

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS  
AND POETRY FOUNDATION PRESENT



*Master Anthology 2022-2023*

# War Widow

By [Chris Abani](#)

The telephone never rings. Still  
you pick it up, smile into the static,  
the breath of those you've loved; long dead.

The leaf you pick from the fall  
rises and dips away with every ridge.  
Fingers stiff from time, you trace.

Staring off into a distance limned  
by cataracts and other collected debris,  
you have forgotten none of the long-ago joy  
of an ice-cream truck and its summer song.

Between the paving stones;  
between tea, a cup, and the sound  
of you pouring;  
between the time you woke that morning  
and the time when the letter came,  
a tired sorrow: like an old flagellant  
able only to tease with a weak sting.

Riding the elevator all day,  
floor after floor after floor,  
each stop some small victory whittled  
from the hard stone of death, you smile.  
They used to write epics about moments like this.

# Things You May Find Hidden in My Ear

By [Mosad Abu Toha](#)

*For Alicia M. Quesnel, MD*

i

When you open my ear, touch it  
gently.  
My mother's voice lingers somewhere inside.  
Her voice is the echo that helps recover my equilibrium  
when I feel dizzy during my attentiveness.

You may encounter songs in Arabic,

poems in English I recite to myself,  
or a song I chant to the chirping birds in our backyard.

When you stitch the cut, don't forget to put all these back in my ear.  
Put them back in order as you would do with books on your shelf.

ii

The drone's buzzing sound,  
the roar of an F-16,  
the screams of bombs falling on houses,  
on fields, and on bodies,  
of rockets flying away—  
rid my small ear canal of them all.

Spray the perfume of your smiles on the incision.  
Inject the song of life into my veins to wake me up.  
Gently beat the drum so my mind may dance with yours,  
my doctor, day and night.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## A Daughter Named After Nina

By [Elizabeth Acevedo](#)

voice of incoming 2 express train

pray herself altar

contort mouth shotgun:

sawed off        a saw

soften tongue songbird

hands mosaicked mirrors

donning skin like battle gear

dawning skin like evening gown

this name pinned on her shoulders;

a heavy mantle. an incantation.

## Manhunt or Ode to First Kisses

By [Elizabeth Acevedo](#)

it was always the older kids  
running to Riverside,  
hiding behind trees and underneath

jungle gyms, holding their breath  
in the darkness as the other team  
tried to find them.

I could not wait to be old enough;  
a captor's arms clasping.  
Manhunt, manhunt 1, 2, 3.

This poem asks me to turn  
the compass in a different direction:  
perhaps commentary on police

or the assaults  
that happen in the dark  
when children play games

while adults sip beers and  
summer unrolls a carpet  
into the worst of memories.

But no. Sometimes  
being honest means offering  
more than one draft.

The game was  
a different kind of winning:  
the chase about the waiting,

wanting to hear a  
countdown softly whispered  
as the July air

stuck our baby hairs

to our necks, and everything  
was playful in the damp.

## **Buckroe, After the Season, 1942**

By [Virginia Adair Hamilton](#)

Past the fourth cloverleaf, by dwindling roads  
At last we came into the unleashed wind;  
The Chesapeake rose to meet us at a dead end  
Beyond the carnival wheels and gingerbread.

Forsaken by summer, the wharf. The oil-green waves  
Flung yellow foam and sucked at disheveled sand.  
Small fish stank in the sun, and nervous droves  
Of cloud hastened their shadows over bay and land.

Beyond the NO DUMPING sign in its surf of cans  
And the rotting boat with nettles to the rails,  
The horse dung garlanded with jewelers flies  
And papers blown like a fleet of shipless sails,

We pushed into an overworld of wind and light  
Where sky unfettered ran wild from earth to noon,  
And the tethered heart broke loose and rose like a kite  
From sands that borrowed diamonds from the sun.

We were empty and pure as shells that air-drenched hour,  
Heedless as waves that swell at the shore and fall,  
Pliant as sea-grass, the rapt inheritors  
Of a land without memory, where tide erases all.

## **Musical Moment**

By [Virginia Adair Hamilton](#)

Always the caravan of sound made us halt  
to admire the swinging and the swift go-by  
of beasts with enormous hooves and heads  
beating the earth or reared against the sky.

Do not reread, I mean glance ahead to see  
what has become of the colossal forms:  
everything happened at the instant of passing:  
the hoof-beat, the whinny, the bells on the harness,  
the creak of the wheels, the monkey's fandango

in double time over the elephant's back.

When the marching was over and we were free to go on  
there was never before us a dungfall or a track  
on the road-sands of any kind:  
only the motion of footprints being made  
crossing and recrossing in the trampled mind.

## Apella

By [Dilruba Ahmed](#)

This morning, a light  
so full, so complete  
we might ask why

the god of sun  
is also god of plague,  
why the god of healing

also god of archery.  
The children under trees—  
unaware their hearts

have become targets  
red and inflamed  
as the eyes of men in thrones—

find sticks in the grass  
to fashion into guns. Some brandish  
a branch-saber. They are sniping

the golden light  
with squinting faces.  
And everywhere

they do not look,  
fences and more fences.  
There are no arrows

to point the way  
as they scythe  
through a woods or dart

between cars in parking lots.  
The miles of fence-links grow

more & more impassable

even as the children try  
to follow the voices  
calling them now, at first

with tenderness and then  
with fierce intensity.

## **Snake Oil, Snake Bite**

By [Dilruba Ahmed](#)

They staunched the wound with a stone.  
They drew blue venom from his blood  
until there was none.  
When his veins ran true his face remained  
lifeless and all the mothers of the village  
wept and pounded their chests until the sky  
had little choice  
but to grant their supplications. God made  
the boy breathe again.

God breathes life into us, it is said,  
only once. But this case was an exception.  
God drew back in a giant gust and blew life into the boy  
and like a stranded fish, he shuddered, oceanless.

It was true: the boy lived.  
He lived for a very long time. The toxins  
were an oil slick: contaminated, cleaned.  
But just as soon as the women  
kissed redness back into his cheeks  
the boy began to die again.  
He continued to die for the rest of his life.  
The dying took place slowly, sweetly.  
The dying took a very long time.

## **I Eat Breakfast to Begin the Day**

By [Zubair Ahmed](#)

I create time  
I cannot create time  
I'm frozen in place  
I cannot be frozen

I'm moving but don't notice  
 I notice me moving, I pay attention  
 To the small yet immense yet  
 Small movements that guide  
 My limbs, my hair growth, my joint oils  
 I don't think about it  
 I don't feel it either  
 I don't have emotions right now  
 I see films of divine quality  
 I don't see any films  
 This black  
 This not black  
 To me I am  
 I am not to me not  
 I walk with this hollowness  
 I walk with this blooming  
 I'm moving outward forever  
 Onward eternally inward  
 I create all objects like shampoos  
 And cats, I create nothing  
 Like space and antimatter  
 I resign to the clocks that keep time  
 I surrender to the clocks that don't keep time  
 I'm sure about it, the color white  
 I'm not sure about it, what is word?  
 Oh, the loops and unloops  
 Destiny unfolds in my knees  
 I eat breakfast to begin the day

# Truth is I would like to escape myself

By Nour Al Ghraowi

Truth is I would like to escape myself.  
                                 Detach my body from my skin,  
 peel it layer by layer to uncover  
                                 beneath the surface of petals  
 and thorns piled up year after year,  
                                 who I am and who I want to be.

I want to be the flower that grows  
                                 in dirt, the feather that flies free between  
 the cracks of fences. A wise woman  
                                 once told me, *don't worry about you,*  
*worry about who you could be.*

                                I want to be the woman who sits  
 on a desk and writes pieces of oceans,

rivers on a white space in a place  
where imagination has no border.

## Jaguar

By [Francisco X. Alarcón](#)

some say  
I'm now almost  
extinct in this park

but the people  
who say this  
don't know

that by smelling  
the orchids  
in the trees

they're sensing  
the fragrance  
of my chops

that by hearing  
the rumbling  
of the waterfalls

they're listening  
to my ancestors'  
great roar

that by observing  
the constellations  
of the night sky

they're gazing  
at the star spots  
on my fur

that I am and  
always will be  
the wild

untamed  
living spirit  
of this jungle

# Words are Birds

By [Francisco X. Alarcón](#)

words  
are birds  
that arrive  
with books  
and spring

they  
love  
clouds  
the wind  
and trees

some words  
are messengers  
that come  
from far away  
from distant lands

for them  
there are  
no borders  
only stars  
moon and sun

some words  
are familiar  
like canaries  
others are exotic  
like the quetzal bird

some can stand  
the cold  
others migrate  
with the sun  
to the south

some words  
die  
caged—  
they're difficult  
to translate

and others

build nests  
have chicks  
warm them  
feed them

teach them  
how to fly  
and one day  
they go away  
in flocks

the letters  
on this page  
are the prints  
they leave  
by the sea

## Le Maudit

By [Richard Aldington](#)

Women's tears are but water;  
The tears of men are blood.

He sits alone in the firelight  
And on either side drifts by  
Sleep, like a torrent whirling,  
Profound, wrinkled and dumb.

Circuitously, stealthily,  
Dawn occupies the city;  
As if the seasons knew of his grief  
Spring has suddenly changed into snow

Disaster and sorrow  
Have made him their pet;  
He cannot escape their accursed embraces.  
For all his dodgings  
Memory will lacerate him.

What good does it do to wander  
Nights hours through city streets?  
Only that in poor places  
He can be with common men  
And receive their unspoken  
Instinctive sympathy.

What has life done for him?  
He stands alone in the darkness  
Like a sentry never relieved,  
Looking over a barren space,  
Awaiting the tardy finish.

## Apollo

By [Elizabeth Alexander](#)

We pull off  
to a road shack  
in Massachusetts  
to watch men walk

on the moon. We did  
the same thing  
for three two one  
blast off, and now

we watch the same men  
bounce in and out  
of craters. I want  
a Coke and a hamburger.

Because the men  
are walking on the moon  
which is now irrefutably  
not green, not cheese,

not a shiny dime floating  
in a cold blue,  
the way I'd thought,  
the road shack people don't

notice we are a black  
family not from there,  
the way it mostly goes.  
This talking through

static, bounces in space-  
boots, tethered  
to cords is much  
stranger, stranger

even than we are.

## Revenant

By [Meena Alexander](#)

This disease has come back  
With frills and furbelows.

*You must give your whole life to poetry*  
Only a few survive if that—

Poems I mean, paper crumpled  
Shades of another water—

Far springs are what you long for,  
Listening for the slow drip of chemicals

Through a hole in your chest.

*If you were torn from me*  
*I could not bear what the earth had to offer.*

To be well again, what might that mean?  
The flowering plum sprung from late snow,

Ratcheting trill in the blackberry bush  
Blood streaks, pluck and throb of mercy.

## Meeting at an Airport

By [Taha Muhammad Ali](#)

You asked me once,  
on our way back  
from the midmorning  
trip to the spring:  
“What do you hate,  
and *who* do you love?”

And I answered,  
from behind the eyelashes  
of my surprise,  
my blood rushing  
like the shadow  
cast by a cloud of starlings:

“I hate departure . . .  
I love the spring  
and the path to the spring,  
and I worship the middle  
hours of morning.”  
And you laughed . . .  
and the almond tree blossomed  
and the thicket grew loud with nightingales.

. . . A question  
now four decades old:  
I salute that question’s answer;  
and an answer  
as old as your departure;  
I salute that answer’s question . . .

And today,  
it’s preposterous,  
here we are at a friendly airport  
by the slimmest of chances,  
and we meet.  
Ah, Lord!  
we meet.  
And here you are  
asking—again,  
it’s absolutely preposterous—  
I recognized you  
but you didn’t recognize me.  
“Is it you?!”  
But you wouldn’t believe it.  
And suddenly  
you burst out and asked:  
“If you’re really you,  
What do you hate  
and *who* do you love?!”

And I answered—  
my blood  
fleeing the hall,  
rushing in me  
like the shadow  
cast by a cloud of starlings:  
“I hate departure,  
and I love the spring,  
and the path to the spring,  
and I worship the middle

hours of morning.”

And you wept,  
and flowers bowed their heads,  
and doves in the silk of their sorrow stumbled.

## Ghazal

By [Agha Shahid Ali](#)

*Feel the patient's heart  
Pounding—oh please, this once—  
—JAMES MERRILL*

I'll do what I must if I'm bold in real time.  
A refugee, I'll be paroled in real time.

Cool evidence clawed off like shirts of hell-fire?  
A former existence untold in real time ...

The one you would choose: Were you led then by him?  
What longing, O *Yaar*, is controlled in real time?

Each syllable sucked under waves of our earth—  
The funeral love comes to hold in real time!

They left him alive so that he could be lonely—  
The god of small things is not consoled in real time.

Please afterwards empty my pockets of keys—  
It's hell in the city of gold in real time.

God's angels again are—for Satan!—forlorn.  
Salvation was bought but sin sold in real time.

And who is the terrorist, who the victim?  
We'll know if the country is polled in real time.

“Behind a door marked DANGER” are being unwound  
the prayers my friend had enscribed in real time.

The throat of the rearview and sliding down it  
the Street of Farewell's now unrolled in real time.

I heard the incessant dissolving of silk—  
I felt my heart growing so old in real time.

Her heart must be ash where her body lies burned.  
What hope lets your hands rake the cold in real time?

Now Friend, the Belovèd has stolen your words—  
Read slowly: The plot will unfold in real time.

*(for Daniel Hall)*

*NOTES: Yaar: Hindi word for friend.*

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score. Recitation of the dedication at the end of the poem is optional. Inclusion or omission of the dedication should not affect your accuracy score.*

## Land

By [Agha Shahid Ali](#)

*For Christopher Merrill*

Swear by the olive in the God-kissed land—  
There is no sugar in the promised land.

Why must the bars turn neon now when, Love,  
I'm already drunk in your capitalist land?

If home is found on both sides of the globe,  
home is of course here—and always a missed land.

The hour's come to redeem the pledge (not wholly?)  
in Fate's "Long years ago we made a tryst" land.

Clearly, these men were here only to destroy,  
a mosque now the dust of a prejudiced land.

Will the Doomsayers die, bitten with envy,  
when springtime returns to our dismissed land?

The prisons fill with the cries of children.  
Then how do you subsist, how do you persist, Land?

"Is my love nothing for I've borne no children?"  
I'm with you, Sappho, in that anarchist land.

A hurricane is born when the wings flutter ...  
Where will the butterfly, on my wrist, land?

You made me wait for one who wasn't even there  
though summer had finished in that tourist land.

Do the blind hold temples close to their eyes  
when we steal their gods for our atheist land?

Abandoned bride, Night throws down her jewels  
so Rome—on our descent—is an amethyst land.

At the moment the heart turns terrorist,  
are Shahid's arms broken, O Promised Land?

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Prayer Rug

By [Agha Shahid Ali](#)

Those intervals  
between the day's  
five calls to prayer

the women of the house  
pulling thick threads  
through vegetables

rosaries of ginger  
of rustling peppers  
in autumn drying for winter

in those intervals this rug  
part of Grandma's dowry  
folded

so the Devil's shadow  
would not desecrate  
Mecca scarlet-woven

with minarets of gold  
but then the sunset  
call to prayer

the servants  
their straw mats unrolled

praying or in the garden

in summer on grass  
the children wanting  
the prayers to end

the women's foreheads  
touching Abraham's  
silk stone of sacrifice

black stone descended  
from Heaven  
the pilgrims in white circling it

this year my grandmother  
also a pilgrim  
in Mecca she weeps

as the stone is unveiled  
she weeps holding on  
to the pillars

(for Begum Zafar Ali)

## Snowmen

By [Agha Shahid Ali](#)

My ancestor, a man  
of Himalayan snow,  
came to Kashmir from Samarkand,  
carrying a bag  
of whale bones:  
heirlooms from sea funerals.  
His skeleton  
carved from glaciers, his breath  
arctic,  
he froze women in his embrace.  
His wife thawed into stony water,  
her old age a clear  
evaporation.

This heirloom,  
his skeleton under my skin, passed  
from son to grandson,  
generations of snowmen on my back.

They tap every year on my window,  
their voices hushed to ice.

No, they won't let me out of winter,  
and I've promised myself,  
even if I'm the last snowman,  
that I'll ride into spring  
on their melting shoulders.

## Explorer

By [Kazim Ali](#)

I fear dispersal but the resounding really sounds may be full of echo  
or echolocation for the next round

Eye rowed in the guest book of God my many sacred tongues  
body and bow

Fingers spell now all the spaces I open  
You now verse now open oh pen

Cacti quiver for a century  
In the desert I swam myself earthword to know

No time on earth and no breath no dearth  
Hollowed out into architecture eternal

Who argues with rhyme or snow  
Who knows the space in your here

The space in the storm so finely bowed  
The space in snow no one nears

## Rain

By [Kazim Ali](#)

With thick strokes of ink the sky fills with rain.  
Pretending to run for cover but secretly praying for more rain.

Over the echo of the water, I hear a voice saying my name.  
No one in the city moves under the quick sightless rain.

The pages of my notebook soak, then curl. I've written:  
"Yogis opened their mouths for hours to drink the rain."

The sky is a bowl of dark water, rinsing your face.  
The window trembles; liquid glass could shatter into rain.

I am a dark bowl, waiting to be filled.  
If I open my mouth now, I could drown in the rain.

I hurry home as though someone is there waiting for me.  
The night collapses into your skin. I am the rain.

## What You Have to Get Over

By [Dick Allen](#)

Stumps. Railroad tracks. Early sicknesses,  
the blue one, especially.  
Your first love rounding a corner,  
that snowy minefield.

Whether you step lightly or heavily,  
you have to get over to that tree line a hundred yards in the distance  
before evening falls,  
letting no one see you wend your way,

that wonderful, old-fashioned word, *wend*,  
meaning “to proceed, to journey,  
to travel from one place to another,”  
as from bed to breakfast, breakfast to imbecile work.

You have to get over your resentments,  
the sun in the morning and the moon at night,  
all those shadows of yourself you left behind  
on odd little tables.

*Tote that barge! Lift that bale!* You have to  
cross that river, jump that hedge, surmount that slogan,  
crawl over this ego or that eros,  
then hoist yourself up onto that yonder mountain.

Another old-fashioned word, *yonder*, meaning  
“that indicated place, somewhere generally seen  
or just beyond sight.” If you would recover,  
you have to get over the shattered autos in the backwoods lot

to that bridge in the darkness  
where the sentinels stand

guarding the border with their half-slung rifles,  
warned of the likes of you.

## “Un Tintero,” Inkwell

By [Desirée Alvarez](#)

Anger is the other person inside  
*mi garganta*, my throat.

The mouth’s mouth is the deepest.

Rage is the homeless boy fallen down a well.

Shout down and he will echo back.  
*La lengua*, tongue.

How long have you been down there?

*Subterráneo*, underground.

The letters of Cortés are difficult to read,  
on each page a horse dies.

The lord of the city lives homeless in a canoe.  
Hundreds of natives are speared.

Another town is burned alive  
with all its caged creatures.

On each page the people appear to walk  
over their dead.

*La tierra estercolada*, the earth fertilized,  
spreads a cloth whose pattern repeats.

On each page the future arrives  
on a raft woven of snakes.

Over and over, the design obliterates.

Never does he say this was their home we took.

# Finishing Up

By [A. R. Ammons](#)

I wonder if I know enough to know what it's really like  
to have been here: have I seen sights enough to give  
seeing over: the clouds, I've waited with white  
October clouds like these this afternoon often before and

taken them in, but white clouds shade other white  
ones gray, had I noticed that: and though I've  
followed the leaves of many falls, have I spent time with  
the wire vines left when frost's red dyes strip the leaves

away: is more missing than was never enough: I'm sure  
many of love's kinds absolve and heal, but were they passing  
rapids or welling stirs: I suppose I haven't done and seen  
enough yet to go, and, anyway, it may be way on on the way

before one picks up the track of the sufficient, the  
world-round reach, spirit deep, easing and all, not just mind  
answering itself but mind and things apprehended at once  
as one, all giving all way, not a scrap of question holding back.

