

Study these poems before our screening of Agnès Varda's *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* (*The Gleaners and I*).

Questions for discussion:

1. As you read through the poems, think about their similar themes; what are some of the consistent images and messages that appear in each?
2. After you see *The Gleaners & I*, think about how these poems relate to Varda's film, and find examples from the film to support the connections you've drawn.
3. Do you think *The Gleaners & I* is crafted like a poem? Why or why not? Find examples from the film to support your arguments.

### Getting Older

The first surprise: I like it.  
Whatever happens now, some things  
that used to terrify have not:

I didn't die young, for instance. Or lose  
my only love. My three children  
never had to run away from anyone.

Don't tell me this gratitude is complacent.  
We all approach the edge of the same blackness  
which for me is silent.

Knowing as much sharpens  
my delight in January freesia,  
hot coffee, winter sunlight. So we say

as we lie close on some gentle occasion:  
every day won from such  
darkness is a celebration.

— Elaine Feinstein, 2002

If you have a 56K modem or faster, listen to Elaine Feinstein read this poem at <http://www.elainefeinstein.com/readings.html>  
(Scroll down the page to the inset box of audio and video clips.)



## When Death Comes

When death comes  
like the hungry bear in autumn;  
when death comes and takes all the bright coins from his purse

to buy me, and snaps the purse shut;  
when death comes  
like the measles-pox;

when death comes  
like an iceberg between the shoulder blades,

I want to step through the door full of curiosity, wondering:  
what it is going to be like, that cottage of darkness?

And therefore I look upon everything  
as a brotherhood and a sisterhood,  
and I look upon time as no more than an idea,  
and I consider eternity as another possibility,

and I think of each life as a flower, as common  
as a field daisy, and as singular,

and each name a comfortable music in the mouth,  
tending, as all music does, toward silence,

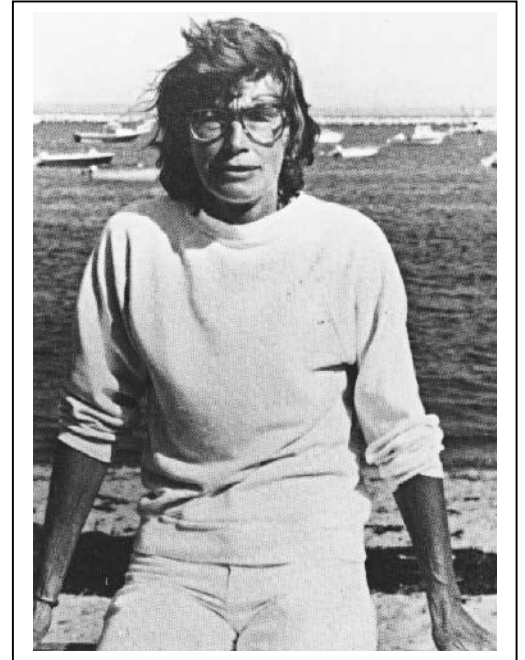
and each body a lion of courage, and something  
precious to the earth.

When it's over, I want to say: all my life  
I was a bride married to amazement.  
I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.

When it's over, I don't want to wonder  
if I have made of my life something particular, and real.  
I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened,  
or full of argument.

I don't want to end up simply having visited this world.

— Mary Oliver, *From New and Selected Poems*, 1993



## What Meets the Eye

Trash in the yards  
white as early flowers,  
the flash of aluminum cans  
in broad sweeps  
spilling down the embankments  
to the shelter of rusty bedsprings  
and the creosote fat of old tires,  
the brawl of oil drums.  
Now and again, the bold spread  
Of a car dump fans out,  
Then closes with the single shell  
of an orange Vega, fastened  
like a mutant insect to the slope.

Something almost yields.  
It's that week before the flush of shoots  
and the blue rush of Texas wild flowers.  
Hawks on the updraft;  
pockets of sky reflecting water.  
It's that season of unreasoning hope,  
when flocks of starlings  
pulse up in a single motion,  
then scatter like a handful of grain  
flung out over the fields.



## Shapes

In the longer view it doesn't matter.  
However, it's that having lived, it matters.  
So that every death breaks you apart.  
You find yourself weeping at the door  
of your own kitchen, overwhelmed  
by loss. And you find yourself weeping  
as you pass the homeless person  
head in hands resigned on a cement  
step, the wire basket on wheels right there.  
Like stopped film, or a line of Vallejo,  
or a sketch of the mechanics of a wing  
by Leonardo. All pauses in space,  
a violent compression of meaning  
in an instant within the meaningless.  
Even staring into the dim shapes  
at the farthest edge; accepting that blur.

— both poems by Ruth Stone,  
from *In the Next Galaxy*, 2002

## Ethics

In ethics class so many years ago  
our teacher asked this question every fall:  
if there were a fire in a museum  
which would you save, a Rembrandt painting  
or an old woman who hadn't many  
years left anyhow? Restless on hard chairs  
caring little for picture or old age  
we'd opt one year for life, the next for art  
and always half-heartedly. Sometimes  
the woman borrowed my grandmother's face  
leaving her usual kitchen to wander  
some drafty, half-imagined museum.  
One year, feeling clever, I replied  
why not let the woman decide herself?  
Linda, the teacher would report, eschews  
the burdens of responsibility.  
This fall in a real museum I stand  
before a real Rembrandt, old woman,  
or nearly so, myself. The colors  
within this frame are darker than autumn,  
darker even than winter – the browns of earth,  
though earth's most radiant elements burn  
through the canvas. I know now that woman  
and painting and season are almost one  
and all beyond saving by children.

– Linda Pastan (1981)

