

philip levine



news of the world

P O E M S

NEWS OF THE WORLD

Poems

PHILIP LEVINE

 *Alfred A. Knopf • New York • 2011*

~~This Is a Borzoi Book Published by Alfred A. Knopf~~
Copyright © 2009 by Philip Levine

All rights reserved. Published in the United States by
Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Random House, Inc., New York,
and in Canada by Random House of Canada, Limited, Toronto.

www.aaknopf.com/poetry

Knopf, Borzoi Books, and the colophon are registered trademarks of Random House, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Levine, Philip, [date]

News of the world : poems / by Philip Levine.—1st ed.

p. cm.

eISBN: 978-0-307-59960-5

I. Title.

PS3562.E9N48 2009

811'54—dc22 2009016517

Cover photograph © Studio Patellani/Corbis

Cover design by Jason Booher

v3.1

CONTENTS

Cover

Title Page

Copyright

Dedication

I

Our Valley

Unholy Saturday

A Story

New Year's Eve, in Hospital

Before the War

My Fathers, the Baltic

Yakov

Innocence

II

Dearborn Suite

An Extraordinary Morning

Arrival and Departure

On Me!

Blood

Homecoming

Of Love and Other Disasters

Library Days

III

Fixing the Foot: On Rhythm

Islands

Not Worth the Wait

In the White City

Old World

Closed

The Language Problem

News of the World

IV

Alba

The Music of Time

During the War

The Death of Mayakovsky

Two Voices

The Heart of October

Burial Rites

Magic

Notes

Acknowledgments

A Note About the Author

Other Books by This Author

JR VALLEY

we don't see the ocean, not ever, but in July and August
when the worst heat seems to rise from the hard clay
in this valley, you could be walking through a fig orchard
and then suddenly the wind cools and for a moment
you get a whiff of salt, and in that moment you can almost
believe something is waiting beyond the Pacheco Pass,
something massive, irrational, and so powerful even
the mountains that rise east of here have no word for it.

you probably think I'm nuts saying the mountains
have no word for ocean, but if you live here
you begin to believe they know everything.
They maintain that huge silence we think of as divine,
a silence that grows in autumn when snow falls
slowly between the pines and the wind dies
to less than a whisper and you can barely catch
your breath because you're thrilled and terrified.

you have to remember this isn't your land.
It belongs to no one, like the sea you once lived beside
and thought was yours. Remember the small boats
that bobbed out as the waves rode in, and the men
who carved a living from it only to find themselves
ruined down to nothing. Now you say this is home,
go ahead, worship the mountains as they dissolve in dust,
wait on the wind, catch a scent of salt, call it our life.

UNHOLY SATURDAY

Three boys down by the river
search for crawdads. One has
immersed a spear from a
rotten rod, and head down,
hands rolled up to his knees, wades
against the river's current.
Nearly seven, he's the most
determined. He'll go home
hours from now with nothing
to show for his efforts except
dirt and sweat and that residue
he's unaware of sifting
down from a distant sky
and glinting like threads
of mica across his shoulders.
At the distance someone keeps
calling the names of the brothers
in the same order over
and over, but they don't hear
that with the riverbank gorged
with blue weed patches and all
the birds in hiding. Perhaps no
one is calling and it's only
the voices of the air as
the late light of June hangs on
the cottonwoods before
the dark whispers the last word.

STORY

Everyone loves a story. Let's begin with a house.
We can fill it with careful rooms and fill the rooms
with things—tables, chairs, cupboards, drawers
used to hide tiny beds where children once slept
big drawers that yawn open to reveal
precisely folded garments washed half to death,
soiled, stale, and waiting to be worn out.
There must be a kitchen, and the kitchen
must have a stove, perhaps a big iron one
with a fat black pipe that vanishes into the ceiling
to reach the sky and exhale its smells and collusions.
This was the center of whatever family life
was here, this and the sink gone yellow
around the drain where the water, dirty or pure,
ran off with no explanation, somewhat like the point
of this, the story we promised and may yet deliver.
Take no mistake, a family was here. You see
the path worn into the linoleum where the wood,
oak and certainly pine, shows through.
Father stood there in the middle of his life
and in his call to the heavens he imagined above the roof
that must surely be listening. When no one answered
you can see where his heel came down again
and again, even though he'd been taught
never to demand. Not that life was especially cruel;
they had well water they pumped at first,
a stove that gave heat, a mother who stood
by the sink at all hours and gazed longingly
toward where the woods once held the voices
of small bears—themselves a family—and the songs
of birds long fled once the deep woods surrendered
the tree at a time after the workmen arrived
with jugs of hot coffee. The worn spot on the sill
where Mother rested her head when no one saw,

ose two stained ridges were handholds

e relied on; they never let her down.

here is she now? You think you have a right

know everything? The children tiny enough

inhabit cupboards, large enough to have rooms

their own and to abandon them, the father

with his right hand raised against the sky?

those questions are too personal, then tell us,

where are the woods? They had to have been

because the continent was clothed in trees.

we all read that in school and knew it to be true.

what all we see are houses, rows and rows

houses as far as sight, and where sight vanishes

into nothing, into the new world no one has seen,

there has to be more than dust, wind-borne particles

burning earth, the earth we lost, and nothing else.