# Mechanism

By [A. R. Ammons](#)

Honor a going thing, goldfinch, corporation, tree,  
    morality: any working order,  
animate or inanimate: it

has managed directed balance,  
    the incoming and outgoing energies are working right,  
some energy left to the mechanism,

some ash, enough energy held  
    to maintain the order in repair,  
assure further consumption of entropy,

expending energy to strengthen order:  
    honor the persisting reactor,  
the container of change, the moderator: the yellow

bird flashes black wing-bars  
    in the new-leaving wild cherry bushes by the bay,  
startles the hawk with beauty,

flitting to a branch where  
flash vanishes into stillness,  
hawk addled by the sudden loss of sight:

honor the chemistries, platelets, hemoglobin kinetics,  
the light-sensitive iris, the enzymic intricacies  
of control,

the gastric transformations, seed  
dissolved to acrid liquors, synthesized into  
chirp, vitreous humor, knowledge,

blood compulsion, instinct: honor the  
unique genes,  
molecules that reproduce themselves, divide into

sets, the nucleic grain transmitted  
in slow change through ages of rising and falling form,  
some cells set aside for the special work, mind

or perception rising into orders of courtship,  
territorial rights, mind rising  
from the physical chemistries

to guarantee that genes will be exchanged, male  
and female met, the satisfactions cloaking a deeper  
racial satisfaction:

heat kept by a feathered skin:  
the living alembic, body heat maintained (bunsen  
burner under the flask)

so the chemistries can proceed, reaction rates  
interdependent, self-adjusting, with optimum  
efficiency—the vessel firm, the flame

staying: isolated, contained reactions! the precise and  
necessary worked out of random, reproducible,  
the handiwork redeemed from chance, while the

goldfinch, unconscious of the billion operations  
that stay its form, flashes, chirping (not a  
great songster) in the bay cherry bushes wild of leaf.

# Self-Portrait as Kendrick Lamar, Laughing to the Bank

By [Ashanti Anderson](#)

This, what God feels like: laughing  
alone in an empty room of tiny doors,  
behind every door a metal box, inside each  
a man's red heart, lying. I don't write  
of the cartoonish thing split and jagged  
at its insides. Instead, of how I break  
even across the same backs spindled by hate.  
I tell God I understand and what I mean is  
I've noticed good people must die to let  
there be light in my house. We share a likeness,  
God and I, both laughing like something  
green folded in our throats. Laughing mean-  
while somebody's auntie asks for Anything  
Helps. Laughing when people say they don't  
want to read about the bad stuff. Crying  
laughing as we pass our pain off as an offering  
plate. Sometimes I nervous chuckle, knowing  
trauma pays, but the only time I really laugh  
is when I'm laughing to the bank like *a-ha*.

## Awakening in New York

By [Maya Angelou](#)

Curtains forcing their will  
against the wind,  
children sleep,  
exchanging dreams with  
seraphim. The city  
drags itself awake on  
subway straps; and  
I, an alarm, awake as a  
rumor of war,  
lie stretching into dawn,  
unasked and unheeded.

## Caged Bird

By [Maya Angelou](#)

A free bird leaps  
on the back of the wind  
and floats downstream

till the current ends  
and dips his wing  
in the orange sun rays  
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks  
down his narrow cage  
can seldom see through  
his bars of rage  
his wings are clipped and  
his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings  
with a fearful trill  
of things unknown  
but longed for still  
and his tune is heard  
on the distant hill  
for the caged bird  
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze  
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees  
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn  
and he names the sky his own

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams  
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream  
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings  
with a fearful trill  
of things unknown  
but longed for still  
and his tune is heard  
on the distant hill  
for the caged bird  
sings of freedom.

## **Kin**

By [Maya Angelou](#)

*FOR BAILEY*

We were entwined in red rings  
Of blood and loneliness before  
The first snows fell  
Before muddy rivers seeded clouds  
Above a virgin forest, and  
Men ran naked, blue and black  
Skinned into the warm embraces  
Of Sheba, Eve and Lilith.  
I was your sister.

You left me to force strangers  
Into brother molds, exacting  
Taxations they never  
Owed or could ever pay.

You fought to die, thinking  
In destruction lies the seed  
Of birth. You may be right.

I will remember silent walks in  
Southern woods and long talks  
In low voices  
Shielding meaning from the big ears  
Of overcurious adults.

You may be right.  
Your slow return from  
Regions of terror and bloody  
Screams, races my heart.  
I hear again the laughter  
Of children and see fireflies  
Bursting tiny explosions in  
An Arkansas twilight.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## **The Mothering Blackness**

By [Maya Angelou](#)

She came home running  
    back to the mothering blackness  
    deep in the smothering blackness  
white tears icicle gold plains of her face

She came home running

She came down creeping  
here to the black arms waiting  
now to the warm heart waiting  
rime of alien dreams befrosts her rich brown face  
She came down creeping

She came home blameless  
black yet as Hagar's daughter  
tall as was Sheba's daughter  
threats of northern winds die on the desert's face  
She came home blameless

## Maybe my most important identity is being a son

By [Raymond Antrobus](#)

my mother  
asking how  
to open a tab  
on her laptop,  
to email a photo,  
calling to ask—  
*can you change  
the lightbulb  
at the top of the stairs?*  
my mother  
spending hours  
helping me find  
a doctor's form,  
a hearing aid battery,  
anything  
misplaced, my mother  
who keeps leaving  
her keys in the doors  
or on the walls,  
who keeps saying  
*I might have to change  
the locks,* mother  
of self-sufficiency,  
of beads and trolleys,  
of handlebars,  
short-tempered  
spiteful mother,  
mother of resistance,

licorice and seaweed  
on the table,  
lonely mother,  
mother needs-no-man,  
mother deserves my cooking,  
deserves a long sleep,  
a cuppa tea, a garden  
of lavender mothers,  
all her heads up,  
mother's tooth  
falls out, mother  
dyes her hair,  
don't say graying  
say sea salt  
and cream, remedy,  
immortal mother.

## Our Nature

By [Rae Armantrout](#)

The very flatness  
of portraits  
makes for nostalgia  
in the connoisseur.

Here's the latest  
little lip of wave  
to flatten  
and spread thin.

Let's say  
it shows our recklessness,

our fast gun,

our self-consciousness  
which was really

our infatuation  
with our own fame,

our escapes,

the easy way  
we'd blend in

with the peasantry,

our loyalty  
to our old gang

from among whom  
it was our nature

to be singled out

## **Pinocchio**

By [Rae Armantrout](#)

Strand. String.  
In this dream,

the paths cross  
and cross again.

They are spelling  
a real boy

out of repetition.

•

Each one  
is the one

real boy.

Each knows  
he must be

wrong  
about this, but

he can't feel  
how.

•

The fish

and the fisherman,

the pilot,  
the princess,

the fireman and  
the ones on fire.

## Riddance

By [Rae Armantrout](#)

Ok, we've rendered  
the rendition

how often?

What were we trying  
to get rid of?

We exposed the homeless  
character of desire  
to the weather.

Shall we talk  
about the weather

worsening four times  
faster than expected,

eight times,

until the joy  
of pattern recognition  
kicks in?

Until the crest  
of the next ridge  
is what remains  
of division.

# Twilight

By [Rae Armantrout](#)

Where there's smoke  
there are mirrors

and a dry ice machine,  
industrial quality fans.

If I've learned anything  
about the present moment

•

But who doesn't  
love a flame,

the way one leaps  
into being

full-fledged,  
then leans over

to chat

•

Already the light  
is retrospective,  
sourceless,

is losing itself  
though the trees  
are clearly limned.

# Xenophobia

By [Rae Armantrout](#)

*I*

“must represent the governess  
for, of course, the creature itself  
could not inspire such terror.”

staring at me fixedly, no  
trace of recognition.

“when the window opened of its own accord.  
In the big walnut tree  
were six or seven wolves ...

strained attention. They were white.”

(The fear of cloudy skies.)

like strangers! After five years

Misgiving. Misdoubt.

## 2

(The fear that one is dreaming.)

The moon was shining, suddenly  
everything around me appeared  
(The fear of)  
unfamiliar.

Wild vista  
inside or near the home.

(Dread of bearing a monster.)

If I failed to overlook the torn cushions,

three teapots side by side,  
strewn towels, socks, papers—

both foreign and stale.

## 3

when I saw the frame was rotten,  
crumbling away from the glass,  
in spots, in other places still attached  
with huge globs of putty.

The doctor forced me to repeat the word.

Chimera. Cold feet.

scared and unreal looking at buildings.  
The thin Victorians with scaly paint,  
their flimsy backporches linked  
by skeletal stairways.

**4**

After five years

(The fear that you are not at home.)

I was sitting in the alcove where I never sit  
when I noticed a single eye,

crudely drawn in pencil,  
in a corner near the floor.

The paint was blistering—  
beneath it I saw white.

**5**

Sparrows settle on the sagging wires.

(Fear of sights not turned to words.)

Horrific. Grisly.  
“Rumplestiltskin!”

Not *my* expression.

Not my net of veins  
beneath thin skin.

(A morbid dread of throbbing.)

Of its own accord

# Zoom!

By [Simon Armitage](#)

It begins as a house, an end terrace  
in this case  
but it will not stop there. Soon it is  
an avenue  
which cambers arrogantly past the Mechanics' Institute,  
turns left  
at the main road without even looking  
and quickly it is  
a town with all four major clearing banks,  
a daily paper  
and a football team pushing for promotion.

On it goes, oblivious of the Planning Acts,  
the green belts,  
and before we know it it is out of our hands:  
city, nation,  
hemisphere, universe, hammering out in all directions  
until suddenly,  
mercifully, it is drawn aside through the eye  
of a black hole  
and bulleted into a neighbouring galaxy, emerging  
smaller and smoother  
than a billiard ball but weighing more than Saturn.

People stop me in the street, badger me  
in the check-out queue  
and ask "What is this, this that is so small  
and so very smooth  
but whose mass is greater than the ringed planet?"  
It's just words  
I assure them. But they will not have it.

# Mediation on a Grapefruit

By [Craig Arnold](#)

To wake when all is possible  
before the agitations of the day  
have gripped you  
To come to the kitchen  
and peel a little basketball  
for breakfast  
To tear the husk

like cotton padding      a cloud of oil  
misting out of its pinprick pores  
clean and sharp as pepper

                    To ease  
each pale pink section out of its case  
so carefully      without breaking  
a single pearly cell

                    To slide each piece  
into a cold blue china bowl  
the juice pooling      until the whole  
fruit is divided from its skin  
and only then to eat  
                    so sweet

                    a discipline  
precisely pointless      a devout  
involvement of the hands and senses  
a pause      a little emptiness

each year harder to live within  
each year harder to live without

## Very Large Moth

By [Craig Arnold](#)

*After D.H.L.*

Your first thought when the light snaps on and the black wings  
clatter about the kitchen      is a bat

the clear part of your mind considers rabies      the other part  
does not consider      knows only to startle

and cower away from the slap of its wings      though it is soon  
clearly not a bat but a moth      and harmless

still you are shy of it      it clings to the hood of the stove  
not black but brown      its orange eyes sparkle

like televisions      its leg joints are large enough to count  
how could you kill it      where would you hide the body

a creature so solid must have room for a soul  
and if this is so      why not in a creature

half its size      or half its size again      and so on  
down to the ants      clearly it must be saved

caught in a shopping bag and rushed to the front door  
afraid to crush it      feeling the plastic rattle

loosened into the night air      it batters the porch light  
throwing fitful shadows around the landing

*That was a really big moth*      is all you can say to the doorman  
who has watched your whole performance with a smile

the half-compassion and half-horror we feel for the creatures  
we want not to hurt      and prefer not to touch

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## **Everybody Believes They Are the Good Guy**

By [Cynthia Arrieu-King](#)

I was hanging with grandparents in a kindergarten

and the teacher drew an accordion wall across

to keep the children in antigravity class together

the grandparents separately graded balloon worksheets

sunlight floated in, the grandparents thoughtful about addition, mulling vacation

*Come here* I said to the little one too little to be in class, soft as peaches

*I want to tell you something and you repeat it back to me next time*

She toddled over, put her arms up to hug me, we hugged

She had stars inside her soul, was visibly celestial beneath her coat

*More human than human, got it?* I cuddled her

*Okay,* she said, *I'm more human than a human*

# If They Should Come for Us

By [Fatimah Asghar](#)

these are my people & I find  
them on the street & shadow  
through any wild all wild  
my people my people  
a dance of strangers in my blood  
the old woman's sari dissolving to wind  
bindi a new moon on her forehead  
I claim her my kin & sew  
the star of her to my breast  
the toddler dangling from stroller  
hair a fountain of dandelion seed  
at the bakery I claim them too  
the sikh uncle at the airport  
who apologizes for the pat  
down the muslim man who abandons  
his car at the traffic light drops  
to his knees at the call of the azan  
& the muslim man who sips  
good whiskey at the start of maghrib  
the lone khala at the park  
pairing her kurta with crocs  
my people my people I can't be lost  
when I see you my compass  
is brown & gold & blood  
my compass a muslim teenager  
snapback & high-tops gracing  
the subway platform  
mashallah I claim them all  
my country is made  
in my people's image  
if they come for you they  
come for me too in the dead  
of winter a flock of  
aunties step out on the sand  
their dupattas turn to ocean  
a colony of uncles grind their palms  
& a thousand jasmines bell the air  
my people I follow you like constellations  
we hear the glass smashing the street  
& the nights opening their dark  
our names this country's wood  
for the fire my people my people

the long years we've survived the long  
years yet to come I see you map  
my sky the light your lantern long  
ahead & I follow I follow

## Anasazi

By [Tacey M. Atsitty](#)

How can we die when we're already  
prone to leaving the table mid-meal  
like Ancient Ones gone to breathe  
elsewhere. Salt sits still, but pepper's gone  
rolled off in a rush. We've practiced dying  
for a long time: when we skip dance or town,  
when we chew. We've rounded out  
like dining room walls in a canyon, eaten  
through by wind—Sorry we rushed off;  
the food wasn't ours. Sorry the grease sits  
white on our plates, and the jam that didn't set—  
use it as syrup to cover every theory of us.

## Backdrop addresses cowboy

By [Margaret Atwood](#)

Starspangled cowboy  
sauntering out of the almost-  
silly West, on your face  
a porcelain grin,  
tugging a papier-mâché cactus  
on wheels behind you with a string,

you are innocent as a bathtub  
full of bullets.

Your righteous eyes, your laconic  
trigger-fingers  
people the streets with villains:  
as you move, the air in front of you  
blossoms with targets

and you leave behind you a heroic  
trail of desolation:  
beer bottles  
slaughtered by the side

of the road, bird-  
skulls bleaching in the sunset.

I ought to be watching  
from behind a cliff or a cardboard storefront  
when the shooting starts, hands clasped  
in admiration,  
but I am elsewhere.

Then what about me

what about the I  
confronting you on that border,  
you are always trying to cross?

I am the horizon  
you ride towards, the thing you can never lasso

I am also what surrounds you:  
my brain  
scattered with your  
tincans, bones, empty shells,  
the litter of your invasions.

I am the space you desecrate  
as you pass through.

## **Siren Song**

By [Margaret Atwood](#)

This is the one song everyone  
would like to learn: the song  
that is irresistible:

the song that forces men  
to leap overboard in squadrons  
even though they see the beached skulls

the song nobody knows  
because anyone who has heard it  
is dead, and the others can't remember.

Shall I tell you the secret  
and if I do, will you get me  
out of this bird suit?

I don't enjoy it here  
squatting on this island  
looking picturesque and mythical

with these two feathery maniacs,  
I don't enjoy singing  
this trio, fatal and valuable.

I will tell the secret to you,  
to you, only to you.  
Come closer. This song

is a cry for help: Help me!  
Only you, only you can,  
you are unique

at last. Alas  
it is a boring song  
but it works every time.

## **They are hostile nations**

By [Margaret Atwood](#)

i

In view of the fading animals  
the proliferation of sewers and fears  
the sea clogging, the air  
nearing extinction

we should be kind, we should  
take warning, we should forgive each other

Instead we are opposite, we  
touch as though attacking,

the gifts we bring  
even in good faith maybe  
warp in our hands to  
implements, to manoeuvres

ii

Put down the target of me  
you guard inside your binoculars,  
in turn I will surrender

this aerial photograph  
(your vulnerable  
sections marked in red)  
I have found so useful

See, we are alone in  
the dormant field, the snow  
that cannot be eaten or captured

iii

Here there are no armies  
here there is no money

It is cold and getting colder,

We need each others'  
breathing, warmth, surviving  
is the only war  
we can afford, stay

walking with me, there is almost  
time / if we can only  
make it as far as

the (possibly) last summer

## **Superstition**

By [Ashley August](#)

In Central America  
To whistle in your home meant you were making room for bad luck  
Like a man who didn't wipe his feet clean at the door  
It meant you were the inviting host of an evil spirit  
It meant you were asking for your home to be set on fire from the foundation  
In America, people whistle while they work  
Whistle while happy  
Whistle to call an animal on four legs closer

Recently I learned how to do this singing with

Just my lips, tongue, and breath  
Old habits die hard  
So I only do it outside the house

I have a fear of meeting the person who will ruin me while whistling  
While happy or attempting to start a fire  
Which means they will be my very own evil spirit on four legs  
The ghost my mother warned me about hissing past the doorframe  
The unseen fire starter  
The house will smell like propane and lighter fluid

While on the train, folks will look around like they just saw a ghost  
and ask what smells like it is burning  
and I know they will mean me  
Which translates to me being the one with the dead dog  
Which means they will know I am the one who did not listen to her mother  
Who plays with ghosts and doesn't expect  
a fire  
or man  
to burn my house  
down

## City Lights

By [Mary Avidano](#)

My father, rather a quiet man,  
told a story only the one time,  
if even then—he had so little  
need, it seemed, of being understood.  
Intervals of years, his silences!  
Late in his life he recalled for us  
that when he was sixteen, his papa  
entrusted to him a wagonload  
of hogs, which he was to deliver  
to the train depot, a half-day's ride  
from home, over a hilly dirt road.  
Lightly he held the reins, light his heart,  
the old horses, as ever, willing.  
In town at noon he heard the station-  
master say the train had been delayed,  
would not arrive until that evening.  
The boy could only wait. At home they'd  
wait for him and worry and would place  
the kerosene lamp in the window.  
Thus the day had turned to dusk before

he turned about the empty wagon,  
took his weary horses through the cloud  
of fireflies that was the little town.  
In all his years he'd never seen those  
lights—he thought of this, he said, until  
he and his milk-white horses came down  
the last moonlit hill to home, drawn as  
from a distance toward a single flame.

## Lucille's Roaches

By [Cameron Awkward-Rich](#)

*After Lucille Clifton*

O winged walker,  
motley brood  
& brood underneath  
the underneath. You,  
formidable residual,  
derelict carried  
to this country  
by the dread Atlantic  
wind. What did you see  
to make but yourself  
& yourself? Foul  
architect, teeming Queen  
of rot. Whereas you  
survive. Whereas your death  
is an industry. Whereas  
on the television  
in this century  
of television  
a woman wears you  
as a living jewel,  
rubied carapace  
on a gold leash.  
Whereas *beauty*  
was never meant  
to be your name—  
O harbinger  
of harbingers.  
O little, unending night.  
Whereas *murder*, too,  
was never right—  
they're just a sound

for what we do  
to the dark. O  
a sound I fear  
is the only sound  
I know.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Hole

By [Naomi Ayala](#)

One morning  
they dig up the sidewalk and leave.  
No sign of the truck,  
only the large,  
dark shadow digging and digging,  
piling up sludge with a hand shovel  
beside the only tree.  
Two o'clock I come by  
and he's slumbering in the grass beside rat holes.  
Three and he's stretched across a jagged stonewall,  
folded hands tucked beneath one ear—  
a beautiful young boy smiling,  
not the heavy, large shadow who can't breathe.  
Four-thirty and the August heat  
takes one down here.  
He's pulled up an elbow joint  
some three feet round.  
At seven I head home for the night,  
pass the fresh gravel mound,  
a soft footprint near the manhole  
like the "x" *abuelo* would place beside his name  
all the years he couldn't write.

## My Dad Says

By [Naomi Ayala](#)

I can do anything, so I try yoga nidra  
to see if I can find him.  
He's been dead four years now  
though I tell people when they ask, two. Just two.  
My mind refuses what it wants  
even if I haven't lost anything.

One day I caw like a seagull  
swooping in for a long dive.  
Another, I am hunger waking up the bear.  
Today I go to the trees to listen  
and he is an old cedar, but sweeter than that.  
When I was a girl, I knew I'd never be a girl exactly.  
He was the only one who knew it  
and let me run wild, would never tell the others.

## As Children Know

By Jimmy Santiago Baca

Elm branches radiate green heat,  
blackbirds stiffly strut across fields.  
Beneath bedroom wood floor, I feel earth—  
bread in an oven that slowly swells,  
simmering my Navajo blanket thread-crust  
as white-feathered and corn-tasseled  
Corn Dancers rise in a line, follow my calf,  
vanish in a rumple and surface at my knee-cliff,  
chanting. Wearing shagged buffalo headgear,  
Buffalo Dancer chases Deer Woman across  
Sleeping Leg mountain. Branches of wild rose  
trees rattle seeds. Deer Woman fades into hills  
of beige background. Red Bird  
of my heart thrashes wildly after her.  
What a stupid man I have been!  
How good to let imagination go,  
step over worrisome events,  
  those hacked logs  
  tumbled about  
  in the driveway.

Let decisions go!

Let them blow  
like school children's papers  
against the fence,  
rattling in the afternoon wind.

