

1. Tango (Dinner in the Courtyard)

Emily Grosholz

from *The River Painter* (1984)

When summer tears the maple leaves
to lace, and blue shows through the green
like those imagined distances,
weaving through all things close at hand,
then sunset looms for hours upon
the scarlet tenements of day,
unraveling curtains, windowpanes
ablaze. The house is close, I say,

and move the table underneath
the arches of the maple tree.
Not even the curious neighbors know
if I am host or stranger here,
nor if this roof of leaf and air,
the little courtyard of the world, is home.

2. Idyll

Theodore Roethke

from *Open House* (1941)

Now as from maple to elm the flittermice skitter and twirl,
A drunk man stumbles by, absorbed in self-talk.
The lights in the kitchens go out; moth wings unfurl;
The last tricycle runs crazily to the end of the walk.

As darkness creeps up on the well-groomed suburban town,
We grow indifferent to dog howls, to the nestling's last peep.
Dew deepens on the fresh-cut lawn;
We sit in the porch swing, content and half asleep.

The world recedes in the black revolving shadow;
A far-off train blows its echoing whistle once;
We go to our beds in a house at the edge of a meadow.
Unmindful of terror and headlines, of speeches and guns.

3. Arioso (Poem with a Moon)

John Balaban

from *Blue Mountain* (1982)

One summer evening at an oak edged pond,
I saw shoals of frogs, or small toads, spawning,
bloated red, glued in pairs, rolling,
roiling the shallows under a full moon
which, oiled, sleek, dripping in the trees,
cast shadows from my hand onto the water.
Tonight, spring night, by your house the peepers trill,
and the moon, as you sit at your desk, looks in
to see if your face is still shadowed by mine.

4. Toccata (Night Journey)

Theodore Roethke

from *Open House* (1941)

Now as the train bears west,
Its rhythm rocks the earth,
And from my Pullman berth
I stare into the night
While others take their rest.
Bridges of iron lace,
A suddenness of trees,
A lap of mountain mist
All cross my line of sight,
Then a bleak wasted place,
And a lake below my knees.
Full on my neck I feel
The straining at a curve;
My muscles move with steel,
I wake in every nerve.
I watch a beacon swing
From dark to blazing bright;
We thunder through ravines
And gullies washed with light.
Beyond the mountain pass
Mist deepens on the pane;
We rush into a rain
That rattles double glass.
Wheels shake the roadbed stone,
The pistons jerk and shove,
I stay up half the night
To see the land I love.