

**Joseph Harrison**

**Stopping**

Whose woods these are we all know well  
Though, tight-lipped, most refuse to tell,  
Reluctant to assume the cost  
Of any silly, childish spell

To make such hidden things stay lost:  
No wind no ice no snow no frost,  
No solid winter six feet deep  
Nor'easter-swirled and bluster-tossed

Now blanketing a world asleep  
Beneath the dark sky's starless sweep,  
None of that. Just my double-take  
To find, at my age, I still keep

Making my typical mistake,  
Stopping beside this frozen lake  
When I have promises to break  
And miles to go before I wake.

### **Hardy's Writing Trousers**

Where are the hounds who ran the land,  
The Chowders and the Bowers  
Who bayed at everything,  
Or rumbled in a dust-storm of a band  
Swerving right or wrong as  
Led by the zig-zag skitters of their prey?  
They had their day.  
They did not last as long as  
The piece of raveled, triple-knotted string  
That held up Thomas Hardy's writing trousers.

Where are the folk who owned the land,  
The holiday carousers  
Who played at the latest thing,  
Swirling together as the village band  
Wound up a final song as  
Shalloon and sash and kerchief caught the sway?  
They had their day.  
They did not last as long as  
The piece of raveled, triple-knotted string  
That held up Thomas Hardy's writing trousers.

Where are the old ones knew the land,  
The forkers, diggers, dowers  
Who stayed at some hard thing  
While fields closed in and pass-through routes were banned,  
With wand and spade and prong as  
Busy as if their way were the only way?  
They had their day.  
They did not last as long as  
The piece of raveled, triple-knotted string  
That held up Thomas Hardy's writing trousers.

**The Forsaken Singer**

When his music defined what the young folk wanted,  
When to sing so purely was risky and brave,  
And his drop-dead artistry, echo-haunted  
By concatenations of wind and wave  
Where the foam flower blooms and the sea mew hovers,  
Made the high tide fill the most secretive nooks  
With studied perfection, true poetry lovers  
    Bought his books.

He sang as if there were no tomorrows,  
As if past and present were one fluid tense  
Full of tacit longings and private sorrows,  
As if beauty were meaning and sound were sense.  
And all those who heard him were certain they knew  
Why he sang as he sang, for a darkling change  
Swept over the seascape to render their view  
    Rich and strange.

But fashion, as fashioned, falls victim to time.  
The polished, percussive extremes of a style  
Swirling in arabesque rhythm and rhyme  
For a while seemed just right. But just for a while.  
What the past most admired the future opposes.  
When the sea winds rise and the sea pines sway  
Some things get, like summer's most delicate roses,  
    Blown away.

Oh yes he was king of the cats, whose fame  
Seemed permanent, scripted by stars. And yet  
How many, today, remember his name?  
The world doesn't end, but we do forget.  
A singer falls silent a hundred years.  
Rare bookstores vanish. Small libraries close.  
What happens to music when no one hears?  
    No one knows.

Joseph Harrison

### **Late Autumnal**

Peace. Mists. The sense of something near its end.  
Last fruits have fallen, leaves have fallen, too.  
Harvest was plumpness, sweetness, swell and bend,  
Full-bodied. But that's done. The bees are through.  
Winnowing, gleaning, reaping--all are past.  
What could be saved has been saved. Now in store  
Just coldness, hardness, frost. A light wind dies.  
We had enough, and then some. We wanted more  
From this, our perfect season which couldn't last.  
The stubble darkens. Days are fading fast.  
A final swallow, twittering. The skies.