This Red Bird  
of my heart thrashes within the tidy appearance  
I offer the world,  
topples what I erect, snares what I set free,  
dashes what I've put together,  
indulges in things left unfinished,  
and my world is left, as children know,  
left as toys after dark in the sandbox.

# **I Am Offering this Poem**

By [Jimmy Santiago Baca](#)

I am offering this poem to you,  
since I have nothing else to give.  
Keep it like a warm coat  
when winter comes to cover you,  
or like a pair of thick socks  
the cold cannot bite through,

I love you,

I have nothing else to give you,  
so it is a pot full of yellow corn  
to warm your belly in winter,  
it is a scarf for your head, to wear  
over your hair, to tie up around your face,

I love you,

Keep it, treasure this as you would  
if you were lost, needing direction,  
in the wilderness life becomes when mature;  
and in the corner of your drawer,  
tucked away like a cabin or hogan  
in dense trees, come knocking,  
and I will answer, give you directions,  
and let you warm yourself by this fire,  
rest by this fire, and make you feel safe

I love you,

It's all I have to give,  
and all anyone needs to live,  
and to go on living inside,  
when the world outside  
no longer cares if you live or die;  
remember,

I love you.

**[It would be near if with the New Year]**

By [Jimmy Santiago Baca](#)

*for Miguel*

It would be neat if with the New Year  
I could leave my loneliness behind with the old year.  
My leathery loneliness an old pair of work boots  
my dog vigorously head-shakes back and forth in its jaws,  
chews on for hours every day in my front yard—  
rain, sun, snow, or wind  
in bare feet, pondering my poem,  
I'd look out my window and see that dirty pair of boots in the yard.

But my happiness depends so much on wearing those boots.

At the end of my day  
while I'm in a chair listening to a Mexican corrido  
I stare at my boots appreciating:  
all the wrong roads we've taken, all the drug and whiskey houses  
we've visited, and as the Mexican singer wails his pain,  
I smile at my boots, understanding every note in his voice,  
and strangers, when they see my boots rocking back and forth on my  
feet  
keeping beat to the song, see how  
my boots are scuffed, tooth-marked, worn-soled.

I keep wearing them because they fit so good  
and I need them, especially when I love so hard,  
where I go up those boulder strewn trails,  
where flowers crack rocks in their defiant love for the light.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Snowflake

By [William Baer](#)

Timing's everything. The vapor rises  
high in the sky, tossing to and fro,  
then freezes, suddenly, and crystalizes  
into a perfect flake of miraculous snow.  
For countless miles, drifting east above  
the world, whirling about in a swirling free-  
for-all, appearing aimless, just like love,  
but sensing, seeking out, its destiny.  
Falling to where the two young skaters stand,  
hand in hand, then flips and dips and whips  
itself about to ever-so-gently land,

a miracle, across her un-kissed lips:  
as he blocks the wind raging from the south,  
leaning forward to kiss her lovely mouth.

## **The Jewel Stairs' Grievance**

By [Li Bai](#)

Translated by Ezra Pound

The jewelled steps are already quite white with dew,  
It is so late that the dew soaks my gauze stockings,  
And I let down the crystal curtain  
And watch the moon through the clear autumn.

## **Song**

By [Joanna Baillie](#)

What voice is this, thou evening gale!  
That mingles with thy rising wail;  
And, as it passes, sadly seems  
The faint return of youthful dreams?

Though now its strain is wild and drear,  
Blithe was it once as sky-lark's cheer —  
Sweet as the night-bird's sweetest song, —  
Dear as the lisp of infant's tongue.

It was the voice, at whose sweet flow  
The heart did beat, and cheek did glow,  
And lip did smile, and eye did weep,  
And motioned love the measure keep.

Oft be thy sound, soft gale of even,  
Thus to my wistful fancy given;  
And, as I list the swelling strain,  
The dead shall seem to live again!

## **To Cupid**

By [Joanna Baillie](#)

Child, with many a childish wile,  
Timid look, and blushing smile,  
Downy wings to steal thy way,  
Gilded bow, and quiver gay,

Who in thy simple mien would trace  
The tyrant of the human race?

Who is he whose flinty heart  
Hath not felt the flying dart?  
Who is he that from the wound  
Hath not pain and pleasure found?  
Who is he that hath not shed  
Curse and blessing on thy head?

## **Faith**

By [David Baker](#)

It was midday before we noticed it was morning.  
The boy cousins brought us a tray—soup and cheese,  
warm soda, and a soft cloth and candy for her fever.  
They wouldn't come in, the tray weighing between them.  
They stood like woodwork inside the door frame.

By afternoon the old procession—silence at the lip  
of a dozen night travelers tired and grieving, one  
by one, or pairs floating to the bed and back  
with a touching of hands like humming,  
and the one we gathered for slipping farther

for all the good we could do. She lay in her shadow.  
She looked to no one. Her daylilies bobbed wide  
open out in the wild, blue sun and the same bee  
kept nosing her window to reach them.  
Dusk: even the boys were back watching it try.

## **Le sporting-club de Monte Carlo (for Lena Horne)**

By [James Baldwin](#)

The lady is a tramp  
a camp  
a lamp

The lady is a sight  
a might  
a light  
the lady devastated  
an alley or two  
reverberated through the valley

which leads to me, and you

the lady is the apple  
of God's eye:  
He's cool enough about it  
but He tends to strut a little  
when she passes by

the lady is a wonder  
daughter of the thunder  
smashing cages  
legislating rages  
with the voice of ages  
singing us through.

## History Textbook, America

By [JoAnn Balingit](#)

I'd search for Philippines in History class.  
The index named one page, moved on to Pierce.  
*The Making of America* marched past  
my enigmatic father's place of birth.  
The week he died some man we didn't know  
called up. *This is his brother*, one more shock,  
*phoning for him*. "He died three days ago."  
The leaden black receiver did not talk.  
My uncle never gave his name or town,  
we never heard from him. Was it a dream?  
The earpiece roar dissolved to crackling sounds,  
a dial tone erased the Philippines.  
And yet my world grows huge with maps, crisscrossed,  
my History alive with all I've lost.

## Legacy

By [Amiri Baraka](#)

*(For Blues People)*

In the south, sleeping against  
the drugstore, growling under  
the trucks and stoves, stumbling  
through and over the cluttered eyes  
of early mysterious night. Frowning  
drunk waving moving a hand or lash.

Dancing kneeling reaching out, letting  
a hand rest in shadows. Squatting  
to drink or pee. Stretching to climb  
pulling themselves onto horses near  
where there was sea (the old songs  
lead you to believe). Riding out  
from this town, to another, where  
it is also black. Down a road  
where people are asleep. Towards  
the moon or the shadows of houses.  
Towards the songs' pretended sea.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## The Rights of Women

By [Anna Lætitia Barbauld](#)

Yes, injured Woman! rise, assert thy right!  
Woman! too long degraded, scorned, opprest;  
O born to rule in partial Law's despite,  
Resume thy native empire o'er the breast!

Go forth arrayed in panoply divine;  
That angel pureness which admits no stain;  
Go, bid proud Man his boasted rule resign,  
And kiss the golden sceptre of thy reign.

Go, gird thyself with grace; collect thy store  
Of bright artillery glancing from afar;  
Soft melting tones thy thundering cannon's roar,  
Blushes and fears thy magazine of war.

Thy rights are empire: urge no meaner claim,—  
Felt, not defined, and if debated, lost;  
Like sacred mysteries, which withheld from fame,  
Shunning discussion, are revered the most.

Try all that wit and art suggest to bend  
Of thy imperial foe the stubborn knee;  
Make treacherous Man thy subject, not thy friend;  
Thou mayst command, but never canst be free.

Awe the licentious, and restrain the rude;  
Soften the sullen, clear the cloudy brow:

Be, more than princes' gifts, thy favours sued;—  
She hazards all, who will the least allow.

But hope not, courted idol of mankind,  
On this proud eminence secure to stay;  
Subduing and subdued, thou soon shalt find  
Thy coldness soften, and thy pride give way.

Then, then, abandon each ambitious thought,  
Conquest or rule thy heart shall feebly move,  
In Nature's school, by her soft maxims taught,  
That separate rights are lost in mutual love.

## To the Poor

By [Anna Lætitia Barbauld](#)

Child of distress, who meet'st the bitter scorn  
Of fellow-men to happier prospects born,  
Doomed Art and Nature's various stores to see  
Flow in full cups of joy—and not for thee;  
Who seest the rich, to heaven and fate resigned,  
Bear *thy* afflictions with a patient mind;  
Whose bursting heart disdains unjust control,  
Who feel'st oppression's iron in thy soul,  
Who dragg'st the load of faint and feeble years,  
Whose bread is anguish, and whose water tears;  
Bear, bear thy wrongs—fulfill thy destined hour,  
Bend thy meek neck beneath the foot of Power;  
But when thou feel'st the great deliverer nigh,  
And thy freed spirit mounting seeks the sky,  
Let no vain fears thy parting hour molest,  
No whispered terrors shake thy quiet breast:  
Think not their threats can work thy future woe,  
Nor deem the Lord above like lords below;—  
Safe in the bosom of that love repose  
By whom the sun gives light, the ocean flows;  
Prepare to meet a Father undismayed,  
Nor fear the God whom priests and kings have made.

## Aria

By [David Barber](#)

What if it were possible to vanquish  
All this shame with a wash of varnish

Instead of wishing the stain would vanish?

What if you gave it a glossy finish?  
What if there were a way to burnish  
All this foolishness, all the anguish?

What if you gave yourself leave to ravish  
All these ravages with famished relish?  
What if this were your way to flourish?

What if the self you love to punish —  
Knavish, peevish, wolfish, sheepish —  
Were all slicked up in something lavish?

Why so squeamish? Why make a fetish  
Out of everything you must relinquish?  
Why not embellish what you can't abolish?

What would be left if you couldn't brandish  
All the slavishness you've failed to banish?  
What would you be without this gibberish?

What if the true worth of the varnish  
Were to replenish your resolve to vanquish  
Every vain wish before you vanish?

## Corn Maze

By [David Barber](#)

Here is where  
You can get nowhere  
Faster than ever  
As you go under  
Deeper and deeper

In the fertile smother  
Of another acre  
Like any other  
You can't peer over  
And then another

And everywhere  
You veer or hare  
There you are  
Farther and farther

Afield than before

But on you blunder  
In the verdant meander  
As if the answer  
To looking for cover  
Were to bewilder

Your inner minotaur  
And near and far were  
Neither here nor there  
And where you are  
Is where you were

## Ice Bound

By [Walter Bargaen](#)

Sky's gray sheet spreads icy rain.  
Through the night we heard the branches cracking.  
Now they bend with the bowed ache of apostrophes.  
Backs to the window, sitting on the couch, we listen  
as the radio announces the list of schools closed.

An hour earlier I inched my way along  
the road, tires spinning toward the ditch.  
Now I read aloud to a teenage daughter,  
who tolerates my foolishness, my claim  
that Lao Tzu traversed a more slippery world.

With two books open on my lap, one in my hand,  
two on the floor, I'm surrounded by imperfect  
translations: a gathering chaos; something  
mysteriously formed; without beginning,  
without end; formless and perfect.

She responds, Sure,  
I knew that, so what? I persist:  
that existed before the heavens and the earth;  
before the universe was born. She's ready to go  
upstairs and listen to the radio. I ask,

What was her face before her parents were born?  
she answers, Nothing. I ask again.  
She says it again. Where are the angels,  
nights on humble knees, the psalms of faith,

the saints of daylight? She walks out of the room.

I'm surrounded by thin books.  
How pointless to go anywhere on this day,  
or maybe any other, but then  
the time comes when there is  
no other way but to stand firm on ice.

## Remarks on Poetry and the Physical World

By [Mary Barnard](#)

After reading *Ash Wednesday*  
she looked once at the baked beans  
and fled. Luncheonless, poor girl,  
she observed a kind of poetic Lent—  
and I had thought I liked poetry  
better than she did.

I do. But to me its most endearing  
quality is its unsuitableness;  
and, conversely, the chief wonder in heaven  
(whither I also am sometimes transported)  
is the kind of baggage I bring with me.

Surely there is no more exquisite jointure  
in the anatomy of life than that at which  
poetry dovetails with the inevitable meal  
and Mrs. B. sits murmuring of avocados.

## Napalm

By [Quan Barry](#)

I have come to realize the body is its own pyre, that degree  
rises from within, the fatty acids a kind of kindling.  
Like a scientist in a lab, this much I have established, blood jelled  
like gasoline, the years spread before me like a map  
pinned with targets, where I'm raging even now.  
It works both ways. Clear the forests to see your enemies  
and your enemies see you clearly. Like all effective incendiaries,  
I won't only bloom where I'm planted.

## Catch

By [Samiya Bashir](#)

if this is a game then we have made it, unknowing,  
to the final four. unlikely underdogs. spectators turned  
to suspect sport. anti-athletes. out of shape beyond reason.

at season's height we fight for a limited audience. few dancers.  
fewer cheers. down by 30 and our coach m.i.a. we, foolish, dribble.  
each bounce-back brings a stranger. can't call us for traveling because

we ain't going nowhere. instead, we trade terrified looks. search  
for the pass but no one stays open for long. even if we knew what to do  
to pull this through we've got two other teams waiting, impatient, to take us out.

## When the saints went

By [Samiya Bashir](#)

what remained: barren stalks bowing heads  
by the field-full. rusty air conditioners dripping  
from warped windowsills. rock formations retaining roots.

hollowed out caves and dog stumps forced ragged, toothy grins.  
all ablaze. a laser show shot hot through the tinny night. every husk  
wore a well lit protrusion. every breath an asthmatic thrush more material

than the silence that surrounds each carcass now: voided prayer: cold  
arthritic grating: remembering notions of breath. saints: offer a hand to a  
wheezing shadow: wish for someone to hold before the sure, sudden twilight.

## Dead Butterfly

By [Ellen Bass](#)

For months my daughter carried  
a dead monarch in a quart mason jar.  
To and from school in her backpack,  
to her only friend's house. At the dinner table  
it sat like a guest alongside the pot roast.  
She took it to bed, propped by her pillow.

Was it the year her brother was born?  
Was this her own too-fragile baby  
that had lived—so briefly—in its glassed world?  
Or the year she refused to go to her father's house?

Was this the holding-her-breath girl she became there?

This plump child in her rolled-down socks  
I sometimes wanted to haul back inside me  
and carry safe again. What was her fierce  
commitment? I never understood.  
We just lived with the dead winged thing  
as part of her, as part of us,  
weightless in its heavy jar.

## The Albatross

By [Kate Bass](#)

When I know you are coming home  
I put on this necklace:  
glass beads on a silken thread,  
a blue that used to match my eyes.  
I like to think I am remembering you.  
I like to think you don't forget.

The necklace lies heavy on my skin,  
it clatters when I reach down  
to lift my screaming child.  
I swing her, roll her in my arms until she forgets.  
The beads glitter in the flicker of a TV set  
as I sit her on my lap  
and wish away the afternoon.

I wait until I hear a gate latch lift  
the turn of key in lock.  
I sit amongst toys and unwashed clothes,  
I sit and she fingers the beads until you speak  
in a voice that no longer seems familiar, only strange.  
I turn as our child tugs at the string.  
I hear a snap and a sound like falling rain.

## The Cricket and the Grasshopper

By [Dan Beachy-Quick](#)

The senseless leaf in the fevered hand  
Grows hot, near blood-heat, but never grows  
Green. Weeks ago the dove's last cooing strain  
Settled silent in the nest to brood slow  
Absence from song. The dropped leaf cools

On the uncut grass, supple still, still green,  
Twining still these fingers as they listless pull  
The tangle straight until the tangle tightens  
And the hand is caught, another fallen leaf.  
The poetry of the earth never ceases  
Ceasing — one blade of grass denies belief  
Until its mere thread bears the grasshopper's  
Whole weight, and the black cricket sings unseen,  
Desire living in a hole beneath the tangle's green.

## **next to nothing**

By [Priscilla Becker](#)

when it was understood  
it could not happen

fast or all  
at once, the world

became my enclosed  
space, my trial

zone—small  
scrimps like the backyard

metal rake scraping  
concrete rather than

one vertical  
slit, or a christening

by walking  
farther and farther

out—the water  
trustworthy, the

edge, intimacy

the skill to  
connect into one dull

flow, able to go  
soundlessly,

scrupulously with no  
help, and paramount, no

signal:  
developing death

stamina, perfecting no  
expression until

I do not need  
a note

## Cabezón

By [Amy Beeder](#)

I see you shuffle up Washington Street  
whenever I am driving much too fast:  
you, chub & bug-eyed, jaw like a loaf  
hands in your pockets, a smoke dangling slack  
from the slit of your pumpkin mouth,  
humped over like the eel-man or geek,  
the dummy paid to sweep out gutters,

drown the cats. Where are you going now?  
Though someday you'll turn your gaze  
upon my shadow in this tinted glass  
I know for now you only look ahead  
at sidewalks cracked & paved with trash  
but what are you slouching toward—knee-locked,  
hippity, a hitch in your zombie walk, Bighead?

## Nostalgia

By [Chase Beggrun](#)

Wist is wetness  
and why, wind,  
why. Go and gather quickly  
before every shadow  
has dispersed to everywhere  
but beside you. God governs only  
what happens while  
it happens: this want  
is wine of your own making.  
Loud the quieter times, and quiet

loudest still, and reach  
and reach the branches that tree  
beside your bedroom window,  
growing to grasp you though felled  
ago no less than half a decade.  
How a day so dear and treasured began  
with a fist in your face. Skin-to-skin.  
Even the memory of that sound, somehow.

## **Epitaph on the Tombstone of a Child, the Last of Seven that Died Before**

By [Aphra Behn](#)

This Little, Silent, Gloomy Monument,  
Contains all that was sweet and innocent ;  
The softest pratler that e'er found a Tongue,  
His Voice was Musick and his Words a Song ;  
Which now each List'ning Angel smiling hears,  
Such pretty Harmonies compose the Spheres;  
Wanton as unfledg'd Cupids, ere their Charms  
Has learn'd the little arts of doing harms ;  
Fair as young Cherubins, as soft and kind,  
And tho translated could not be refin'd ;  
The Seventh dear pledge the Nuptial Joys had given,  
Toil'd here on Earth, retir'd to rest in Heaven ;  
Where they the shining Host of Angels fill,  
Spread their gay wings before the Throne, and smile.

## **Love Armed**

By [Aphra Behn](#)

*Song from Abdelazar*

Love in Fantastic Triumph sat,  
Whilst Bleeding Hearts around him flowed,  
For whom Fresh pains he did Create,  
And strange Tyrannic power he showed;  
From thy Bright Eyes he took his fire,  
Which round about, in sport he hurled;  
But 'twas from mine he took desire  
Enough to undo the Amorous World.

From me he took his sighs and tears,  
From thee his Pride and Cruelty;

From me his Languishments and Fears,  
And every Killing Dart from thee;  
Thus thou and I, the God have armed,  
And set him up a Deity;  
But my poor Heart alone is harmed,  
Whilst thine the Victor is, and free.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## A Thousand Martyrs

By [Aphra Behn](#)

A thousand martyrs I have made,  
All sacrificed to my desire;  
A thousand beauties have betrayed,  
That languish in resistless fire.  
The untamed heart to hand I brought,  
And fixed the wild and wandering thought.

I never vowed nor sighed in vain  
But both, though false, were well received.  
The fair are pleased to give us pain,  
And what they wish is soon believed.  
And though I talked of wounds and smart,  
Love's pleasures only touched my heart.

Alone the glory and the spoil  
I always laughing bore away;  
The triumphs, without pain or toil,  
Without the hell, the heav'n of joy.  
And while I thus at random rove  
Despise the fools that whine for love.

## An Introduction to My Anthology

By [Marvin Bell](#)

Such a book must contain—  
it always does!—a disclaimer.  
I make no such. For here  
I have collected all the best—  
the lily from the field among them,  
forget-me-nots and mint weed,  
a rose for whoever expected it,

and a buttercup for the children  
to make their noses yellow.

Here is clover for the lucky  
to roll in, and milkweed to clatter,  
a daisy for one judgment,  
and a violet for when he loves you  
or if he loves you not and why not.  
Those who sniff and say no,  
These are the wrong ones (and  
there always are such people!)—  
let them go elsewhere, and quickly!

For you and I, who have made it this far,  
are made happy by occasions  
requiring orchids, or queenly arrangements  
and even a bird-of-paradise,  
but happier still by the flowers of  
circumstance, cattails of our youth,  
field grass and bulrush. I have included  
the devil's paintbrush  
but only as a peacock among barn fowl.

