
My name, my number, how my day began,
How soldiers milled around the garden stone
And sang amusing songs; how all that day
Their javelins measured crowds; how I alone
Bargained the proper coins, and slipped away.

Banished from heaven, I found this victim beaten,
Stripped, kneed, and left to cry. Dropping my rope
Aside, I ran, ignored the uniforms:
Then I remembered bread my flesh had eaten,
The kiss that ate my flesh. Flayed without hope,
I held the man for nothing in my arms.

A Blessing

by James Wright

Just off the highway to Rochester, Minnesota
Twilight bounds softly forth on the grass.
And the eyes of those two Indian ponies
Darken with kindness.
They have come gladly out of the willows
To welcome my friend and me.
We step over the barbed wire into the pasture
Where they have been grazing all day, alone.
They ripple tensely, they can hardly contain their happiness
That we have come.
They bow shyly as wet swans. They love each other.
There is no loneliness like theirs.
At home once more, they begin munching the young tufts of spring in the
darkness.
I would like to hold the slenderer one in my arms,
For she has walked over to me
And nuzzled my left hand.
She is black and white,
Her mane falls wild on her forehead,
And the light breeze moves me to caress her long ear
That is delicate as the skin over a girl's wrist.
Suddenly I realize
That if I stepped out of my body I would break
Into blossom.