NEW YEAR'S EVE, IN HOSPITAL

ou can hate the sea as it floods
e shingle, draws back, swims up
ain; it goes on night and day
your life, and when your life
over it's still going. A young priest
t by my bed and asked, did I know
at Cardinal Newman said
out the sea. This merry little chap
th his round pink hands entwined
ld me I should change my life.
like my life," I said. "Holidays
e stressful in our line of work,"
said. Within the week he was off
Carmel to watch the sea come on
d on and on, as Newman wrote.
hate the sea," I said, and I did
that moment, the way the waves
on and on without a care.
silence we watched the night
read from the corners of the room.
ou should change your life,"
repeated. I asked had he been
ading Rilke. The man in the next bed,
retired landscaper from Chowchilla,
out a great groan and rolled over
face the blank wall. I felt bad
r the little priest: both of us
called "my sons" were failing,
pping gracelessly from our lives
abandon him to face eternity
it came on and on and on.

BEFORE THE WAR

eing his mother coming home
neels behind a parked car,
e hand over his mouth to still
s breathing. She passes, climbs
e stairs, and again the street is his.
e're in an American city, Toledo,
metime in the last century, though
could be Buffalo or Flint,
e places are the same except
r the names. At eight or nine,
en at eleven, kids are the same,
thout an identity, without a soul,
ings with bad teeth and bad clothes.
e could give them names, we could
me the mother Gertrude and give her
small office job typing bills of lading
ght hours a day, five and a half
ys a week. We could give her
eams of marriage to the boss
o's already married, but we
n't because she loathes him.
s her son, Sol, she loves,
e one still hiding with one knee
own on the concrete drawing
e day's last heat. He's got feelings.
ung as he is, he can feel heat,
ld, pain, just as a dog would
d like a dog he'll answer
his name. Go ahead, call him,
ley, Solly, Solly boy, come here!"
e doesn't bark, he doesn't sit,
e doesn't beg or extend one paw
a gesture of submission.
e accepts his whole name, even

a kid he stands and faces us,

st as eleven years from now

'll stand and face his death

oming toward him on a bridgehead

Remagen while Gertrude

es on typing mechanically

to the falling winter night.

MY FATHERS, THE BALTIC

low and gray, the sky
dips into the sea.
Along the strand stones,
washed shells, bottle tops,
emptied beer cans.
Something began here
centuries ago,
maybe a voyage,
a nameless disaster.
Young men set out
for those continents
beyond myth
while the women
waited and the sons
drew into other men.
Looking for a sign,
maybe an amulet
against storms, I kneel
in the damp sand
to find my own face
in a small black pool,
wide-eyed, alarmed.
My grandfather crossed
this sea in '04
and never returned,
I've come alone
to thank creation
that he would never
return carrying him home
from work, age, defeat,
those blood brothers
faithful to the end.
I miss Priskulnick,
I miss your laughter

rown in the wind's face,
ur gall, your rages,
ur abiding love
r money and all
never bought,
r your cracked voice
at wakens in dreams
ere you rest at last,
r all the sea taught
ou and you taught me:
at the waves go out
d nothing comes back.

My uncle told me of the cabin
in the forest, his house for years—
thirty-five or more—he'd lost count.
Hundred miles off descending into
the valley as evening gathered
around the branches of larch and oak
I'd catch the smell of woodsmoke,
the thin plume that always brought
me home. "The silence, it was
everything."
When the wolves, he told me, moved
through the trees without breathing.
The blackbirds vanished hours before
dusk. Snow fell only in the dark
so that at daybreak the world
was new. How he lived, what he ate,
how he dressed, who he spoke to,
what he shared, he never said.
The first sight of smoke, the silence,
the unseen wolves their tracks carved
in the snow, the daily disappearances,
the sun rising, the sun failing,
the absence of another voice,
any human voice, these were
his companions, his Siberia.
In Detroit was something else:
the back of Automotive
the bare bulb swung above him
he bowed to the wrong job
in the wrong place and entered
the unwritten epic of tedium,
cigarette in one hand,
three fingers on the other.
Akov, my old grease shop partner,

the day hung up his apron,
took down his gloves and wristbands,
and went off in smoke. If he came
to my door now on his trek
from nowhere I'd welcome him back
with black wine and black bread,
a glass of tea, a hard wood floor
to sleep on, and hope the new day
would bring him the music of silence.