## The Uniform

By [Marvin Bell](#)

Of the sleeves, I remember their weight, like wet wool,  
on my arms, and the empty ends which hung past my hands.  
Of the body of the shirt, I remember the large buttons  
and larger buttonholes, which made a rack of wheels  
down my chest and could not be quickly unbuttoned.  
Of the collar, I remember its thickness without starch,  
by which it lay against my clavicle without moving.  
Of my trousers, the same—heavy, bulky, slow to give  
for a leg, a crowded feeling, a molasses to walk in.  
Of my boots, I remember the brittle soles, of a material  
that had not been made love to by any natural substance,  
and the laces: ropes to make prisoners of my feet.  
Of the helmet, I remember the webbed, inner liner,  
a brittle plastic underwear on which wobbled  
the crushing steel pot then strapped at the chin.  
Of the mortar, I remember the mortar plate,  
heavy enough to kill by weight, which I carried by rope.  
Of the machine gun, I remember the way it fit  
behind my head and across my shoulder blades

as I carried it, or, to be precise, as it rode me.  
Of tactics, I remember the likelihood of shooting  
the wrong man, the weight of the rifle bolt, the difficulty  
of loading while prone, the shock of noise.  
For earplugs, some used cigarette filters or toilet paper.  
I don't hear well now, for a man of my age,  
and the doctor says my ears were damaged and asks  
if I was in the Army, and of course I was but then  
a wounded eardrum wasn't much in the scheme.

## Somewhere Thuban Is Fading

By [Rosebud Ben-Oni](#)

*For Carolina Ebeid*

We enrolled at barbizon  
Knowing full well  
We'd never look like  
What was promised  
Cue carol of the bells  
Cue a demo on the casio  
And the security of two-way  
Escalators setting the speed  
Those early mornings  
In our mall school  
The store's silver grills  
Some mannequins left  
Half-clothed  
We'd taunt them  
With our imagined summers  
In london paris rome  
We weren't please and thank you  
Walking with books on our heads  
No we were going to devastate  
Greek shipping heirs  
At every port of call

Yet when our bus broke down  
And we trudged the shoulder  
Of highways  
Single file  
Dodging cigarette butt and horn  
We shook off those mornings  
Studied  
Their defenseless

Indifference  
The blinding surface  
The quality of electric  
Without being alive  
We knew that there  
In only hot pants  
The ideal form  
Plastic  
Most would take a bullet for

While at 16

We were already trash-talking  
Our prayers never went beyond  
The second floor  
Light-years away  
From the last word  
That distant somewhere  
Where a boat loses course  
The north star forsaking  
Its name to another

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Difference

By [Stephen Vincent Benét](#)

My mind's a map. A mad sea-captain drew it  
Under a flowing moon until he knew it;  
Winds with brass trumpets, puffy-cheeked as jugs,  
And states bright-patterned like Arabian rugs.  
"Here there be tygers." "Here we buried Jim."  
Here is the strait where eyeless fishes swim  
About their buried idol, drowned so cold  
He weeps away his eyes in salt and gold.  
A country like the dark side of the moon,  
A cider-apple country, harsh and boon,  
A country savage as a chestnut-rind,  
A land of hungry sorcerers.

Your mind?

—Your mind is water through an April night,  
A cherry-branch, plume-feathery with its white,  
A lavender as fragrant as your words,  
A room where Peace and Honor talk like birds,

Sewing bright coins upon the tragic cloth  
Of heavy Fate, and Mockery, like a moth,  
Flutters and beats about those lovely things.  
You are the soul, enchanted with its wings,  
The single voice that raises up the dead  
To shake the pride of angels.

I have said.

## On Education

By [Elizabeth Bentley](#)

*December 1789*

When infant Reason first exerts her sway,  
And new-formed thoughts their earliest charms display;  
Then let the growing race employ your care  
Then guard their opening minds from Folly's snare;  
Correct the rising passions of their youth,  
Teach them each serious, each important truth;  
Plant heavenly virtue in the tender breast,  
Destroy each vice that might its growth molest;  
Point out betimes the course they should pursue;  
Then with redoubled pleasure shall you view  
Their reason strengthen as their years increase,  
Their virtue ripen and their follies cease;  
Like corn sown early in the fertile soil,  
The richest harvest shall repay your toil.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Sad Boy's Sad Boy

By [Charles Bernstein](#)

I ruin my hats and all the mat slides glad  
I hop my girls and all is skip again  
I jump I run you up inside my truck

The car goes looping out in dark and light  
And yellow hat slides in  
I run my mats and all the girl slides glad

I hoped you skipped me into luck  
And jump me black, ruin me glad

I jump I run you up inside my truck

I jump my slopes and all the dopes slide glad  
I glide my luck and all is slip again  
I jump my hopes and all the rope glides sad

I skip you jump the way you said  
But I run old and sigh your name  
I ruin my mats and all the girl slides glad

At least when luck hops it skips back again  
A rune my mats and all the girls slide glad  
I jump I run you up inside my truck

*After "Mad Girl's Love Song" by Sylvia Plath*

***Note to Poetry Out Loud students:*** Recitation of the dedication at the end of the poem is optional.  
*Inclusion or omission of the dedication should not affect your accuracy score.*

## Enemies

By [Wendell Berry](#)

If you are not to become a monster,  
you must care what they think.  
If you care what they think,

how will you not hate them,  
and so become a monster  
of the opposite kind? From where then

is love to come—love for your enemy  
that is the way of liberty?  
From forgiveness. Forgiven, they go

free of you, and you of them;  
they are to you as sunlight  
on a green branch. You must not

think of them again, except  
as monsters like yourself,  
pitiable because unforgiving.

# the name before the name before mine

By [Jay Besemer](#)

the unknown has hold of me and its grip is strong as honey on the underside of a spoon  
the unknown i mean is not the usual one the future the tomorrow of survival  
but the past and what happened in the name of the name after mine and in the name of the  
name before mine  
i do not know enough to speak i do not know enough to remain silent  
there is a fear that holds me and it sounds like wind it sounds like katydids in catalpa  
ah the tall grass of the days before i knew there was a before me  
where do i live if there's no home remaining  
where do i live if the home i helped build can never be mine and the one i was born into  
never was

# The New Decalogue

By [Ambrose Bierce](#)

Have but one God: thy knees were sore  
If bent in prayer to three or four.  
  
Adore no images save those  
The coinage of thy country shows.  
  
Take not the Name in vain. Direct  
Thy swearing unto some effect.  
  
Thy hand from Sunday work be held—  
Work not at all unless compelled.  
  
Honor thy parents, and perchance  
Their wills thy fortunes may advance.  
  
Kill not—death liberates thy foe  
From persecution's constant woe.  
  
Kiss not thy neighbor's wife. Of course  
There's no objection to divorce.

To steal were folly, for 'tis plain  
In cheating there is greater gain.

Bear not false witness. Shake your head  
And say that you have "heard it said."

Who stays to covet ne'er will catch  
An opportunity to snatch.

## The Statesmen

By [Ambrose Bierce](#)

How blest the land that counts among  
Her sons so many good and wise,  
To execute great feats of tongue  
When troubles rise.

Behold them mounting every stump,  
By speech our liberty to guard.  
Observe their courage—see them jump,  
And come down hard!

"Walk up, walk up!" each cries aloud,  
"And learn from me what you must do  
To turn aside the thunder cloud,  
The earthquake too.

"Beware the wiles of yonder quack  
Who stuffs the ears of all that pass.  
I—I alone can show that black  
Is white as grass."

They shout through all the day and break  
The silence of the night as well.  
They'd make—I wish they'd *go* and make—  
Of Heaven a Hell.

A advocates free silver, B  
Free trade and C free banking laws.  
Free board, clothes, lodging would from me  
Win warm applause.

Lo, D lifts up his voice: "You see  
The single tax on land would fall

On all alike." More evenly  
No tax at all.

"With paper money," bellows E,  
"We'll all be rich as lords." No doubt—  
And richest of the lot will be  
The chap without.

As many "cures" as addle-wits  
Who know not what the ailment is!  
Meanwhile the patient foams and spits  
Like a gin fizz.

Alas, poor Body Politic,  
Your fate is all too clearly read:  
To be not altogether quick,  
Nor very dead.

You take your exercise in squirms,  
Your rest in fainting fits between.  
'Tis plain that your disorder's worms—  
Worms fat and lean.

Worm Capital, Worm Labor dwell  
Within your maw and muscle's scope.  
Their quarrels make your life a Hell,  
Your death a hope.

God send you find not such an end  
To ills however sharp and huge!  
God send you convalesce! God send  
You vermifuge.

## **At the Vietnam Memorial**

By [George Bilgere](#)

The last time I saw Paul Castle  
it was printed in gold on the wall  
above the showers in the boys'  
locker room, next to the school  
record for the mile. I don't recall  
his time, but the year was 1968  
and I can look across the infield  
of memory to see him on the track,  
legs flashing, body bending slightly

beyond the pack of runners at his back.

He couldn't spare a word for me,  
two years younger, junior varsity,  
and hardly worth the waste of breath.  
He owned the hallways, a cool blonde  
at his side, and aimed his interests  
further down the line than we could guess.

Now, reading the name again,  
I see us standing in the showers,  
naked kids beneath his larger,  
comprehensive force—the ones who trail  
obscurely, in the wake of the swift,  
like my shadow on this gleaming wall.

## Filling Station

By [Elizabeth Bishop](#)

Oh, but it is dirty!  
—this little filling station,  
oil-soaked, oil-permeated  
to a disturbing, over-all  
black translucency.  
Be careful with that match!

Father wears a dirty,  
oil-soaked monkey suit  
that cuts him under the arms,  
and several quick and saucy  
and greasy sons assist him  
(it's a family filling station),  
all quite thoroughly dirty.

Do they live in the station?  
It has a cement porch  
behind the pumps, and on it  
a set of crushed and grease-  
impregnated wickerwork;  
on the wicker sofa  
a dirty dog, quite comfy.

Some comic books provide  
the only note of color—  
of certain color. They lie

upon a big dim doily  
draping a taboret  
(part of the set), beside  
a big hirsute begonia.

Why the extraneous plant?  
Why the taboret?  
Why, oh why, the doily?  
(Embroidered in daisy stitch  
with marguerites, I think,  
and heavy with gray crochet.)

Somebody embroidered the doily.  
Somebody waters the plant,  
or oils it, maybe. Somebody  
arranges the rows of cans  
so that they softly say:  
ESSO—SO—SO—SO  
to high-strung automobiles.  
Somebody loves us all.

## One Art

By [Elizabeth Bishop](#)

The art of losing isn't hard to master;  
so many things seem filled with the intent  
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster  
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.  
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:  
places, and names, and where it was you meant  
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or  
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.  
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,  
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.  
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

—Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture

I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident  
the art of losing's not too hard to master  
though it may look like (*Write it!*) like disaster.

## **Istanbul 1983**

By [Sheila Black](#)

In the frozen square, the student asks me if I will  
sell him the books from my backpack. He hides them  
under his winter coat. Steam rises from the whole  
wheat rolls we break open at the breakfast table.  
We drink hot apple tea and pronounce the skyline  
“charming.” In a jail a man counts the visible bones,  
and recounts them in the blaze of morning. To turn  
a self to light proves painful — each piece must  
be dissected in turn; you pass through every feeling  
imaginable, so many you might make a dictionary —  
dread to disgust, delight to degradation. The prisoner  
remembers wanting only to read as if in a fever —  
running fingers over pyramids of words as if he might  
translate himself from this life to a more vivid existence  
in which he cuts open the pages with a knife in  
plain sight of everyone like a man eating meat and  
potatoes at the dinner table. Not that world; this one  
where blue light and sharpened files, where identikit  
and stamps on passports, where the book in his back-  
pack is a crime, and I have sold him down the river  
for ideas I barely value — the volumes flung carelessly  
across my hotel room, while he picks mushrooms on  
the edge of dread, pallid ghosts of what won't speak  
or be spoken. Or where I remember what it is to  
be present in the world, and I turn away, unable to  
bear it — so much light and dread, so much in the darkness  
growing or simply how hard to ever remain in place.

## **About Standing (in Kinship)**

By [Kimberly Blaeser](#)

We all have the same little bones in our foot  
twenty-six with funny names like *navicular*.  
Together they build something strong—  
our foot arch a pyramid holding us up.  
The bones don't get casts when they break.  
We tape them—one *phalange* to its neighbor for support.

(Other things like sorrow work that way, too—  
find healing in the leaning, the closeness.)  
Our feet have one quarter of all the bones in our body.  
Maybe we should give more honor to feet  
and to all those tiny but blessed cogs in the world—  
communities, the forgotten architecture of friendship.

## **The Chimney Sweeper: A little black thing among the snow**

By [William Blake](#)

A little black thing among the snow,  
Crying "weep! 'weep!" in notes of woe!  
"Where are thy father and mother? say?"  
"They are both gone up to the church to pray.

Because I was happy upon the heath,  
And smil'd among the winter's snow,  
They clothed me in the clothes of death,  
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

And because I am happy and dance and sing,  
They think they have done me no injury,  
And are gone to praise God and his Priest and King,  
Who make up a heaven of our misery."

## **The Chimney Sweeper: When my mother died I was very young**

By [William Blake](#)

When my mother died I was very young,  
And my father sold me while yet my tongue  
Could scarcely cry " 'weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep!"  
So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.

There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head  
That curled like a lamb's back, was shaved, so I said,  
"Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare,  
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair."

And so he was quiet, & that very night,  
As Tom was a-sleeping he had such a sight!  
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, & Jack,  
Were all of them locked up in coffins of black;

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,  
And he opened the coffins & set them all free;  
Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing they run,  
And wash in a river and shine in the Sun.

Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,  
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind.  
And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,  
He'd have God for his father & never want joy.

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark  
And got with our bags & our brushes to work.  
Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm;  
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.

## **The Ecchoing Green**

By [William Blake](#)

The sun does arise,  
And make happy the skies.  
The merry bells ring  
To welcome the Spring.  
The sky-lark and thrush,  
The birds of the bush,  
Sing louder around,  
To the bells' cheerful sound.  
While our sports shall be seen  
On the Ecchoing Green.

Old John, with white hair  
Does laugh away care,  
Sitting under the oak,  
Among the old folk,  
They laugh at our play,  
And soon they all say.  
'Such, such were the joys.  
When we all girls & boys,  
In our youth-time were seen,  
On the Ecchoing Green.'

Till the little ones weary  
No more can be merry  
The sun does descend,  
And our sports have an end:  
Round the laps of their mothers,

Many sisters and brothers,  
Like birds in their nest,  
Are ready for rest;  
And sport no more seen,  
On the darkening Green.

## Introduction to the Songs of Innocence

By [William Blake](#)

Piping down the valleys wild  
Piping songs of pleasant glee  
On a cloud I saw a child.  
And he laughing said to me.

Pipe a song about a Lamb;  
So I piped with merry chear,  
Piper pipe that song again—  
So I piped, he wept to hear.

Drop thy pipe thy happy pipe  
Sing thy songs of happy chear,  
So I sung the same again  
While he wept with joy to hear

Piper sit thee down and write  
In a book that all may read—  
So he vanish'd from my sight.  
And I pluck'd a hollow reed.

And I made a rural pen,  
And I stain'd the water clear,  
And I wrote my happy songs  
Every child may joy to hear

## London

By [William Blake](#)

I wander thro' each charter'd street,  
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.  
And mark in every face I meet  
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,  
In every Infants cry of fear,

In every voice: in every ban,  
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear

How the Chimney-sweepers cry  
Every blackning Church appalls,  
And the hapless Soldiers sigh  
Runs in blood down Palace walls

But most thro' midnight streets I hear  
How the youthful Harlots curse  
Blasts the new-born Infants tear  
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse

## Mad Song

By [William Blake](#)

The wild winds weep,  
    And the night is a-cold;  
Come hither, Sleep,  
    And my griefs infold:  
But lo! the morning peeps  
    Over the eastern steeps,  
And the rustling birds of dawn  
The earth do scorn.

Lo! to the vault  
    Of paved heaven,  
With sorrow fraught  
    My notes are driven:  
They strike the ear of night,  
    Make weep the eyes of day;  
They make mad the roaring winds,  
    And with tempests play.

Like a fiend in a cloud  
    With howling woe,  
After night I do croud,  
    And with night will go;  
I turn my back to the east,  
From whence comforts have increas'd;  
For light doth seize my brain  
With frantic pain.

# A Poison Tree

By [William Blake](#)

I was angry with my friend;  
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.  
I was angry with my foe:  
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I waterd it in fears,  
Night & morning with my tears:  
And I sunned it with smiles,  
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night.  
Till it bore an apple bright.  
And my foe beheld it shine,  
And he knew that it was mine.

And into my garden stole,  
When the night had veild the pole;  
In the morning glad I see;  
My foe outstretched beneath the tree.

# The Tyger

By [William Blake](#)

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,  
In the forests of the night;  
What immortal hand or eye,  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies.  
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?  
On what wings dare he aspire?  
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,  
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?  
And when thy heart began to beat,  
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,  
In what furnace was thy brain?  
What the anvil? what dread grasp,  
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

When the stars threw down their spears  
And water'd heaven with their tears:  
Did he smile his work to see?  
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,  
In the forests of the night:  
What immortal hand or eye,  
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

## **Burning in the Rain**

By [Richard Blanco](#)

Someday compassion would demand  
I set myself free of my desire to recreate  
my father, indulge in my mother's losses,  
strangle lovers with words, forcing them  
to confess for me and take the blame.  
Today was that day: I tossed them, sheet  
by sheet on the patio and gathered them  
into a pyre. I wanted to let them go  
in a blaze, tiny white dwarfs imploding  
beside the azaleas and ficus bushes,  
let them crackle, burst like winged seeds,  
let them smolder into gossamer embers—  
a thousand gray butterflies in the wind.  
Today was that day, but it rained, kept  
raining. Instead of fire, water—drops  
knocking on doors, wetting windows  
into mirrors reflecting me in the oaks.  
The garden walls and stones swelling  
into ghostlier shades of themselves,  
the wind chimes giggling in the storm,  
a coffee cup left overflowing with rain.  
Instead of burning, my pages turned  
into water lilies floating over puddles,  
then tiny white cliffs as the sun set,  
finally drying all night under the moon  
into papier-mâché souvenirs. Today  
the rain would not let their lives burn.

# The Bug

By [Tommye Blount](#)

lands on my pretty man's forearm. Harmless,  
it isn't deadly at all; makes his muscle flutter  
— the one that gets his hand to hold mine, or  
ball into a fist, or handle a gun. It's a ladybug,  
or an Asian lady beetle everyone mistakes  
for a ladybug — eating whatever  
it lands on. My pretty man is asleep — at ease, or  
plotting like the bug. Or maybe the bug  
is a blowfly — eating my pretty man's tan  
from his pretty arm. My man swats it  
without waking, as if he's dreaming of an enemy,  
or me. When my pretty man isn't asleep  
he's got a temper.

No, he is not

asleep. He's wide awake and wants me to tell you  
I'm wrong. Blowflies don't eat skin,  
they lay eggs on skin. He knows all about  
blowfly larvae. Napoleon used them  
to clean war wounds, my cold pretty man  
says in that pretty way,  
with his cold pretty mouth. He's eaten plenty  
of bugs before. On night watch,  
over there. Over there, they're everywhere.

# Driving Toward the Lac Qui Parle River

By [Robert Bly](#)

*I*

I am driving; it is dusk; Minnesota.  
The stubble field catches the last growth of sun.  
The soybeans are breathing on all sides.  
Old men are sitting before their houses on car seats  
In the small towns. I am happy,  
The moon rising above the turkey sheds.

*II*

The small world of the car  
Plunges through the deep fields of the night,  
On the road from Willmar to Milan.  
This solitude covered with iron

Moves through the fields of night  
Penetrated by the noise of crickets.

*III*

Nearly to Milan, suddenly a small bridge,  
And water kneeling in the moonlight.  
In small towns the houses are built right on the ground;  
The lamplight falls on all fours on the grass.  
When I reach the river, the full moon covers it.  
A few people are talking, low, in a boat.

## **Prayer for My Father**

By [Robert Bly](#)

Your head is still  
restless, rolling  
east and west.  
That body in you  
insisting on living  
is the old hawk  
for whom the world  
darkens.  
If I am not  
with you when you die,  
that is just.

It is all right.  
That part of you cleaned  
my bones more  
than once. But I  
will meet you  
in the young hawk  
whom I see  
inside both  
you and me; he  
will guide  
you to the Lord of Night,  
who will give you  
the tenderness  
you wanted here.

# Waking from Sleep

By [Robert Bly](#)

Inside the veins there are navies setting forth,  
Tiny explosions at the waterlines,  
And seagulls weaving in the wind of the salty blood.

It is the morning. The country has slept the whole winter.  
Window seats were covered with fur skins, the yard was full  
Of stiff dogs, and hands that clumsily held heavy books.

Now we wake, and rise from bed, and eat breakfast!  
Shouts rise from the harbor of the blood,  
Mist, and masts rising, the knock of wooden tackle in the sunlight.

Now we sing, and do tiny dances on the kitchen floor.  
Our whole body is like a harbor at dawn;  
We know that our master has left us for the day.

