

"Ode to Man"
from Sophocles' *Antigone*

Numberless are the world's wonders, but none
More wonderful than man; the stormgray sea
Yields to his prows. the huge crests bear him high;
Earth, holy and inexhaustible, is graven
With shining furrows where his plows have gone
Year and year, the timeless labor of stallions.

The lightboned birds and beasts that cling to cover,
The lithe fish lighting their reaches of dim water,
All are taken, tamed in the net of his mind;
The lion on the hill, the wild horse windy-maned,
Resign to him; and his blunt yoke has broken
The sultry shoulders of the mountain bull.

Words also, ant thought as rapid as air,
He fashions to his good use; statecraft is his,
And his the skill that deflect the arrows of snow,
The spears of winter rain: from every wind
He has made himself secure—from all but one:
In the late wind of death he cannot stand.

O clear intelligence, force beyond all measure!
O fate of man, working both good and evil!
When the laws are kept, how proudly his city stands!
When the laws are broken, what of his city then?
Never may the anarchic man find rest at my hearth,
Never be it said that my thoughts are his thoughts.

Translated by Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald, 1938.

Many the wonders but nothing walks stranger than man.
This thing crosses the sea in the winter's storm,
making his path through the roaring waves.
And she, the greatest of the gods, the earth—
ageless she is, and unwearied—he wears her away
as the ploughs go up and down from year to year
and his mules turn up the soil.

Gay nations of birds he snares and leads,
wild beast tribes and the salty brood of the sea,
with the twisted mesh of his nets, this clever man.
He controls with craft the beasts of the open air,
walkers on the hills, the horse with shaggy mane
he holds and harnesses, yoked about the neck,
and the strong bull of the mountain.

Language, and thought like the wind
and the feelings that make the town,
he has taught himself, and shelter against the cold,
refuge from rain. He can always help himself.
He faces no future helpless. There's only death
that he cannot find an escape from. He has contrived
refuge from illnesses once beyond all cure.
Clever beyond all dreams
the inventive craft that he has
which may drive him one time or another to well or ill.
When he honors the laws of the land and the gods' sworn right
high indeed is his city; but stateless the man
who dares to dwell with dishonor. Not by my fire,
never to share my thoughts, who does these things.

Translated by Elizabeth Wyckoff, 1954.

Of all the wonders of the world, most wonderful
is man: On sea and land he travels freely,
a sailor, farmer, hunter of the bountiful
birds and wild beasts, and fish unswift to flee.
He conquers all—lion, horse, and ox,
and words, and ideas, even wind and weather.
Except for death, there is no plague or pox
he has not learned to steer clear of or endure.
His intelligence is marvelous,
and if he lives by the law, he'll do just fine,
but a mind that raises itself above all else,
that thinks it knows everything will undermine
the absolute foundations of its world,
and ours.

Translated by Kelly Cherry, 1999.