NOCENCE

ailing, my brother straddles a beer keg
outside a pub. 1944, a year
buzz bombs. He's in the Air Corps,
on a mission to London to refill
oxygen tanks for B-24s, the flying coffins
they were dubbed by those who flew
them night after night. Fifty years later
a German writer on a walking trip
rough East Anglia meets a gardener
who recalls as a boy of twelve hearing
the planes taking off at dusk to level
the industrial cities of the Ruhr
and later when the Luftwaffe was all
that destroyed whatever they could reach.
"10,000 American lads died." The gardener
calls waking near dawn, the planes
chattering back in ones and twos.
How many Germans died we may
never know. "Must have been women,
children, and the very old what with
all the eligible men gone to war."
The German novelist writes it down
word for word in his mind and goes
on to an appointment with an English
writer born in Germany, a Jew
who got out in time. My brother
calls a young woman who lived above
the pub, a blonde, snapping the picture
outside the pub with his own Argus
camera, and points out a horse and wagon
around the corner loaded with beer kegs
with no driver. The pub is closed,
but it is not long after dawn and the city
is rising for work and war. We call the time

nocent for lack of a better word, we call
the Germans the Nazis because it suits
the vengeance we exact. Some hours later
the two writers born in Germany sit
out in a summer garden and converse
in their adopted tongue and say nothing
about what they can't forget as children,
for these two remain children until they die.
My brother, blind now, tells me he is glad
to be alive, he calls every painful day
a gift he's not sure he earned but accepts
with joy. He lives in a Neutra house
with entire walls of glass and a view
of the Pacific, a house he bought
for a song twenty years ago in disrepair.
He accepts the fact that each year squadrons
of architectural students from Europe and Asia
drop in to view the place, and though
he cannot see he shows them around
effortlessly and lets them take
their photographs. When I tell him
of the 50,000 airmen the gardener told
the novelist about, his blind eyes
light up, for above all my older brother
is a man of feeling, and his memory is precise—
like a diamond—and he says, "Not that many."

DEARBORN SUITE

iddle-aged, supremely bored
with his wife, hating his work,
unable to sleep, he rises
from bed to pace his mansion
in slippers and robe, wondering
if this is all there ever
will be to becoming Henry Ford,
the man who created

the modern world. The skies
above the great Rouge factory
are black with coke smoke, starless,
and the world is starless now, all
because he remade it in
his image, no small reward.

Monday comes as it must, with a pale
moon sinking below the elms.
They told us another dawn was
in the way, possibly held up
by traffic on Grand Boulevard
created by Henry, master of Dearborn,
who loathes sharing the light
with the unenlightened among us.

That was 60 years ago.
The day arrived, a weak sun
but nonetheless an actual
one, its sooty light bathing
the walls, windows, eyelids while
the old moon drifted off to sleep.

a boy I'd known these fields
with wild phlox in April,
here at night the red-tailed fox
came to prey and the horned owl
lit the air in a sudden rush
for its kill. I loved that world
with its little woods that held
their darkness and the still ponds,

near as ice, that held the stars
each night until the dawn broke
to fenced plots of land,
named and named, barns and stables,
white houses with eyes shut tight
against the intrusion of sight.

It all is here in the forge room
where the giant presses stamp
out body parts and the smell
of burning skin seeps into
our hair and under our nails.
The old man, King Henry, punches in
for the night shift with us,
his beloved coloreds and Yids,
work until the shattered
windows gray. There is a justice
after all, there's a bright anthem
for the occasion, something
familiar and blue, with words we
sing, like "Time on My Hands."

N EXTRAORDINARY MORNING

Two young men—you just might call them boys—
waiting for the Woodward streetcar to get
them downtown. Yes, they're tired, they're also
dirty and happy. Happy because they've
finished a short workweek, and if they're not rich
they're as close to rich as they'll ever be
in this town. Are they truly brothers?
You could ask the husky one, the one
in the black jacket he fills to bursting;
he seems friendly enough, snapping
his fingers while he shakes his ass and sings
"Sweet Lorraine," or if you're put off
by his mocking tone, ask the one leaning
against the locked door of Ruby's Rib Shack,
the one whose eyelids flutter in time
with nothing. Tell him it's crucial to know
in truth this is brotherly love. He won't
get angry, he's too tired for anger,
too relieved to be here, he won't even laugh
though he'll find you silly. It's Thursday,
maybe a holy day somewhere else, maybe
the Sabbath, but these two, neither devout
nor cynical, have no idea how to worship
except by doing what they're doing,
singing a song about a woman they love
solely for her name, breathing in and out
the used and soiled air they wouldn't know
how to live without, and by filling
the twin bodies they've disguised as filth.

- [download online Islands in the Sky here](#)
- [Rufus M. \(The Moffats, Book 3\) pdf](#)
- [download The Hairy Hikers: A Coast-to-Coast Trek Along the French Pyrenees pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub, doc, mobi](#)
- [download online Condé Nast Traveller \[UK\] \(October 2015\)](#)
- [The Phone Book: The Curious History of the Book That Everyone Uses but No One Reads here](#)

- <http://crackingscience.org/?library/The-Archive-Effect--Found-Footage-and-the-Audiovisual-Experience-of-History.pdf>
- <http://www.gateaerospaceforum.com/?library/A-Blaze-of-Glory--A-Novel-of-the-Battle-of-Shiloh.pdf>
- <http://test1.batsinbelfries.com/ebooks/An-Illustrated-History-of-Health-and-Fitness--from-Pre-History-to-our-Post-Modern-World--Studies-in-History-and->
- <http://fitnessfatale.com/freebooks/Cond---Nast-Traveller--UK---October-2015-.pdf>
- <http://www.freightunlocked.co.uk/lib/Swarm-Intelligence.pdf>