# Medusa

By [Louise Bogan](#)

I had come to the house, in a cave of trees,  
Facing a sheer sky.  
Everything moved,—a bell hung ready to strike,  
Sun and reflection wheeled by.

When the bare eyes were before me  
And the hissing hair,  
Held up at a window, seen through a door.  
The stiff bald eyes, the serpents on the forehead  
Formed in the air.

This is a dead scene forever now.  
Nothing will ever stir.  
The end will never brighten it more than this,  
Nor the rain blur.

The water will always fall, and will not fall,  
And the tipped bell make no sound.  
The grass will always be growing for hay  
Deep on the ground.

And I shall stand here like a shadow  
Under the great balanced day,

My eyes on the yellow dust, that was lifting in the wind,  
And does not drift away.

## Women

By [Louise Bogan](#)

Women have no wilderness in them,  
They are provident instead,  
Content in the tight hot cell of their hearts  
To eat dusty bread.

They do not see cattle cropping red winter grass,  
They do not hear  
Snow water going down under culverts  
Shallow and clear.

They wait, when they should turn to journeys,  
They stiffen, when they should bend.  
They use against themselves that benevolence  
To which no man is friend.

They cannot think of so many crops to a field  
Or of clean wood cleft by an axe.  
Their love is an eager meaninglessness  
Too tense, or too lax.

They hear in every whisper that speaks to them  
A shout and a cry.  
As like as not, when they take life over their door-sills  
They should let it go by.

## And Soul

By [Eavan Boland](#)

My mother died one summer—  
the wettest in the records of the state.  
Crops rotted in the west.  
Checked tablecloths dissolved in back gardens.  
Empty deck chairs collected rain.  
As I took my way to her  
through traffic, through lilacs dripping blackly  
behind houses  
and on curbsides, to pay her  
the last tribute of a daughter, I thought of something

I remembered  
I heard once, that the body is, or is  
said to be, almost all  
water and as I turned southward, that ours is  
a city of it,  
one in which  
every single day the elements begin  
a journey towards each other that will never,  
given our weather,  
fail—  
the ocean visible in the edges cut by it,  
cloud color reaching into air,  
the Liffey storing one and summoning the other,  
salt greeting the lack of it at the North Wall and,  
as if that wasn't enough, all of it  
ending up almost every evening  
inside our speech—  
*coast canal ocean river stream* and now  
*mother* and I drove on and although  
the mind is unreliable in grief, at  
the next cloudburst it almost seemed  
they could be shades of each other,  
the way the body is  
of every one of them and now  
they were on the move again—fog into mist,  
mist into sea spray and both into the oily glaze  
that lay on the railings of  
the house she was dying in  
as I went inside.

## How We Made a New Art on Old Ground

By [Eavan Boland](#)

A famous battle happened in this valley.  
You never understood the nature poem.  
Till now. Till this moment—if these statements  
seem separate, unrelated, follow this  
  
silence to its edge and you will hear  
the history of air: the crispness of a fern  
or the upward cut and turn around of  
a fieldfare or thrush written on it.  
  
The other history is silent: The estuary  
is over there. The issue was decided here:

Two kings prepared to give no quarter.  
Then one king and one dead tradition.

Now the humid dusk, the old wounds  
wait for language, for a different truth:  
When you see the silk of the willow  
and the wider edge of the river turn

and grow dark and then darker, then  
you will know that the nature poem  
is not the action nor its end: it is  
this rust on the gate beside the trees, on

the cattle grid underneath our feet,  
on the steering wheel shaft: it is  
an aftermath, an overlay and even in  
its own modest way, an art of peace:

I try the word *distance* and it fills with  
sycamores, a summer's worth of pollen  
And as I write *valley* straw, metal  
blood, oaths, armour are unwritten.

Silence spreads slowly from these words  
to those ilex trees half in, half out  
of shadows falling on the shallow ford  
of the south bank beside Yellow Island

as twilight shows how this sweet corrosion  
begins to be complete: what we see  
is what the poem says:  
evening coming—cattle, cattle-shadows—

and whin bushes and a change of weather  
about to change them all: what we see is how  
the place and the torment of the place are  
for this moment free of one another.

## The Lost Land

By [Eavan Boland](#)

I have two daughters.

They are all I ever wanted from the earth.

Or almost all.

I also wanted one piece of ground:

One city trapped by hills. One urban river.  
An island in its element.

So I could say *mine. My own.*  
And mean it.

Now they are grown up and far away

and memory itself  
has become an emigrant,  
wandering in a place  
where love disassembles itself as landscape:

Where the hills  
are the colours of a child's eyes,  
where my children are distances, horizons:

At night,  
on the edge of sleep,

I can see the shore of Dublin Bay.  
Its rocky sweep and its granite pier.

Is this, I say  
how they must have seen it,  
backing out on the mailboat at twilight,

shadows falling  
on everything they had to leave?  
And would love forever?  
And then

I imagine myself  
at the landward rail of that boat  
searching for the last sight of a hand.

I see myself  
on the underworld side of that water,  
the darkness coming in fast, saying  
all the names I know for a lost land:

*Ireland. Absence. Daughter.*

# The War Horse

By [Eavan Boland](#)

This dry night, nothing unusual  
About the clip, clop, casual

Iron of his shoes as he stamps death  
Like a mint on the innocent coinage of earth.

I lift the window, watch the ambling feather  
Of hock and fetlock, loosed from its daily tether

In the tinker camp on the Enniskerry Road,  
Pass, his breath hissing, his snuffling head

Down. He is gone. No great harm is done.  
Only a leaf of our laurel hedge is torn—

Of distant interest like a maimed limb,  
Only a rose which now will never climb

The stone of our house, expendable, a mere  
Line of defence against him, a volunteer

You might say, only a crocus, its bulbous head  
Blown from growth, one of the screamless dead.

But we, we are safe, our unformed fear  
Of fierce commitment gone; why should we care

If a rose, a hedge, a crocus are uprooted  
Like corpses, remote, crushed, mutilated?

He stumbles on like a rumour of war, huge  
Threatening. Neighbours use the subterfuge

Of curtains. He stumbles down our short street  
Thankfully passing us. I pause, wait,

Then to breathe relief lean on the sill  
And for a second only my blood is still

With atavism. That rose he smashed frays  
Ribbioned across our hedge, recalling days

Of burned countryside, illicit braid:

A cause ruined before, a world betrayed.

## The Delta

By [Bruce Bond](#)

If you are going there by foot, prepare  
to get wet. You are not you anymore.

You are a girl standing in a pool  
of clouds as they catch fire in the distance.

There are laws of heaven and those of place  
and those who see the sky in the water,

angels in ashes that are the delta's now.  
They say if you sweep the trash from your house

after dark, you sweep away your luck.  
If you are going by foot, bring a stick,

a third leg, and honor the great disorder,  
the great broom of waterfowl and songbirds.

Prepare to voodoo your way, best you can,  
knowing there is a little water in things

you take for granted, a little charity  
and squalor for the smallest forms of life.

Voodoo was always mostly charity.  
People forget. If you shake a tablecloth

outside at night, someone in your family  
dies. There are laws we make thinking

it was us who made them. We are not us.  
We are a floodplain by the Mississippi

that once poured slaves upriver to the fields.  
We are a hurricane in the making.

We could use a magus who knows something  
about suffering, who knows a delta's needs.

We understand if you want a widow

to stay single, cut up her husband's shoes.

He is not himself anyway and walks  
barefoot across a landscape that has no north.

Only a ghost tree here and there, a frog,  
a cricket, a bird. And if the fates are kind,

a girl with a stick, who is more at home,  
being homeless, than you will ever be.

## Rocket

By [Todd Boss](#)

Despite that you  
wrote your name  
and number  
on its fuselage  
in magic marker

neither your quiet  
hours at the kitchen  
table assembling  
it with glue

nor your choice of  
paint and lacquer

nor your seemingly  
equally perfect  
choice of a seemingly  
breezeless day  
for the launch of  
your ambition

nor the thrill  
of its swift ignition

nor the heights  
it streaks

nor the dancing  
way you chase  
beneath its

dot

across that  
seemingly endless  
childhood field

will ever be  
restored to you

by the people  
in the topmost  
branches of whose trees

unseen

it may yet from  
its plastic  
chute  
on thin  
white  
string

still swing.

## **Sign for My Father, Who Stressed the Bunt**

By [David Bottoms](#)

On the rough diamond,  
the hand-cut field below the dog lot and barn,  
we rehearsed the strict technique  
of bunting. I watched from the infield,  
the mound, the backstop  
as your left hand climbed the bat, your legs  
and shoulders squared toward the pitcher.  
You could drop it like a seed  
down either base line. I admired your style,  
but not enough to take my eyes off the bank  
that served as our center-field fence.

Years passed, three leagues of organized ball,  
no few lives. I could homer  
into the left-field lot of Carmichael Motors,  
and still you stressed the same technique,  
the crouch and spring, the lead arm absorbing

just enough impact. That whole tiresome pitch  
about basics never changing,  
and I never learned what you were laying down.

Like a hand brushed across the bill of a cap,  
let this be the sign  
I'm getting a grip on the sacrifice.

## Under the Vulture-Tree

By [David Bottoms](#)

We have all seen them circling pastures,  
have looked up from the mouth of a barn, a pine clearing,  
the fences of our own backyards, and have stood  
amazed by the one slow wing beat, the endless dihedral drift.  
But I had never seen so many so close, hundreds,  
every limb of the dead oak feathered black,

and I cut the engine, let the river grab the jon boat  
and pull it toward the tree.  
The black leaves shined, the pink fruit blossomed  
red, ugly as a human heart.  
Then, as I passed under their dream, I saw for the first time  
its soft countenance, the raw fleshy jowls  
wrinkled and generous, like the faces of the very old  
who have grown to empathize with everything.

And I drifted away from them, slow, on the pull of the river,  
reluctant, looking back at their roost,  
calling them what I'd never called them, what they are,  
those dwarfed transfiguring angels,  
who flock to the side of the poisoned fox, the mud turtle  
crushed on the shoulder of the road,  
who pray over the leaf-graves of the anonymous lost,  
with mercy enough to consume us all and give us wings.

## Peace Lilies

By [Cathy Smith Bowers](#)

I collect them now, it seems. Like  
sea-shells or old  
thimbles. One for  
Father. One for

Mother. Two for my sweet brothers.  
Odd how little  
they require of  
me. Unlike the

ones they were sent in memory  
of. No sudden  
shrilling of the  
phone. No harried

midnight flights. Only a little  
water now and  
then. Scant food and  
light. See how I've

brought them all together here in  
this shaded space  
beyond the stairs.  
Even when they

thirst, they summon me with nothing  
more than a soft,  
indifferent furl-  
ing of their leaves.

## **The Poet Orders His Tomb**

By [Edgar Bowers](#)

I summon up Panofskv from his bed  
Among the famous dead  
To build a tomb which, since I am not read,  
Suffers the stone's mortality instead;

Which, by the common iconographies  
Of simple visual ease,  
Usurps the place of the complexities  
Of sound survivors once preferred to noise:

Monkeys fixed on one bough, an almost holy  
Nightmarish sloth, a tree  
Of parrots in a pride of family,  
Immortal skunks, unaromatically;

Some deaf bats in a cave, a porcupine  
Quill-less, a superfine

Flightless eagle, and, after them, a line  
Of geese, unnavigating by design;

Dogs in the frozen haloes of their barks,  
A hundred porous arks  
Aground and lost, where elephants like quarks  
Ape mother mules or imitation sharks—

And each of them half-venerated by  
A mob, impartially  
Scaled, finned, or feathered, all before a dry  
Unable mouth, symmetrically awry.

But how shall I, in my brief space, describe  
A tomb so vast, a tribe  
So desperately existent for a scribe  
Knowingly of the fashions' diatribe,

I who have sought time's memory afoot,  
Grateful for every root  
Of trees that fill the garden with their fruit,  
Their fragrance and their shade? Even as I do it,

I see myself unnoticed on the stair  
That, underneath a clear  
Welcome of bells, had promised me a fair  
Attentive hearing's joy, sometime, somewhere.

## Bereavement

By [William Lisle Bowles](#)

Whose was that gentle voice, that, whispering sweet,  
Promised methought long days of bliss sincere!  
Soothing it stole on my deluded ear,  
Most like soft music, that might sometimes cheat  
Thoughts dark and drooping! 'Twas the voice of Hope.  
Of love and social scenes, it seemed to speak,  
Of truth, of friendship, of affection meek;  
That, oh! poor friend, might to life's downward slope  
Lead us in peace, and bless our latest hours.  
Ah me! the prospect saddened as she sung;  
Loud on my startled ear the death-bell rung;  
Chill darkness wrapt the pleasurable bowers,  
Whilst Horror, pointing to yon breathless clay,  
"No peace be thine," exclaimed, "away, away!"

# Respectability

By [Tina Boyer Brown](#)

We ask our children  
to act calm/nervous/whatever  
innocent looks like when  
some cop shows his badge/pulls his gun/slows his car.

We beg kids  
to say soft *yes sirs*.  
We beg kids  
to get on the hood of that car/empty their pockets/shut up/put your hands behind your head.

No is an existential threat.  
No is an existential threat.  
No is an existential threat.  
No is an existential threat.

Never is an existential threat.  
Never is an existential threat.  
Never is an existential threat.  
Never is an existential threat.

We dare ask for humility  
in the face of this oppression?  
We have no idea what the threat feels like,  
but we know

Breonna  
Rekia  
Sandra  
Nia  
Bettie  
Yvette  
Miriam  
Shereese  
Ahmaud  
Trayvon  
Eric  
Laquan  
Michael  
Philando  
Stephon  
Alton  
Amadou  
Akai

Quintonio  
Rumai  
John  
Jordan  
Jonathan  
Reynaldo  
Kendrec  
Ramarley  
Kenneth  
Robert  
Walter  
Terence  
Freddie  
Samuel  
George  
Tamir  
and more  
and more  
and more

There's no open wrist declaring our innocence that will confer peace  
where innocents need.

Our children  
stand in front of doors/pages/words/in the streets.  
They shut down/they shut down/they shut down  
the forces that burn against them.

## Barber

By [Larry Bradley](#)

Learn from the man who spends much of his life speaking  
To the back of your head knowing what it means to follow

The razor's edge along a worn strop or random thoughts  
As they spring so invisibly from the mind to a mouth

Who shouldered soldiers in two wars and fled fire fields  
Undecorated who fathered once but was fatherless forever

And who works his sentiments in deeper into your scalp  
Under a sign on the knotty-pine walls whose rubric reads

*quot homines, tot sententiae* which means he sees  
In you his suffering smells of horehound tonics and gels

Pillow heads and powders and a floor full of snippings  
Swept neatly every evening into a pile for the field mice

All those roundabout hours only a man who fixes his tie  
To clip crabgrass crowding a lady's grave could believe

With a certain clean devotion and who would never for one  
Moment dream of hurting you when your back was turned

## **The Author to Her Book**

By [Anne Bradstreet](#)

Thou ill-form'd offspring of my feeble brain,  
Who after birth didst by my side remain,  
Till snatched from thence by friends, less wise than true,  
Who thee abroad, expos'd to publick view,  
Made thee in raggs, halting to th' press to trudge,  
Where errors were not lessened (all may judg).  
At thy return my blushing was not small,  
My rambling brat (in print) should mother call,  
I cast thee by as one unfit for light,  
Thy Visage was so irksome in my sight;  
Yet being mine own, at length affection would  
Thy blemishes amend, if so I could:  
I wash'd thy face, but more defects I saw,  
And rubbing off a spot, still made a flaw.  
I stretched thy joynts to make thee even feet,  
Yet still thou run'st more hobling then is meet;  
In better dress to trim thee was my mind,  
But nought save home-spun Cloth, i' th' house I find.  
In this array 'mongst Vulgars mayst thou roam.  
In Criticks hands, beware thou dost not come;  
And take thy way where yet thou art not known,  
If for thy Father askt, say, thou hadst none:  
And for thy Mother, she alas is poor,  
Which caus'd her thus to send thee out of door.

## **Before the Birth of one of Her Children**

By [Anne Bradstreet](#)

All things within this fading world hath end,  
Adversity doth still our joyes attend;  
No ties so strong, no friends so dear and sweet,

But with death's parting blow is sure to meet.  
The sentence past is most irrevocable,  
A common thing, yet oh inevitable.  
How soon, my Dear, death may my steps attend,  
How soon't may be thy Lot to lose thy friend,  
We are both ignorant, yet love bids me  
These farewell lines to recommend to thee,  
That when that knot's untied that made us one,  
I may seem thine, who in effect am none.  
And if I see not half my dayes that's due,  
What nature would, God grant to yours and you;  
The many faults that well you know I have  
Let be interr'd in my oblivious grave;  
If any worth or virtue were in me,  
Let that live freshly in thy memory  
And when thou feel'st no grief, as I no harms,  
Yet love thy dead, who long lay in thine arms.  
And when thy loss shall be repaid with gains  
Look to my little babes, my dear remains.  
And if thou love thyself, or loved'st me,  
These o protect from step Dames injury.  
And if chance to thine eyes shall bring this verse,  
With some sad sighs honour my absent Herse;  
And kiss this paper for thy loves dear sake,  
Who with salt tears this last Farewel did take.

## **A Letter to her Husband, absent upon Publick employment**

By [Anne Bradstreet](#)

My head, my heart, mine Eyes, my life, nay more,  
My joy, my Magazine of earthly store,  
If two be one, as surely thou and I,  
How stayest thou there, whilst I at *Ipswich* lye?  
So many steps, head from the heart to sever  
If but a neck, soon should we be together:  
I like the earth this season, mourn in black,  
My Sun is gone so far in's Zodiack,  
Whom whilst I 'joy'd, nor storms, nor frosts I felt,  
His warmth such frigid colds did cause to melt.  
My chilled limbs now nummed lye forlorn;  
Return, return sweet *Sol* from *Capricorn*;  
In this dead time, alas, what can I more  
Then view those fruits which through thy heat I bore?  
Which sweet contentment yield me for a space,  
True living Pictures of their Fathers face.

O strange effect! now thou art *Southward* gone,  
I weary grow, the tedious day so long;  
But when thou *Northward* to me shalt return,  
I wish my Sun may never set, but burn  
Within the Cancer of my glowing breast,  
The welcome house of him my dearest guest.  
Where ever, ever stay, and go not thence,  
Till natures sad decree shall call thee hence;  
Flesh of thy flesh, bone of thy bone,  
I here, thou there, yet both but one.

## To Her Father with Some Verses

By [Anne Bradstreet](#)

Most truly honoured, and as truly dear,  
If worth in me or ought I do appear,  
Who can of right better demand the same  
Than may your worthy self from whom it came?  
The principal might yield a greater sum,  
Yet handled ill, amounts but to this crumb;  
My stock's so small I know not how to pay,  
My bond remains in force unto this day;  
Yet for part payment take this simple mite,  
Where nothing's to be had, kings loose their right.  
Such is my debt I may not say forgive,  
But as I can, I'll pay it while I live;  
Such is my bond, none can discharge but I,  
Yet paying is not paid until I die.

## To my Dear and Loving Husband

By [Anne Bradstreet](#)

If ever two were one, then surely we.  
If ever man were loved by wife, then thee.  
If ever wife was happy in a man,  
Compare with me, ye women, if you can.  
I prize thy love more than whole mines of gold,  
Or all the riches that the East doth hold.  
My love is such that rivers cannot quench,  
Nor ought but love from thee give recompense.  
Thy love is such I can no way repay;  
The heavens reward thee manifold, I pray.  
Then while we live, in love let's so persevere,  
That when we live no more, we may live ever.

# The Watchers

By [William Stanley Braithwaite](#)

Two women on the lone wet strand  
    *(The wind's out with a will to roam)*  
The waves wage war on rocks and sand,  
    *(And a ship is long due home.)*

The sea sprays in the women's eyes—  
    *(Hearts can writhe like the sea's wild foam)*  
Lower descend the tempestuous skies,  
    *(For the wind's out with a will to roam.)*

"O daughter, thine eyes be better than mine,"  
    *(The waves ascend high as yonder dome)*  
"North or south is there never a sign?"  
    *(And a ship is long due home.)*

They watched there all the long night through—  
    *(The wind's out with a will to roam)*  
Wind and rain and sorrow for two—  
    *(And heaven on the long reach home.)*

# Layabout

By [John Brehm](#)

Do nothing and everything will be done,  
that's what Mr. Lao Tzu said, who walked  
around talking 2,500 years ago and

now his books practically grow on trees  
they're so popular and if he were  
alive today beautiful women would

rush up to him like waves lapping  
at the shores of his wisdom.  
That's the way it is, I guess: humbling.

But if I could just unclench my fists,  
empty out my eyes, turn my mind into  
a prayer flag for the wind to play with,

we could be brothers, him the older one  
who's seen and not done it all and me  
still unlearning, both of us slung low

in our hammocks, our hats tipped  
forwards, hands folded neatly,  
like bamboo huts, above our hearts.

