

her own, perhaps to sleep in.  
Perhaps she will rise, & face my window,  
my hazel eyes, perhaps she will call  
the police, & tell them I have

hazel eyes, or that she, herself,  
has hazel eyes. We are in trouble.  
Our fingers burn as we turn away  
from the rough glass. We don't know why,

how, we have become *we*. Was it something  
we ate? Was it a stream of obscenities  
we vaguely imagined? A thundering piece  
of rust in our hearts? Darting out

into the blue rain we sprain our hips,  
we've sprained our lips, & it doesn't end  
on such an up-note. No, I was old enough  
to pick up the phone, dial the correct

number, make the right connection, &  
you said, "The blood supply is low,"  
& I said, "The blue tongue disease  
is on the rise." Snails are licking

the moon's full body, all the parts  
we will never see.



## MARK STRAND

### *Night Piece*

(AFTER DICKENS)

A fine bright moon and thousands of stars!  
It is a still night, a very still night  
and the stillness is everywhere.

Not only is it a still night  
on deserted roads and hilltops  
where the dim, quilted countryside seems to doze  
as it fans out into clumps of trees dark and unbending  
against the sky, with the gray dust of moonlight upon them,

not only is it a still night  
in backyards overgrown with weeds, and in woods,  
and by tracks where the rat sleeps under the garnet-crust rock,  
and in the abandoned railroad station that reeks of mildew and  
urine,

and on the river where the oil slick rides the current  
sparkling among islands and scattered weirs,

not only is it a still night  
wherever the river winds through marshes and mud flats fouled  
by bottles, tires, and rusty cans, and where it narrows  
through the sloping acres of higher ground covered with plots  
cleared and graded for building,

not only is it a still night  
wherever the river flows, where houses cluster in small towns,  
but farther down where more and more bridges are reflected in  
it,  
where wharves, cranes, warehouses make it black and awful,  
where it turns from those creaking shapes and mingles with the  
sea,

and not only is it a still night  
at sea and on the pale glass of the beach  
where the watcher stands upright in the mystery and motion of  
his life  
and sees the silent ships move in from nowhere he has ever been,  
crossing the path of light that he believes runs only to him,

but even in this stranger's wilderness of a city  
it is a still night. Steeples and skyscrapers grow  
more ethereal, rooftops crowded with towers and ducts  
lose their ugliness under the shining of the urban moon;  
street noises are fewer and are softened, and footsteps  
on the sidewalks pass more quickly away.

In this place where the sound of traffic never ceases  
and people move like a ghostly traffic from home to work and  
home,  
and the poor in their tenements speak to their gods  
and the rich do not hear them, every sound is merged,  
this moonlight night, into a distant humming, as if  
the city, finally, were singing itself to sleep.

altering of river + moon,  
universal things, show  
altering of place, second movement  
country to them to midtown  
(2) reflective watches to  
ghostly traffic, din of tenements  
outward, inward, outward (that he believes runs only to him)

JON SWAN

Among Commuters

In the night in the train pulling out of the city,  
standing in the swaying club car, drinking with others  
whose faces are too familiar, whose names one does not want to  
know,  
looking out of the grubby, pocked, three-star window  
at the finale of a sunset, the long clouds the color of rust,  
at rubble and tenement, at billboards that advertise space,  
at space, one feels, or may feel, that at long last  
one is escaping what?

Click of wheel assures you that you are leaving, leaving,  
that on earth as in heaven flight is still possible,  
that the half-seen faces staring from windows into the summer  
night,  
enduring the noise of your elevated passing,  
will slip from your mind even as they slip out of sight  
like a drowning crowd in another forgettable movie,  
that you can shed the daily skin of your existence  
by being thus transported.

But the sun sinks and around you the faces flare,  
ruddy as they celebrate once again the day's end,  
the irresponsible interval between office and home,  
between the pressure to produce and the pressure to relax,  
to be attentive and loving: another man.  
Through dark country now we move between our selves, as the  
train moves,  
reluctantly, as if it had too often  
reached its destination.



MAY SWENSON

At the Museum of Modern Art

At the Museum of Modern Art you can sit in the lobby  
on the foam-rubber couch; you can rest and smoke,  
and view whatever the revolving doors express.  
You don't have to go into the galleries at all.

In this arena the exhibits are free and have all  
the surprises of art—besides something extra:  
sensory restlessness, the play of alternation,  
expectation in an incessant spray

A fine night, and a bright large moon, and multitudes of stars. Mr. Tulkinghorn, in repairing to his cellar and in opening and shutting those resounding doors, has to cross a little prison-like yard. He looks up casually, thinking what a fine night, what a bright large moon, what multitudes of stars! A quiet night, too.

A very quiet night. When the moon shines very brilliantly, a solitude and stillness seem to proceed from her that influence even crowded places full of life. Not only is it a still night on dusty high roads and on hill-summits, whence a wide expanse of country may be seen in repose, quieter and quieter as it spreads away into a fringe of trees against the sky with the grey ghost of a bloom upon them; not only is it a still night in gardens and in woods, and on the river where the water-meadows are fresh and green, and the stream sparkles on among pleasant islands, murmuring weirs, and whispering rushes; not only does the stillness attend it as it flows where houses cluster thick, where many bridges are reflected in it, where wharves and shipping make it black and awful, where it winds from these disfigurements through marshes whose grim beacons stand like skeletons washed ashore, where it expands through the bolder region of rising grounds, rich in cornfield wind-mill and steeple, and where it mingles with the ever-heaving sea; not only is it a still night on the deep, and on the shore where the watcher stands to see the ship with her spread wings cross the path of light that appears to be presented to only him; but even on this stranger's wilderness of London there is some rest. Its steeples and towers and its one great dome grow more ethereal; its smoky house-tops lose their grossness in the pale effulgence; the noises that arise from the streets are fewer and are softened, and the footsteps on the pavements pass more tranquilly away. In

these fields of Mr. Tulkinghorn's inhabiting, where the shepherds play on Chancery pipes that have no stop, and keep their sheep in the fold by hook and by crook until they have shorn them exceeding close, every noise is merged, this moonlight night, into a distant ringing hum, as if the city were a vast glass, vibrating.

What's that? Who fired a gun or pistol? Where was it?

The few foot-passengers start, stop, and stare about them. Some windows and doors are opened, and people come out to look. It was a loud report and echoed and rattled heavily. It shook one house, or so a man says who was passing. It has aroused all the dogs in the neighbourhood, who bark vehemently. Terrified cats scamper across the road. While the dogs are yet barking and howling—there is one dog howling like a demon—the church-clocks, as if they were startled too, begin to strike. The hum from the streets, likewise, seems to swell into a shout. But it is soon over. Before the last clock begins to strike ten, there is a lull. When it has ceased, the fine night, the bright large moon, and multitudes of stars, are left at peace again.