

4. Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

Let Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow or all three be central to your poem today.

Nostalgia

for Donald Justice

The professors of English have taken their gowns
to the laundry, have taken themselves to the fields.
Dreams of motion circle the Persian rug in a room
you were in.

On the beach the sadness of gramophones
deepens the ocean's folding and falling.
It is yesterday. It is still yesterday.

Mark Strand
in *Collected Poems*

HERE WE ARE

Today it is. Right here next to
yesterday which, wanting

to be perfect, fell down. Today's
morning opens big doors

but doesn't know what to do
with itself. It has a chair and a hill

and a window between. It can look out
and in. Nothing sits in the chair, nothing

moves on the hill. Beyond the hill
is a darker hill, but today hasn't

gotten that far.

I am around here
somewhere. Today tries the chair,

stands at the window. It stands
on the hill, too, talking to itself

with the sound of daylight.
It stops wondering what
to do: it has half a planet to get to
and the half keeps moving. It has
to make hay, it has to make trees.
I am here. A standing. I hold
sky in my hands, which are empty,
which have let slide the economy
of clocks. Now is an economy
of air. It has abundance but is not
full. It stands around me. I stand
around it. Now it is.

Pamela Alexander
in *Slow Fire*

Today

today a comet is to appear
so the dog
the pastor
and the dragonfly too
are waiting with their mouths open.

Fujitomi Yasuo
in *Like Underground Water:
The Poetry of Mid-Twentieth Century Japan*

Tomorrow

there will be sun, scalloped by clouds,
ushered in by a waterfall of birdsong.
It will be a temperate seventy-five, low
humidity. For twenty-four hours,
all politicians will be silent. Reality
programs will vanish from TV, replaced
by the “snow” that used to decorate

our screens when reception wasn't
working. Soldiers will toss their weapons
in the grass. The oceans will stop
their inexorable rise. No one
will have to sit on a committee.
When twilight falls, the aurora borealis
will cut off cell phones, scramble the internet.
We'll play flashlight tag, hide and seek,
decorate our hair with fireflies, spin
until we're dizzy, collapse
on the dew-decked lawn and look up,
perhaps for the first time, to read the long lines
of cold code written in the stars....

Barbara Crooker
from *Some Glad Morning*

I am in yesterday, today. And tomorrow? In tomorrow I was.

Antonio Porchia
in *Voices*
translated by W.S. Merwin