## Over and Under

By [John Brehm](#)

So sexy to slide under-  
neath a river,  
to sit inside this  
snakelike sub-  
marine-like  
subway car and  
freely imagine  
the world above—  
the Brooklyn  
Bridge invisibly  
trembling with the  
weight of its  
own beauty,  
the East River  
still guided by  
the grooves  
Walt Whitman's  
eyes wore in it,  
the bulldog tug-  
boats pushing the  
passively impressive  
broad-bottomed  
barges around,  
and the double-  
decker orange  
and black Staten  
Island ferries,  
with their aura  
of overworked  
pack-mule  
mournfulness,  
and beyond them  
the Atlantic Ocean  
which I lately learned  
was brought here  
by ice comets three  
billion years ago,

which explains  
a few things, like  
why everybody  
feels so alienated,  
and of course  
the thoughts being  
thought by every  
person in New  
York City at  
this moment—  
vast schools of  
undulating fish  
curving and rising  
in the cloud-swirling  
wind-waved sky,  
surrounded by  
the vaster emptiness  
of non-thought  
which holds them  
and which they try  
not to think  
about and you  
lying in bed in  
your sixth-floor  
walk-up sublet  
on St. Mark's Place—  
such a breath-  
taking ascension!  
imagining me  
rising now to meet you.

## **The Affliction of Richard**

By [Robert Bridges](#)

Love not too much. But how,  
When thou hast made me such,  
And dost thy gifts bestow,  
How can I love too much?  
Though I must fear to lose,  
And drown my joy in care,  
With all its thorns I choose  
The path of love and prayer.

Though thou, I know not why,  
Didst kill my childish trust,

That breach with toil did I  
Repair, because I must:  
And spite of frightening schemes,  
With which the fiends of Hell  
Blaspheme thee in my dreams,  
So far I have hoped well.

But what the heavenly key,  
What marvel in me wrought  
Shall quite exculpate thee,  
I have no shadow of thought.  
What am I that complain?  
The love, from which began  
My question sad and vain,  
Justifies thee to man.

## Will

By [Trevino L. Brings Plenty](#)

Small red tin box sealed in shrink-wrap, cut open  
with pocketknife, pried apart, its goods aerate the  
office. I pluck white sliced chalky cylinders; let them  
simmer in my mouth. I exhale peppermint scent  
through my nose. Cut open the official letter. A map  
in letters on a white page. My teeth grind mints.  
Photocopies slightly off alignment, I blur lines.  
Equations disperse family through land documents,  
position each generation. I am only fourth in line.  
Some plots are gumbo after winter thaw. Sections  
stitched together with extended relatives. This ritual,  
personal death papers drafted. I am partial to this  
grassland; the place of deer marks and porcupine  
quills, ledger extrapolates history. I refold estate  
document, place it back into its envelope.

## The Day

By [Geoffrey Brock](#)

It hangs on its  
                    stem like a plum  
at the edge of a  
                    darkening thicket.

It's swelling and

blushing and ripe  
and I reach out a  
hand to pick it

but flesh moves  
slow through time  
and evening  
comes on fast

and just when I  
think my fingers  
might seize that  
sweetness at last

the gentlest of  
breezes rises  
and the plum lets  
go of the stem.

And now it's my  
fingers ripening  
and evening that's  
reaching for them.

## What to Say Upon Being Asked to Be Friends

By [Julian Talamantez Brolaski](#)

Why speak of hate, when I do bleed for love?  
Not hate, my love, but Love doth bite my tongue  
Till I taste stuff that makes my rhyming rough  
So flatter I my fever for the one  
For whom I inly mourn, though seem to shun.  
A rose is arrows is eros, so what  
If I confuse the shade that I've become  
With winedark substance in a lover's cup?  
But stop my tonguely wound, I've bled enough.  
If I be fair, or false, or freaked with fear  
If I my tongue in lockèd box immure  
Blame not me, for I am sick with love.  
Yet would I be your friend most willingly  
Since friendship would infect me killingly.

# On the Death of Anne Brontë

By [Charlotte Brontë](#)

There's little joy in life for me,  
And little terror in the grave;  
I 've lived the parting hour to see  
Of one I would have died to save.

Calmly to watch the failing breath,  
Wishing each sigh might be the last;  
Longing to see the shade of death  
O'er those beloved features cast.

The cloud, the stillness that must part  
The darling of my life from me;  
And then to thank God from my heart,  
To thank Him well and fervently;

Although I knew that we had lost  
The hope and glory of our life;  
And now, benighted, tempest-tossed,  
Must bear alone the weary strife.

# Ah! Why, Because the Dazzling Sun

By [Emily Brontë](#)

Ah! why, because the dazzling sun  
Restored my earth to joy  
Have you departed, every one,  
And left a desert sky?

All through the night, your glorious eyes  
Were gazing down in mine,  
And with a full heart's thankful sighs  
I blessed that watch divine!

I was at peace, and drank your beams  
As they were life to me  
And revelled in my changeful dreams  
Like petrel on the sea.

Thought followed thought—star followed star  
Through boundless regions on,  
While one sweet influence, near and far,  
Thrilled through and proved us one.

Why did the morning rise to break  
So great, so pure a spell,  
And scorch with fire the tranquil cheek  
Where your cool radiance fell?

Blood-red he rose, and arrow-straight,  
His fierce beams struck my brow;  
The soul of Nature sprang elate,  
But mine sank sad and low!

My lids closed down—yet through their veil  
I saw him blazing still;  
And bathe in gold the misty dale,  
And flash upon the hill.

I turned me to the pillow then  
To call back Night, and see  
Your worlds of solemn light, again  
Throb with my heart and me!

It would not do—the pillow glowed  
And glowed both roof and floor,  
And birds sang loudly in the wood,  
And fresh winds shook the door.

The curtains waved, the wakened flies  
Were murmuring round my room,  
Imprisoned there, till I should rise  
And give them leave to roam.

O Stars and Dreams and Gentle Night;  
O Night and Stars return!  
And hide me from the hostile light  
That does not warm, but burn—

That drains the blood of suffering men;  
Drinks tears, instead of dew:  
Let me sleep through his blinding reign,  
And only wake with you!

## **No Coward Soul Is Mine**

By [Emily Brontë](#)

No coward soul is mine

No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere  
I see Heaven's glories shine  
And Faith shines equal arming me from Fear

O God within my breast  
Almighty ever-present Deity  
Life, that in me hast rest,  
As I Undying Life, have power in Thee

Vain are the thousand creeds  
That move men's hearts, unutterably vain,  
Worthless as withered weeds  
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main

To waken doubt in one  
Holding so fast by thy infinity,  
So surely anchored on  
The steadfast rock of Immortality.

With wide-embracing love  
Thy spirit animates eternal years  
Pervades and broods above,  
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates and rears

Though earth and moon were gone  
And suns and universes ceased to be  
And Thou wert left alone  
Every Existence would exist in thee

There is not room for Death  
Nor atom that his might could render void  
Since thou art Being and Breath  
And what thou art may never be destroyed.

## **['Often rebuked, yet always back returning']**

By [Emily Brontë](#)

Often rebuked, yet always back returning  
To those first feelings that were born with me,  
And leaving busy chase of wealth and learning  
For idle dreams of things which cannot be:

To-day, I will seek not the shadowy region;  
Its unsustaining vastness waxes drear;  
And visions rising, legion after legion,

Bring the unreal world too strangely near.

I'll walk, but not in old heroic traces,  
And not in paths of high morality,  
And not among the half-distinguished faces,  
The clouded forms of long-past history.

I'll walk where my own nature would be leading:  
It vexes me to choose another guide:  
Where the gray flocks in ferny glens are feeding;  
Where the wild wind blows on the mountain side.

What have those lonely mountains worth revealing?  
More glory and more grief than I can tell:  
The earth that wakes *one* human heart to feeling  
Can centre both the worlds of Heaven and Hell.

## Shall earth no more inspire thee

By [Emily Brontë](#)

Shall earth no more inspire thee,  
Thou lonely dreamer now?  
Since passion may not fire thee  
Shall Nature cease to bow?

Thy mind is ever moving  
In regions dark to thee;  
Recall its useless roving—  
Come back and dwell with me.

I know my mountain breezes  
Enchant and soothe thee still—  
I know my sunshine pleases  
Despite thy wayward will.

When day with evening blending  
Sinks from the summer sky,  
I've seen thy spirit bending  
In fond idolatry.

I've watched thee every hour;  
I know my mighty sway,  
I know my magic power  
To drive thy griefs away.

Few hearts to mortals given  
On earth so wildly pine;  
Yet none would ask a heaven  
More like this earth than thine.

Then let my winds caress thee;  
Thy comrade let me be—  
Since nought beside can bless thee,  
Return and dwell with me.

## The Soldier

By [Rupert Brooke](#)

If I should die, think only this of me:  
That there's some corner of a foreign field  
That is for ever England. There shall be  
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;  
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,  
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam;  
A body of England's, breathing English air,  
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,  
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less  
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;  
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;  
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,  
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem has had two titles: "The Soldier" and "Nineteen-Fourteen: The Soldier". The student may give either title during the recitation.*

## The Children of the Poor

By [Gwendolyn Brooks](#)

1

People who have no children can be hard:  
Attain a mail of ice and insolence:  
Need not pause in the fire, and in no sense  
Hesitate in the hurricane to guard.  
And when wide world is bitten and bewarred  
They perish purely, waving their spirits hence  
Without a trace of grace or of offense

To laugh or fail, diffident, wonder-starred.  
While through a throttling dark we others hear  
The little lifting helplessness, the queer  
Whimper-whine; whose unridiculous  
Lost softness softly makes a trap for us.  
And makes a curse. And makes a sugar of  
The malocclusions, the inconditions of love.

2

What shall I give my children? who are poor,  
Who are adjudged the leastwise of the land,  
Who are my sweetest lepers, who demand  
No velvet and no velvety velour;  
But who have begged me for a brisk contour,  
Crying that they are quasi, contraband  
Because unfinished, graven by a hand  
Less than angelic, admirable or sure.  
My hand is stuffed with mode, design, device.  
But I lack access to my proper stone.  
And plenitude of plan shall not suffice  
Nor grief nor love shall be enough alone  
To ratify my little halves who bear  
Across an autumn freezing everywhere.

3

And shall I prime my children, pray, to pray?  
Mites, come invade most frugal vestibules  
Spectered with crusts of penitents' renewals  
And all hysterics arrogant for a day.  
Instruct yourselves here is no devil to pay.  
Children, confine your lights in jellied rules;  
Resemble graves; be metaphysical mules.  
Learn Lord will not distort nor leave the fray.  
Behind the scurryings of your neat motif  
I shall wait, if you wish: revise the psalm  
If that should frighten you: sew up belief  
If that should tear: turn, singularly calm  
At forehead and at fingers rather wise,  
Holding the bandage ready for your eyes.

## **kitchenette building**

By [Gwendolyn Brooks](#)

We are things of dry hours and the involuntary plan,  
Grayed in, and gray. "Dream" makes a giddy sound, not strong  
Like "rent," "feeding a wife," "satisfying a man."

But could a dream send up through onion fumes  
Its white and violet, fight with fried potatoes  
And yesterday's garbage ripening in the hall,  
Flutter, or sing an aria down these rooms

Even if we were willing to let it in,  
Had time to warm it, keep it very clean,  
Anticipate a message, let it begin?

We wonder. But not well! not for a minute!  
Since Number Five is out of the bathroom now,  
We think of lukewarm water, hope to get in it.

## **Sadie and Maud**

By [Gwendolyn Brooks](#)

Maud went to college.  
Sadie stayed at home.  
Sadie scraped life  
With a fine-tooth comb.

She didn't leave a tangle in.  
Her comb found every strand.  
Sadie was one of the livingest chits  
In all the land.

Sadie bore two babies  
Under her maiden name.  
Maud and Ma and Papa  
Nearly died of shame.

When Sadie said her last so-long  
Her girls struck out from home.  
(Sadie had left as heritage  
Her fine-tooth comb.)

Maud, who went to college,  
Is a thin brown mouse.

She is living all alone  
In this old house.

## **a song in the front yard**

By [Gwendolyn Brooks](#)

I've stayed in the front yard all my life.  
I want a peek at the back  
Where it's rough and untended and hungry weed grows.  
A girl gets sick of a rose.

I want to go in the back yard now  
And maybe down the alley,  
To where the charity children play.  
I want a good time today.

They do some wonderful things.  
They have some wonderful fun.  
My mother sneers, but I say it's fine  
How they don't have to go in at quarter to nine.  
My mother, she tells me that Johnnie Mae  
Will grow up to be a bad woman.  
That George'll be taken to Jail soon or late  
(On account of last winter he sold our back gate).

But I say it's fine. Honest, I do.  
And I'd like to be a bad woman, too,  
And wear the brave stockings of night-black lace  
And strut down the streets with paint on my face.

## **truth**

By [Gwendolyn Brooks](#)

And if sun comes  
How shall we greet him?  
Shall we not dread him,  
Shall we not fear him  
After so lengthy a  
Session with shade?

Though we have wept for him,  
Though we have prayed  
All through the night-years—  
What if we wake one shimmering morning to

Hear the fierce hammering  
Of his firm knuckles  
Hard on the door?

Shall we not shudder?—  
Shall we not flee  
Into the shelter, the dear thick shelter  
Of the familiar  
Propitious haze?

Sweet is it, sweet is it  
To sleep in the coolness  
Of snug unawareness.

The dark hangs heavily  
Over the eyes.

## **Waiheke**

By [James Brown](#)

You yearn so much  
you could be a yacht.  
Your mind has already  
set sail. It takes a few days  
to arrive

at island pace,  
but soon you are barefoot  
on the sand,  
the slim waves testing  
your feet

like health professionals.  
You toe shells, sea glass, and odd things  
that have drifted for years  
and finally  
washed up here.

You drop your towel  
and step out of  
your togs, ungainly,  
first  
your right foot, then

the other

stepping down  
the sand  
to stand  
in the water.

There is no discernible  
difference  
in temperature.  
You breaststroke in  
the lazy blue.

A guy passing in a rowboat  
says, "Beautiful, isn't it?"  
And it is. Your body  
afloat in salt  
as if cured.

## The Card Tables

By [Jericho Brown](#)

Stop playing. You do remember the card tables,  
Slick stick figures like men with low-cut fades,  
Short but standing straight  
Because we bent them into weak display.  
What didn't we want? What wouldn't we claim?  
How perfectly each surface was made  
For throwing or dropping or slamming a necessary  
Portion of our pay.  
And how could any of us get by  
With one in the way?  
Didn't that bare square ask to be played  
On, beaten in the head, then folded, then put away,  
All so we could call ourselves safe  
Now that there was more room, a little more space?

## Crossing

By [Jericho Brown](#)

The water is one thing, and one thing for miles.  
The water is one thing, making this bridge  
Built over the water another. Walk it  
Early, walk it back when the day goes dim, everyone  
Rising just to find a way toward rest again.  
We work, start on one side of the day

Like a planet's only sun, our eyes straight  
Until the flame sinks. The flame sinks. Thank God  
I'm different. I've figured and counted. I'm not crossing  
To cross back. I'm set  
On something vast. It reaches  
Long as the sea. I'm more than a conqueror, bigger  
Than bravery. I don't march. I'm the one who leaps.

## **This is the Honey**

By [Mahogany L. Browne](#)

There is no room on this planet for anything less than a miracle  
We gather here today to revel in the rebellion of a silent tongue  
Every day, we lean forward into the light of our brightest designs  
    & cherish the sun  
Praise our hands & throats  
    each incantation, a jubilee of a people dreaming wildly  
Despite the dirt  
beneath our feet  
or the wind  
pushing against  
our greatest efforts

Soil creates things  
Art births change  
This is the honey  
    & doesn't it taste like a promise?  
Where your heart is an accordion  
    & our laughter is a soundtrack

Friend, dance to this good song—  
look how it holds our names!

Each bone of our flesh-homes sings welcome

O look at the Gods dancing  
    as the rain reigns against a steely skyline

Where grandparents sit on the porch & nod at the spectacle  
in awe of the perfection of their grandchildren's faces  
Each small discovery unearthed in its own outpour  
Tomorrow our daughters will travel the world with each poem  
    & our sons will design cities against the backdrops of living museums  
Yes! Our children will spin chalk until each equation bursts a familial tree

Rooted in miraculous possibilities  
& alive

## Grief

By [Elizabeth Barrett Browning](#)

I tell you, hopeless grief is passionless;  
That only men incredulous of despair,  
Half-taught in anguish, through the midnight air  
Beat upward to God's throne in loud access  
Of shrieking and reproach. Full desertness,  
In souls as countries, lieth silent-bare  
Under the blanching, vertical eye-glare  
Of the absolute heavens. Deep-hearted man, express  
Grief for thy dead in silence like to death—  
Most like a monumental statue set  
In everlasting watch and moveless woe  
Till itself crumble to the dust beneath.  
Touch it; the marble eyelids are not wet:  
If it could weep, it could arise and go.

## A Man's Requirements

By [Elizabeth Barrett Browning](#)

I  
Love me Sweet, with all thou art,  
    Feeling, thinking, seeing;  
Love me in the lightest part,  
    Love me in full being.

II  
Love me with thine open youth  
    In its frank surrender;  
With the vowing of thy mouth,  
    With its silence tender.

III  
Love me with thine azure eyes,  
    Made for earnest granting;  
Taking colour from the skies,  
    Can Heaven's truth be wanting?

IV  
Love me with their lids, that fall

Snow-like at first meeting;  
Love me with thine heart, that all  
Neighbours then see beating.

V  
Love me with thine hand stretched out  
Freely—open-minded:  
Love me with thy loitering foot,—  
Hearing one behind it.

VI  
Love me with thy voice, that turns  
Sudden faint above me;  
Love me with thy blush that burns  
When I murmur *Love me!*

VII  
Love me with thy thinking soul,  
Break it to love-sighing;  
Love me with thy thoughts that roll  
On through living—dying.

VIII  
Love me when in thy gorgeous airs,  
When the world has crowned thee;  
Love me, kneeling at thy prayers,  
With the angels round thee.

IX  
Love me pure, as musers do,  
Up the woodlands shady:  
Love me gaily, fast and true  
As a winsome lady.

X  
Through all hopes that keep us brave,  
Farther off or nigher,  
Love me for the house and grave,  
And for something higher.

XI  
Thus, if thou wilt prove me, Dear,  
Woman's love no fable.  
I will love *thee*—half a year—  
As a man is able.

## Sonnets from the Portuguese 43: How do I love thee? Let me count the ways

By [Elizabeth Barrett Browning](#)

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.  
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height  
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight  
For the ends of being and ideal grace.  
I love thee to the level of every day's  
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.  
I love thee freely, as men strive for right;  
I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.  
I love thee with the passion put to use  
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.  
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose  
With my lost saints. I love thee with the breath,  
Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose,  
I shall but love thee better after death.

*Poetry Out Loud Note: In the print anthology, this poem is titled simply "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways." The student may give either title during their recitation.*

## Confessions

By [Robert Browning](#)

What is he buzzing in my ears?  
"Now that I come to die,  
Do I view the world as a vale of tears?"  
Ah, reverend sir, not I!

What I viewed there once, what I view again  
Where the physic bottles stand  
On the table's edge,—is a suburb lane,  
With a wall to my bedside hand.

That lane sloped, much as the bottles do,  
From a house you could descry  
O'er the garden-wall; is the curtain blue  
Or green to a healthy eye?

To mine, it serves for the old June weather  
Blue above lane and wall;  
And that farthest bottle labelled "Ether"  
Is the house o'ertopping all.

At a terrace, somewhere near the stopper,  
There watched for me, one June,  
A girl: I know, sir, it's improper,  
My poor mind's out of tune.

Only, there was a way... you crept  
Close by the side, to dodge  
Eyes in the house, two eyes except:  
They styled their house "The Lodge."

What right had a lounge up their lane?  
But, by creeping very close,  
With the good wall's help,—their eyes might strain  
And stretch themselves to Oes,

Yet never catch her and me together,  
As she left the attic, there,  
By the rim of the bottle labelled "Ether,"  
And stole from stair to stair,

And stood by the rose-wreathed gate. Alas,  
We loved, sir—used to meet:  
How sad and bad and mad it was—  
But then, how it was sweet!

## Epilogue

By [Robert Browning](#)

At the midnight in the silence of the sleep-time,  
When you set your fancies free,  
Will they pass to where—by death, fools think, imprisoned—  
Low he lies who once so loved you, whom you loved so,  
—Pity me?

Oh to love so, be so loved, yet so mistaken!  
What had I on earth to do  
With the slothful, with the mawkish, the unmanly?  
Like the aimless, helpless, hopeless, did I drivel  
—Being—who?

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,  
Never doubted clouds would break,  
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,  
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,

Sleep to wake.

