

Readings

from The Shortest Day by Susan Cooper

And so the Shortest Day came and the year died
And everywhere down the centuries of the snow-white world
Came people singing, dancing,
To drive the dark away.

They lighted candles in the winter trees;
They hung their homes with evergreen;
They burned beseeching fires all night long
To keep the year alive.

And when the new year's sunshine blazed awake
They shouted, reveling.

Through all the frosty ages you can hear them
Echoing behind us—listen!
All the long echoes, sing the same delight,
This Shortest Day,

As promise wakens in the sleeping land:
They carol, feast, give thanks,
And dearly love their friends,
And hope for peace.

And now so do we, here, now,
This year and every year.

Solstice Poem by Margaret Atwood

This is the solstice, the still point
of the sun, its cusp and midnight,
the year's threshold
and unlocking, where the past
lets go of and becomes the future;
the place of caught breath.

from Take Joy! By Fra Giovanni

I salute you! There is nothing I can give you which you have not; but there is much, that,
while I cannot give, you can take.
No heaven can come to us unless our hearts find rest in it today. Take Heaven.
No peace lies in the future which is not hidden in this present instant. Take Peace.
The gloom of the world is but a shadow; behind it, yet, within our reach, is joy. Take Joy.
And so, at this time, I greet you, with the prayer that for you, now and forever, the day
breaks and the shadows flee away.

To Know the Dark by Wendell Berry

To go in the dark with a light is to know the light.
To know the dark, go dark. Go without sight,
and find the dark, too, blooms and sings,
and is traveled by dark feet and dark wings.

Snowy Night by Mary Oliver

Last night, an owl
in the blue dark
tossed an indeterminate number
of carefully shaped sounds into

the world, in which,
a quarter of a mile away, I happened
to be standing.

I couldn't tell
which one it was –
the barred or the great-horned
ship of the air –
it was that distant. But, anyway,
aren't there moments
that are better than knowing something,
and sweeter? Snow was falling,
so much like stars
filling the dark trees
that one could easily imagine
its reason for being was nothing more
than prettiness. I suppose
if this were someone else's story
they would have insisted on knowing
whatever is knowable – would have hurried
over the fields
to name it – the owl, I mean.

But it's mine, this poem of the night,
and I just stood there, listening and holding out
my hands to the soft glitter
falling through the air. I love this world,
but not for its answers.
And I wish good luck to the owl,
whatever its name –
and I wish great welcome to the snow,

whatever its severe and comfortless
and beautiful meaning.

Now Winter Nights Enlarge by Thomas Campion

Now winter nights enlarge
The number of their hours;
And clouds their storms discharge
Upon the airy towers.
Let now the chimneys blaze
And cups o'erflow with wine,
Let well-turned words amaze
With harmony divine.
Now yellow waxen lights
Shall wait on honey love
While youthful revels, masques, and courtly sights
Sleep's leaden spells remove.

This time doth well dispense
With lovers' long discourse;
Much speech hath some defense,
Though beauty no remorse.
All do not all things well;
Some measures comely tread,
Some knotted riddles tell,
Some poems smoothly read.
The summer hath his joys,
And winter his delights;
Though love and all his pleasures are but toys,
They shorten tedious nights.

On December 21 by Amos Russel Wells

Now let the weather do its worst,
With frost and sleet and blowing,
Rage like a beldam wild and curst,
And have its fill of snowing.
Now let the ice in savage vise
Grip meadow, brook, and branches,
Down from the north pour winter forth
In roaring avalanches.

I turn my collar to the blast
And greet the storm with laughter:
Your day, old Winter! use it fast,
For Spring is coming after.
The world may wear a frigid air,
But ah! its heart is burning;
Soon, soon will May dance down this way:
The year is at the turning.

There's not a sabre-charge of cold
But brings the blossoms nearer;
By every frost-flower we shall hold
The violets the dearer.
So rage and blow the drifting snow
And have your fill of sorrow:
The turning years bring smiles for tears;
We'll greet the spring to-morrow!