No, at noonday in the bustle of man's work-time  
Greet the unseen with a cheer!  
Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be,  
"Strive and thrive!" cry "Speed,—fight on, fare ever  
There as here!"

## Life in a Love

By [Robert Browning](#)

Escape me?  
Never—  
Beloved!  
While I am I, and you are you,  
So long as the world contains us both,  
Me the loving and you the loth,  
While the one eludes, must the other pursue.  
My life is a fault at last, I fear:  
It seems too much like a fate, indeed!  
Though I do my best I shall scarce succeed.  
But what if I fail of my purpose here?  
It is but to keep the nerves at strain,  
To dry one's eyes and laugh at a fall,  
And, baffled, get up and begin again,—  
So the chase takes up one's life, that's all.  
While, look but once from your farthest bound  
At me so deep in the dust and dark,  
No sooner the old hope goes to ground  
Than a new one, straight to the self-same mark,  
I shape me—  
Ever  
Removed!

## Meeting at Night

By [Robert Browning](#)

I  
The grey sea and the long black land;  
And the yellow half-moon large and low;  
And the startled little waves that leap  
In fiery ringlets from their sleep,  
As I gain the cove with pushing prow,  
And quench its speed i' the slushy sand.

## II

Then a mile of warm sea-scented beach;  
Three fields to cross till a farm appears;  
A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch  
And blue spurt of a lighted match,  
And a voice less loud, thro' its joys and fears,  
Than the two hearts beating each to each!

## Steel

By [Joseph Bruchac](#)

Seeing photos  
of ancestors  
a century past

is like looking  
at your own  
fingerprints—

circles  
and lines  
you can't  
recognize

until someone else  
with a stranger's eye  
looks close and says  
that's you.

## Prints

By [Joseph Bruchac](#)

*for Rick Hill and in memory of Buster Mitchell*

I  
Steel arches up  
past the customs sheds,  
the bridge to a place  
named Canada,  
thrust into Mohawk land.

A dull rainbow  
arcing over

the new school,  
designed to fan  
out like the tail  
of the drumming Partridge—  
dark feathers of the old way's pride  
mixed in with blessed Kateri's  
pale dreams of sacred water.

## II

When that first span  
fell in 1907  
cantilevered shapes collapsed,  
gave like an old man's  
arthritic back.

The tide was out,  
the injured lay trapped like game in a deadfall  
all through that day  
until the evening.  
Then, as tide came in,  
the priest crawled  
through the wreckage,  
giving last rites  
to the drowning.

## III

Loading on,  
the cable lifts.  
Girders swing  
and sing in sun.  
Tacked to the sky,  
reflecting wind,  
long knife-blade mirrors  
they fall like jackstraws  
when they hit the top  
of the big boom's run.

The cable looped,  
the buzzer man  
pushes a button  
red as sunset.  
The mosquito whine  
of the motor whirrs  
bare bones up to  
the men who stand  
an edge defined

on either side  
by a long way down.

#### IV

Those who hold papers  
claim to have ownership  
of buildings and land.  
They do not see the hands  
which placed each rivet.  
They do not hear the feet  
walking each hidden beam.  
They do not hear the whisper  
of strong clan names.  
They do not see the faces  
of men who remain  
unseen as those girders  
which strengthen and shape.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## The Moonlight

By [Noah Buchholz](#)

Translated by John Lee Clark

That night the moon rose  
in the window. Its light  
touched the pane and spread  
over the floor. The girls  
climbed out of their beds  
and gathered in the glow,  
where their hands came alive.  
Their chatter filled their chests  
with such gladness it flowed  
out past the sentry girl  
at the door and down  
the corridor until it struck  
the matron's ears. She rocked  
forward, enraged, and thundered up  
the corridor. The sentry girl  
gave the alarm. They flew  
for their beds. The matron  
burst in. Her arm swung  
and connected. A girl dropped.  
The hand of the moon

went to the girl, tapping  
her on the shoulder, tapping  
to no avail. It withdrew,  
gliding back to the window  
and out. When the sun  
came up, its blaze seething  
into the floor, the girls  
gathered again at the window.  
They watched as the gardener  
dug a hole. His shovel  
thrust firmly in the ground,  
he lifted a covered figure  
and let drop. Its arms  
were crossed as it tumbled  
to the bottom. The gardener  
grimaced and covered the hole.  
That night the moon rose  
in the window. Its light  
touched the pane and spread  
over the floor. The girls  
climbed out of their beds  
and gathered in the glow,  
where their hands came alive.

*Note: Translated from the American Sign Language*

## Enough

By [Suzanne Buffam](#)

I am wearing dark glasses inside the house  
To match my dark mood.

I have left all the sugar out of the pie.  
My rage is a kind of domestic rage.

I learned it from my mother  
Who learned it from her mother before her

And so on.  
Surely the Greeks had a word for this.

Now surely the Germans do.  
The more words a person knows

To describe her private sufferings

The more distantly she can perceive them.

I repeat the names of all the cities I've known  
And watch an ant drag its crooked shadow home.

What does it mean to love the life we've been given?  
To act well the part that's been cast for us?

*Wind. Light. Fire. Time.*  
A train whistles through the far hills.

One day I plan to be riding it.

## The Pilgrim

By [John Bunyan](#)

Who would true Valour see  
Let him come hither;  
One here will Constant be,  
Come Wind, come Weather.  
There's no *Discouragement*,  
Shall make him once *Relent*,  
His first avow'd *Intent*,  
*To be a Pilgrim.*

Who so beset him round,  
With dismal *Storys*,  
Do but themselves Confound;  
His Strength the *more is*.  
No *Lyon* can him fright,  
He'l with a *Gyant* Fight,  
But he will have a right,  
*To be a Pilgrim.*

*Hobgoblin*, nor foul *Fiend*,  
Can *daunt* his Spirit:  
He knows, he *at the end*,  
*Shall Life Inherit.*  
Then Fancies fly away,  
He'l fear not what men say,  
He'l labour Night and Day,  
*To be a Pilgrim.*

# Diameter

By [Michelle Y. Burke](#)

You love your friend, so you fly across the country to see her.

Your friend is grieving. When you look at her, you see that something's missing.

You look again. She seems all there: reading glasses, sarcasm, leather pumps.

What did you expect? Ruins? Demeter without arms in the British Museum?

Your friend says she believes there's more pain than beauty in the world.

When Persephone was taken, Demeter damned the world for half the year.

The other half remained warm and bountiful; the Greeks loved symmetry.

On the plane, the man next to you read a geometry book, the lesson on finding the circumference of a circle.

On circumference: you can calculate the way around if you know the way across.

You try *across* with your friend. You try *around*.

*I don't believe in an afterlife, she says. But after K. died, I thought I might go after her.*

*In case I'm wrong. In case she's somewhere. Waiting.*

# A Red, Red Rose

By [Robert Burns](#)

O my Luve is like a red, red rose  
That's newly sprung in June;  
O my Luve is like the melody  
That's sweetly played in tune.

So fair art thou, my bonnie lass,  
So deep in luve am I;  
And I will luve thee still, my dear,  
Till a' the seas gang dry.

Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,  
And the rocks melt wi' the sun;  
I will love thee still, my dear,  
While the sands o' life shall run.

And fare thee weel, my only luve!  
And fare thee weel awhile!  
And I will come again, my luve,  
Though it were ten thousand mile.

## A Covered Bridge in Littleton, New Hampshire

By [Stephanie Burt](#)

I can remember when I wanted X  
more than anything ever—for X fill in  
from your own childhood

[balloon, pencil lead, trading card, shoelaces, a bow  
or not to have to wear a bow]

and now I am moved to action, when I am moved,  
principally by a memory of what to want.

The point is to be, in your own eyes, what you are,  
or to keep your own tools, so that you can pretend.

And so it was no surprise,  
to me at least, when Cooper, who is two,  
collapsed in *fortissimo* fits when he could not have  
a \$20, three-foot-long stuffed frog  
in the image of Frog from *Frog and Toad*, since he is Toad.

That morning, needing a nap,  
he had thrown, from the third-story balcony  
of Miller's Cafe and Bakery, into the whistling  
rapids and shallows  
of the Ammonoosuc River, with its arrowheads and caravans of stones,  
his Red Sox cap. His hair was shining like  
another planet's second sun,  
as he explained, looking up, "I threw my hat in the river.  
I would like my hat back now."

## Advice from Rock Creek Park

By [Stephanie Burt](#)

What will survive us  
has already begun

Oak galls  
Two termites' curious  
self-perpetuating bodies

Letting the light through the gaps

They lay out their allegiances  
under the roots  
of an overturned tree

Almost always better  
to build than to wreck

You can build in a wreck

Under the roots  
of an overturned tree

Consider the martin that hefts  
herself over traffic cones

Consider her shadow  
misaligned  
over parking-lot cement  
Saran Wrap scrap in her beak

Nothing lasts  
forever not even  
the future we want

The President has never  
owned the rain

## Kites

By [Stephanie Burt](#)

Complete in ourselves,  
we look like scraps of paper anyway:  
left alone, we could tell

our mothers and one another our owners'  
flimsiest secrets and play together all day

until we became intertwined, which is why

you try  
to keep us permanently apart.

One of us is a gossamer pirate ship,  
a frigate whose rigging the industrial

sunset highlights, sail by oblong sail.  
Another resembles a Greek letter — *gamma*,  
or *lambda*; others still

a ligature, a propeller, a fat lip.  
Our will is not exactly the wind's will.  
Underlined by sand,

whose modes of coagulation and cohabitation  
none of the human pedestrians understand,

we take off on our almost arbitrarily  
lengthy singletons of string

towards the unattainable, scarily  
lofty realm of hawk and albatross  
and stay, backlit by cirrocumulus.

It seems to be up to you  
to keep us  
up in the air, and to make sure our paths never cross.

## A Farmer Remember Lincoln

By [Witter Bynner](#)

“Lincoln?—  
Well, I was in the old Second Maine,  
The first regiment in Washington from the Pine Tree State.  
Of course I didn't get the butt of the clip;  
We was there for guardin' Washington—  
We was all green.

“I ain't never ben to the theayter in my life—  
I didn't know how to behave.  
I ain't never ben since.  
I can see as plain as my hat the box where he sat in  
When he was shot.  
I can tell you, sir, there was a panic  
When we found our President was in the shape he was in!

Never saw a soldier in the world but what liked him.

“Yes, sir. His looks was kind o’ hard to forget.  
He was a spare man,  
An old farmer.  
Everything was all right, you know,  
But he wasn’t a smooth-appearin’ man at all—  
Not in no ways;  
Thin-faced, long-necked,  
And a swellin’ kind of a thick lip like.

“And he was a jolly old fellow—always cheerful;  
He wasn’t so high but the boys could talk to him their own ways.  
While I was servin’ at the Hospital  
He’d come in and say, ‘You look nice in here,’  
Praise us up, you know.  
And he’d bend over and talk to the boys—  
And he’d talk so good to ’em—so close—  
That’s why I call him a farmer.  
I don’t mean that everything about him wasn’t all right, you understand,  
It’s just—well, I was a farmer—  
And he was my neighbor, anybody’s neighbor.  
I guess even you young folks would ‘a’ liked him.”

## **Mother’s Day at Crystal Banquet, Now Closed**

By [Bryan Byrdlong](#)

I dance with my mother beneath the fake crystal  
chandelier. A group of us swaying kompa in circles,  
with our mothers, in honor of our mothers, despite  
our mothers. We radiate out like the plastic floral  
arrangements adorning each table, our endless  
fractal orbit, Creole as sonic centerfold. I don’t  
understand what infects me, only know it does,  
the iridescence of immortal flowers, the kompa band’s  
baritone, the blue as the karabela dresses river  
down a makeshift runway. We have come to  
pay respect to our mothers, our mother tongue  
which heals, speaks for itself, is here in our collective  
magnetic spin, our slew of aphorisms, our revolutionary  
lilt, honed. All our mothers are here with us,  
our bodies & so their bodies raised mitochondrial.  
& we have gathered to eat bread and chicken penne,  
for Tante Raymonde to take my arm & lead me  
to dance, for my cousin Michael to chase me,

this too a dance. He catches me, tickles my sides.  
I am 8, sideways, a small infinity. My laughter is  
in Creole. I laugh like no one is after me.

## Cow Song

By [Elena Karina Byrne](#)

*For Thomas Lux*

I heard them, far-off, deep calling  
from behind death's invisible floor door. Their wallow  
metronome from the after-rain mud was one giant body.  
Arizona's yellow arm's length of light all the way  
to my own body standing at the edge of their field held  
me. I moved toward them and they toward me, as if to ask  
for something from nothing, as memory does, each face

dumbfounded ... dumb and found by  
the timeframe of my own fear, surrounded at dusk.  
There was a plastic grocery bag, its ghost body cornered  
small against a tree, and there was a heavy smell.  
Desolation is equal to contained energy now.  
Their heavy bodies slow toward me, my own  
slow inside their circle without kulning.

Kulning is a Swedish song for cows, not  
a pillowcase pulled over the head. Here, the mountains could be seen  
from far away. There's an abandoned physics, a floor door,  
my own head-call herding me, in-hearing nothing but them.  
Bone for bone's female indicates the inside  
of the mouth when singing is grief alone and is curved.

You can't stop shifting no matter how  
slow. It sounds like confusion in one direction.  
I wanted to tell you this in your absence. It sounds like the oak,  
it sounds like the oak of floorboards in God's head.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## The Destruction of Sennacherib

By [George Gordon, Lord Byron](#)

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,

And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;  
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,  
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is green,  
That host with their banners at sunset were seen:  
Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,  
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,  
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;  
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,  
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever grew still!

And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,  
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;  
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,  
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

And there lay the rider distorted and pale,  
With the dew on his brow, and the rust on his mail:  
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,  
The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.

And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,  
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;  
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,  
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!

## **She Walks in Beauty**

By [George Gordon, Lord Byron](#)

She walks in beauty, like the night  
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;  
And all that's best of dark and bright  
Meet in her aspect and her eyes;  
Thus mellowed to that tender light  
Which heaven to gaudy day denies.

One shade the more, one ray the less,  
Had half impaired the nameless grace  
Which waves in every raven tress,  
Or softly lightens o'er her face;  
Where thoughts serenely sweet express,  
How pure, how dear their dwelling-place.

And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,  
So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,  
The smiles that win, the tints that glow,  
But tell of days in goodness spent,  
A mind at peace with all below,  
A heart whose love is innocent!

## **So We'll Go No More a Roving**

By [George Gordon, Lord Byron](#)

So, we'll go no more a roving  
So late into the night,  
Though the heart be still as loving,  
And the moon be still as bright.

For the sword outwears its sheath,  
And the soul wears out the breast,  
And the heart must pause to breathe,  
And love itself have rest.

Though the night was made for loving,  
And the day returns too soon,  
Yet we'll go no more a roving  
By the light of the moon.

## **Altered After Too Many Years Under the Mask**

By [CAConrad](#)

I feel you  
judging me for  
becoming agoraphobic  
in someone else's house  
I forget how I learned to stroll through  
grocery stores as though there is no crisis  
my elbow cannot touch the middle of my back  
my fingers though have found every part of me  
soon no migration of wild animals will  
be unknown to humans we will chart  
film record publish archive everything  
it gives us something to do while we  
annihilate beauty poets shoveling  
a quarry that is really an ongoing  
crime scene investigation

a study in vomit imitating  
vast chronicles of the face  
whatever world we can hold  
we will never agree our  
neglect was worth it  
whatever amount of  
crazy we can imagine  
coming at us double it  
I found the perfect  
listening chair nothing  
but listeners who sit  
I am sitting in it now  
listening to my friend  
the photographer  
whose self-portrait  
I find reflected  
in eyes  
of her  
every  
photo

## **For the Feral Splendor that Remains**

By [CAConrad](#)

*For Kazim Ali*

sometimes I strain  
to hear one  
natural  
sound  
when gender blurs in a  
poem my world sets a  
tooth in the gear  
if god is in me  
when will I ask for  
my needs to be met  
every god is qualified  
it is not such a secret  
when I was afraid of the  
road I learned to drive  
map says name of  
your city in ocean  
line drawn to it  
towing behind  
the big party

history of life on  
earth might be  
interesting to a  
visitor one day  
chewing parsley and  
cilantro together is for  
me where forest  
meets meadow  
in a future life  
would we like to  
fall in love with the  
world as it is with  
no recollection  
of the beauty  
we destroy  
today

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## First Storm and Thereafter

By [Scott Cairns](#)

What I notice first within  
this rough scene fixed  
in memory is the rare  
quality of its lightning, as if  
those bolts were clipped  
from a comic book, pasted  
on low cloud, or fashioned  
with cardboard, daubed  
with gilt then hung overhead  
on wire and fine hooks.  
What I hear most clearly  
within that thunder now  
is its grief—a moan, a long  
lament echoing, an ache.  
And the rain? Raucous enough,  
pounding, but oddly  
musical, and, well,  
eager to entertain, solicitous.

No storm since has been framed  
with such matter-of-fact  
artifice, nor to such comic

effect. No, the thousand-plus  
storms since then have turned  
increasingly artless,  
arbitrary, bearing—every  
one of them—a numbing burst.

And today, from the west a gust  
and a filling pressure  
pulsing in the throat—offering  
little or nothing to make light of.

## **Possible Answers to Prayer**

By [Scott Cairns](#)

Your petitions—though they continue to bear  
just the one signature—have been duly recorded.  
Your anxieties—despite their constant,

relatively narrow scope and inadvertent  
entertainment value—nonetheless serve  
to bring your person vividly to mind.

Your repentance—all but obscured beneath  
a burgeoning, yellow fog of frankly more  
conspicuous resentment—is sufficient.

Your intermittent concern for the sick,  
the suffering, the needy poor is sometimes  
recognizable to me, if not to them.

Your angers, your zeal, your lipsmackingly  
righteous indignation toward the many  
whose habits and sympathies offend you—

these must burn away before you'll apprehend  
how near I am, with what fervor I adore  
precisely these, the several who rouse your passions.

## **Come Back**

By [Rocket Caleshu](#)

I hate how I can't keep this tremor inside, this mute  
matter of being made extant, this shiver in being, in  
no not-being, this wild flying up from the inner surge

and this crack in the apparatus espied around  
the corner from my particular warble, this  
quiver of dissolution in the pool of no single thing,

this break in the entity of the single, of not  
a mistake in being made, this suffering of trying  
to contain the infinite in language, this refusal

inextricable from its mass; this love, love of  
love, this being only in your presence, this inability  
not to err, rather the constitution of my broken image

caressed by this, this permission to submerge, this bigger  
and bigger being, tremor of infinite allowances, this telos  
of cataloging that which can never be disappeared.

## **At Last the New Arriving**

By [Gabrielle Calvocoressi](#)

Like the horn you played in Catholic school  
the city will open its mouth and cry

out. *Don't worry 'bout nothing. Don't mean  
no thing.* It will leave you stunned

as a fighter with his eyes swelled shut  
who's told he won the whole damn purse.

It will feel better than any floor  
that's risen up to meet you. It will rise

like Easter bread, golden and familiar  
in your grandmother's hands. She'll come back,

heaven having been too far from home  
to hold her. O it will be beautiful.

Every girl will ask you to dance and the boys  
won't kill you for it. Shake your head.

Dance until your bones clatter. What a prize  
you are. What a lucky sack of stars.

# Miss you. Would like to grab that chilled tofu we love.

By [Gabrielle Calvocoressi](#)

Do not care if you bring only your light body.  
Would just be so happy to sit at the table  
and talk about the menu. Miss you.  
Wish we could bet which chilis they'll put  
on the cubes of tofu. Our favorite.  
Sometimes green. Sometimes red. Roasted  
we always thought. But so cold and fresh.  
How did they do it? Wish you could be here  
to talk about it like it was so important.  
Wish you could. Watched you on the screens  
as I was walking, as I was cooking. Wished you  
could get out of the hospital. Can't  
bring myself to order our dish and eat it  
in the car. Miss you laughing. Miss  
you coming in from the cold or one  
too many meetings. Laughing. I'll order  
already. I'll order seven helpings, some  
dumplings, those cold yam noodles that you  
like. You can come in your light  
body or skeleton or be invisible I don't even  
care. Know you have a long way to travel.  
Know I don't even know if it's long  
at all. Wish you could tell me. What  
you're reading. If you're reading.  
Miss you. I'm at the table in the back.

## First Job

By [Joseph Campana](#)

All evening I hunted  
the bird that wanted  
a cage of glass,  
here where cemetery  
slides into creek, fronting  
what was once the largest  
indoor leather mill in the world.  
There the skins gathered  
for cleansing, coloring,  
scraping, shipping off.

It closed three years after  
a lone sparrow set up camp

behind the only desk  
in the only full-serve  
service station left in town  
where, from four to seven  
nightly one summer,  
I blackened the pages  
of books with my thumbs.

Whatever it sought there—  
thumping its frightened body  
against glass, into cabinets  
or out to the bays  
scrubbed raw with gasoline  
where the broken waited  
to be raised up, hosed off,  
fastened together in hope  
of coughing to life again—  
whatever it sought was not a dollar  
slipped through a window cracked  
because patronage was right  
for the aging ladies of August to provide  
from Chryslers cool in the sun.

There was nothing to be found  
in books or boxes of parts.  
And the tools hanging from pegs  
were as useless as my hands,  
which could not patch together  
those straggling conveyances  
any more than I could  
with a tattered broom  
batter the bird to freedom  
as I swung at fluttering terror  
as I sought with useless devices  
some fortune reposed  
in corners of grease and dust.

## **Follow Thy Fair Sun**

By [Thomas Campion](#)

Follow thy fair sun, unhappy shadow,  
Though thou be black as night  
And she made all of light,  
Yet follow thy fair sun unhappy shadow.

Follow her whose light thy light depriveth,  
Though here thou liv'st disgraced,  
And she in heaven is placed,  
Yet follow her whose light the world reviveth.

Follow those pure beams whose beauty burneth,  
That so have scorched thee,  
As thou still black must be,  
Till Her kind beams thy black to brightness turneth.

Follow her while yet her glory shineth,  
There comes a luckless night,  
That will dim all her light,  
And this the black unhappy shade divineth.

Follow still since so thy fates ordained,  
The Sun must have his shade,  
Till both at once do fade,  
The Sun still proved, the shadow still disdained.

## **My partner wants me to write them a poem about Sheryl Crow**

By [Kayleb Rae Candrilli](#)

but all I want to do is marry them on a beach  
that refuses to take itself too seriously.  
So much of our lives has been serious.  
Over time, I've learned that love is most astonishing  
when it persists after learning where we come from.  
When I bring my partner to my childhood home  
it is all bullets and needles and trash bags held  
at arm's length. It is my estranged father's damp  
bed of cardboard and cigar boxes filled  
with gauze and tarnished spoons. It is hard  
to clean a home, but it is harder to clean

the memory of it. When I was young, my  
father would light lavender candles and shoot  
up. Now, my partner and I light a fire that will  
burn all traces of the family that lived here.  
Black plastic smoke curdles up, and loose bullets  
discharge in the flames. My partner holds  
my hand as gunfire rings through  
the birch trees. Though this is almost  
beautiful, it is not. And if I'm being honest,  
my partner and I spend most of our time  
on earth feeding one another citrus fruits  
and enough strength to go on. Every morning  
I pack them half a grapefruit and some sugar.  
And they tell me it's just sweet enough.

## **Song**

By [Brenda Cárdenas](#)

You shout my name  
from beyond my dreams,  
beyond the picture window  
of this Rosarito beach house.  
Rushing from bed to shore  
I glimpse their backs—  
volcanoes rising out of the sea.  
Your back, a blue-black silhouette,  
feet wet with the wash of morning waves.  
Fountains spring from mammal minds,  
my hands lifting a splash of sand.  
I'm on my knees,  
toes finding a cool prayer

beneath them, fingers pressing  
sea foam to my temples,  
while you open arms wide as a generation,  
raise them to a compass point,  
dive.  
If you could reach them,  
you would ride their fins  
under the horizon,  
then surf the crash of waves  
left in their wake.  
And if I could grasp  
my own fear,  
I'd drown it,  
leave it breathless and blue  
as this ocean,  
as the brilliant backs  
of whales  
surfacing  
for air.

## **Epitaph on the Lady Mary Villiers**

By [Thomas Carew](#)

This little vault, this narrow room,  
Of Love, and Beauty, is the tomb;  
The dawning beam that gan to clear  
Our clouded sky, lies darken'd here,  
Forever set to us, by death  
Sent to inflame the world beneath.  
'Twas but a bud, yet did contain  
More sweetness than shall spring again;  
A budding star that might have grown  
Into a sun, when it had blown.  
This hopeful beauty did create  
New life in Love's declining state;  
But now his empire ends, and we  
From fire and wounding darts are free;  
His brand, his bow, let no man fear,  
The flames, the arrows, all lie here.

## **The Spring**

By [Thomas Carew](#)

Now that the winter's gone, the earth hath lost

Her snow-white robes, and now no more the frost  
Candies the grass, or casts an icy cream  
Upon the silver lake or crystal stream;  
But the warm sun thaws the benumbed earth,  
And makes it tender; gives a sacred birth  
To the dead swallow; wakes in hollow tree  
The drowsy cuckoo, and the humble-bee.  
Now do a choir of chirping minstrels bring  
In triumph to the world the youthful Spring.  
The valleys, hills, and woods in rich array  
Welcome the coming of the long'd-for May.  
Now all things smile, only my love doth lour;  
Nor hath the scalding noonday sun the power  
To melt that marble ice, which still doth hold  
Her heart congeal'd, and makes her pity cold.  
The ox, which lately did for shelter fly  
Into the stall, doth now securely lie  
In open fields; and love no more is made  
By the fireside, but in the cooler shade  
Amyntas now doth with his Chloris sleep  
Under a sycamore, and all things keep  
Time with the season; only she doth carry  
June in her eyes, in her heart January.

## Native Title

By [Ina Cariño](#)

my dead grandmother's young  
    Japanese maple was uprooted   stolen  
        last week    scattered leaves crushed

under a stranger's foot. to recover  
    from this loss I spelled my name red  
        in alphabet soup—mashed the letters

together until they resembled my face,  
    which is as my mother's—skin of ginger  
        & violet tuber. on split lips I wear my papa's

name    passed down from his father's  
    fathers—a century of men called darling,  
        cariño by Spanish priests. I am still named

after all of them, here where my brown  
    face is my first language, where I carry

a muddled tongue. words I try to forget:  
darling, cariño, native, empire, earth. in 1909  
the Supreme Court gifted my forefathers  
their native title for being dark on their own  
dirt. to (dis)prove myself *native* I honey  
my mouth with prayers for untainted soil,  
because I was schooled across the ocean  
in a convent—nuns cracking on my knuckles  
with splintered rulers & taking five centavos,  
my rusted allowance, for every word not  
spoken in English. a trickery this germination  
of my nonexistent accent. & I place blushed  
begonias newly-potted on my windowsill—  
sad replica of my childhood garden. still, I wept  
when my grandmother's tree returned—  
replanted messy by surreptitious hands.  
I tally my fortunes count new freckles  
blossoming every year—stare at the mirror  
until I am my mother's mothers, even if  
I can never tell which empire I mimic  
as I am shuffled from one to the other.

## Fortuna

By [Thomas Carlyle](#)

The wind blows east, the wind blows west,  
And the frost falls and the rain:  
A weary heart went thankful to rest,  
And must rise to toil again, 'gain,  
And must rise to toil again.

The wind blows east, the wind blows west,  
And there comes good luck and bad;  
The thriftiest man is the cheerfulest;  
'Tis a thriftless thing to be sad, sad,  
'Tis a thriftless thing to be sad.

The wind blows east, the wind blows west;

Ye shall know a tree by its fruit:  
This world, they say, is worst to the best;—  
But a dastard has evil to boot, boot,  
But a dastard has evil to boot.

The wind blows east, the wind blows west;  
What skills it to mourn or to talk?  
A journey I have, and far ere I rest;  
I must bundle my wallets and walk, walk,  
I must bundle my wallets and walk.

The wind does blow as it lists alway;  
Canst thou change this world to thy mind?  
The world will wander its own wise way;  
I also will wander mine, mine,  
I also will wander mine.

## **A Boat Beneath a Sunny Sky**

By [Lewis Carroll](#)

A boat beneath a sunny sky,  
Lingering onward dreamily  
In an evening of July —

Children three that nestle near,  
Eager eye and willing ear,  
Pleased a simple tale to hear —

Long has faded that sunny sky:  
Echoes fade and memories die:  
Autumn frosts have slain July.

Still she haunts me, phantomwise,  
Alice moving under skies  
Never seen by waking eyes.

Children yet, the tale to hear,  
Eager eye and willing ear,  
Lovingly shall nestle near.

In a Wonderland they lie,  
Dreaming as the days go by,  
Dreaming as the summers die:

Ever drifting down the stream —

Lingering in the golden gleam —  
Life, what is it but a dream?

## **The Bearer**

By [Hayden Carruth](#)

Like all his people he felt at home in the forest.  
The silence beneath great trees, the dimness there,  
The distant high rustling of foliage, the clumps  
Of fern like little green fountains, patches of sunlight,  
Patches of moss and lichen, the occasional  
Undergrowth of hazel and holly, was he aware  
Of all this? On the contrary his unawareness  
Was a kind of gratification, a sense of comfort  
And repose even in the strain of running day  
After day. He had been aware of the prairies.  
He had known he hated the sky so vast, the wind  
Roaring in the grasses, and the brightness that  
Hurt his eyes. Now he hated nothing; nor could he  
Feel anything but the urgency that compelled him  
Onward continually. "May I not forget, may I  
Not forget," he said to himself over and over.  
When he saw three ravens rise on their awkward  
Wings from the forest floor perhaps seventy-five  
Ells ahead of him, he said, "Three ravens,"  
And immediately forgot them. "May I not forget,"  
He said, and repeated again in his mind the exact  
Words he had memorized, the message that was  
Important and depressing, which made him feel  
Worry and happiness at the same time, a peculiar  
Elation. At last he came to his people far  
In the darkness. He smiled and spoke his words,  
And he looked intently into their eyes gleaming  
In firelight. He cried when they cried. No rest  
For his lungs. He flinched and lay down while they  
Began to kill him with clubs and heavy stones.

## **I Know, I Remember, But How Can I Help You**

By [Hayden Carruth](#)

The northern lights.        I wouldn't have noticed them  
if the deer hadn't told me  
a doe       her coat of pearls       her glowing hoofs  
proud and inquisitive

eager for my appraisal  
and I went out into the night with electrical steps  
but with my head held also proud  
to share the animal's fear  
and see what I had seen before  
a sky flaring and spectral  
greenish waves and ribbons  
and the snow under strange light tossing in the pasture  
like a storming ocean caught  
by a flaring beacon.  
The deer stands away from me not far  
there among bare black apple trees  
a presence I no longer see.  
We are proud to be afraid  
proud to share  
the silent magnetic storm that destroys the stars  
and flickers around our heads  
like the saints' cold spiritual agonies  
of old.  
I remember but without the sense other light-storms  
cold memories discursive and philosophical  
in my mind's burden  
and the deer remembers nothing.  
We move our feet crunching bitter snow while the storm  
crashes like god-wars down the east  
we shake the sparks from our eyes  
we quiver inside our shocked fur  
we search for each other  
in the apple thicket—  
a glimpse, an acknowledgment  
it is enough and never enough—  
we toss our heads and say good night  
moving away on bitter bitter snow.

## Proem

By [Martin Carter](#)

Not, in the saying of you, are you  
said. Baffled and like a root  
stopped by a stone you turn back questioning  
the tree you feed. But what the leaves hear  
is not what the roots ask. Inexhaustibly,  
being at one time what was to be said  
and at another time what has been said  
the saying of you remains the living of you

never to be said. But, enduring,  
you change with the change that changes  
and yet are not of the changing of any of you.  
Ever yourself, you are always about  
to be yourself in something else ever with me.

## To Solitude

By [Alice Cary](#)

I am weary of the working,  
Weary of the long day's heat;  
To thy comfortable bosom,  
Wilt thou take me, spirit sweet?

Weary of the long, blind struggle  
For a pathway bright and high,—  
Weary of the dimly dying  
Hopes that never quite all die.

Weary searching a bad cipher  
For a good that must be meant;  
Discontent with being weary,—  
Weary with my discontent.

I am weary of the trusting  
Where my trusts but torments prove;  
Wilt thou keep faith with me? wilt thou  
Be my true and tender love?

I am weary drifting, driving  
Like a helmless bark at sea;  
Kindly, comfortable spirit,  
Wilt thou give thyself to me?

Give thy birds to sing me sonnets?  
Give thy winds my cheeks to kiss?  
And thy mossy rocks to stand for  
The memorials of our bliss?

I in reverence will hold thee,  
Never vexed with jealous ills,  
Though thy wild and wimpling waters  
Wind about a thousand hills.

# Jacob

By [Phoebe Cary](#)

He dwelt among “apartments let,”  
About five stories high;  
A man I thought that none would get,  
And very few would try.

A boulder, by a larger stone  
Half hidden in the mud,  
Fair as a man when only one  
Is in the neighborhood.

He lived unknown, and few could tell  
When Jacob was not free;  
But he has got a wife,—and O!  
The difference to me!

# Suppose

By [Phoebe Cary](#)

Suppose, my little lady,  
Your doll should break her head,  
Could you make it whole by crying  
Till your eyes and nose are red?  
And would n't it be pleasanter  
To treat it as a joke;  
And say you 're glad "'T was Dolly's  
And not your head that broke?"

Suppose you 're dressed for walking,  
And the rain comes pouring down,  
Will it clear off any sooner  
Because you scold and frown?  
And would n't it be nicer  
For you to smile than pout,  
And so make sunshine in the house  
When there is none without?

Suppose your task, my little man,  
Is very hard to get,  
Will it make it any easier  
For you to sit and fret?  
And would n't it be wiser  
Than waiting like a dunce,

To go to work in earnest  
And learn the thing at once?

Suppose that some boys have a horse,  
And some a coach and pair,  
Will it tire you less while walking  
To say, "It is n't fair?"  
And would n't it be nobler  
To keep your temper sweet,  
And in your heart be thankful  
You can walk upon your feet?

And suppose the world don't please you,  
Nor the way some people do,  
Do you think the whole creation  
Will be altered just for you?  
And is n't it, my boy or girl,  
The wisest, bravest plan,  
Whatever comes, or does n't come,  
To do the best you can?

## **Christmas, 1970**

By [Sandra M. Castillo](#)

We assemble the silver tree,  
our translated lives,  
its luminous branches,  
numbered to fit into its body.  
place its metallic roots  
to decorate our first Christmas.  
Mother finds herself  
opening, closing the Red Cross box  
she will carry into 1976  
like an unwanted door prize,  
a timepiece, a stubborn fact,  
an emblem of exile measuring our days,  
marked by the moment of our departure,  
our lives no longer arranged.

Somewhere,  
there is a photograph,  
a Polaroid Mother cannot remember was ever taken:  
I am sitting under Tia Tere's Christmas tree,  
her first apartment in this, our new world:  
my sisters by my side,

I wear a white dress, black boots,  
an eight-year-old's resignation;  
Mae and Mitzy, age four,  
wear red and white snowflake sweaters and identical smiles,  
on this, our first Christmas,  
away from ourselves.

The future unreal, unmade,  
Mother will cry into the new year  
with Lidia and Emerito,  
our elderly downstairs neighbors,  
who realize what we are too young to understand:  
Even a map cannot show you  
the way back to a place  
that no longer exists.

## Harina de Castilla

By [Sandra M. Castillo](#)

“All accounts of the past are made up of possibilities.”

—*Dionisio Martinez*

for Larry Villanueva

i.  
For years,  
you were a story of ancestors,  
pre-revolutionary Cuba:  
Barrios, Donate, Gallata, Villanueva,  
family names strung and pearled in the Caribbean  
by blood and memory,  
nostalgia and calamity  
en Artemisa, a small town in my mother's childhood,  
a woman in December of 1967,  
your Tía Marta, a hospital room en la Covadonga,  
rows and rows of children, my sisters,  
unexpectedly two, your cousins,  
whose clothes Mae and Mitzy wore  
into history and exile.

En el exilo, La Cuba del Norte,  
ten years after the summer of El Mariel,  
you were my map of Cuba,  
un espejo, un reflejo,  
a tisa-blue knot of possibility.

Mi esquina Habanera,  
a street en la arquitectura del pasado,  
a superficial distance in the patina of memory,  
a me I had never really known,  
a language I had learned not to think in.

Later, you were a face on T.V.  
en Guadalupe, María Elena,  
my mother's telenovelas en el canal 23,  
an actor, a director, a sculptor, abstract angst with a face  
history and coincidence had given me.

ii.  
So when you become fingerprints and words,  
a noun, a verb, a snapshot in motion,  
I am no longer alone with my ghosts,  
las sombras de el pasado, inventing truth,  
reclaiming language, my old self.  
I am me, unadorned by speech,  
English or translation;  
I am an I, simple, exposed,  
this afternoon in our lives,  
a conversation about the circle  
of coincidence and persuasion,  
a photograph of an idea we once were,  
and you are familiar,  
somehow.

iii.  
Constantly returning,  
we breathe in Spanish,  
move through blank spaces like incantations,  
waiting for words to fill a moment  
(often ninety miles long)  
with etymology, jargon, ghostwords,  
shadows and nostalgia,  
and become Harina de Castilla, Larry,  
re-shaped, translated, improvised, sculpted  
and redefined.

***Note to Poetry Out Loud students:*** This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.

# My Father Sings, to My Embarrassment

By [Sandra M. Castillo](#)

at Las Villas, a small Carol City bar with a makeshift stage,  
where he spends too much time drinking,  
pretending he can learn to play the guitar at forty-five,  
become a singer, a musician,  
who writes about "Que Difícil Es...."  
to live in Spanish in Miami,  
a city yet to be translated,  
in a restaurant where he has taken us for Cuban food,  
where I sit, frozen, unable to make a sound,  
where Mother smiles,  
all her teeth exposed,  
squeezes my hand,  
where Mae and Mitzy hide  
under the table shielding them from shame  
with a blood-red tablecloth,  
leaving my mother and me,  
pale-faced, trapped by the spotlight shining in our eyes,  
making it difficult for us to pretend  
we do not know the man in the white suit  
pointing to us.

# An Apology for Her Poetry

By [Margaret Cavendish](#)

I language want to dress my fancies in,  
The hair's uncurled, the garment's loose and thin.  
Had they but silver lace to make them gay,  
They'd be more courted than in poor array;  
Or, had they art, would make a better show;  
But they are plain; yet cleanly do they go.  
The world in bravery doth take delight,  
And glistening shows do more attract the sight:  
And every one doth honor a rich hood,  
As if the outside made the inside good.  
And every one doth bow and give the place,  
Not for the man's sake but the silver lace.  
Let me intreat in my poor book's behalf,  
That all will not adore the golden calf.  
Consider, pray, gold hath no life therein,  
And life, in nature, is the richest thing.  
Be just, let Fancy have the upper place,  
And then my verses may perchance find grace.

# Emplumada

By [Lorna Dee Cervantes](#)

When summer ended  
the leaves of snapdragons withered  
taking their shrill-colored mouths with them.  
They were still, so quiet. They were  
violet where umber now is. She hated  
and she hated to see  
them go. Flowers

born when the weather was good - this  
she thinks of, watching the branch of peaches  
daring their ways above the fence, and further,  
two hummingbirds, hovering, stuck to each other,  
arcing their bodies in grim determination  
to find what is good, what is  
given them to find. These are warriors

distancing themselves from history.  
They find peace  
in the way they contain the wind  
and are gone.

# Four Portraits of Fire

By [Lorna Dee Cervantes](#)

1

I find a strange knowledge of wind,  
an open door in the mountain  
pass where everything intersects.  
Believe me. This will not pass.  
This is a world where flags  
contain themselves, and are still,  
marked by their unfurled edges.  
Lean stuff sways on the boughs  
of pitch pine: silver, almost tinsel,  
all light gone blue and sprouting  
orange oils in a last bouquet.

2

These were the nest builders;  
I caught one last morning, I sang  
so it fell down, stupid,  
from the trees. They're so incorrect

in their dead skin. Witness their twig  
feet, the mistake of their hands.  
They will follow you. They yearn  
pebbles for their gullets to grind  
their own seed. They swallow  
so selflessly and die  
like patriots.

3

Last Christmas, a family of five  
woke from their dreaming and  
dreamed themselves over: the baby  
in its pink pajamas, the boy  
in the red flannel bathrobe  
he grabbed from the door,  
a mother, a father, and a sister  
in curlers; all died.

A wood frame house,  
a cannister of oil,  
a match—watch  
as it unsettles.  
They were so cold;  
umber.

4

I am away from the knowledge  
of animal mystics,  
brujas and sorcerers  
or the nudging chants  
of a Tlingit Kachina.  
I am frightened by regions  
with wills of their own,  
but when my people  
die in the snow  
I wonder  
did the depths billow up  
to reach them?

## **“Love of My Flesh, Living Death”**

By [Lorna Dee Cervantes](#)

*after García Lorca*

Once I wasn't always so plain.

I was strewn feathers on a cross  
of dune, an expanse of ocean  
at my feet, garlands of gulls.

Sirens and gulls. They couldn't tame you.  
You know as well as they: to be  
a dove is to bear the falcon  
at your breast, your nights, your seas.

My fear is simple, heart-faced  
above a flare of etchings, a lineage  
in letters, my sudden stare. It's you.

*It's you!* sang the heart upon its mantel  
pelvis. Blush of my breath, catch  
of my see—beautiful bird—It's you.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Night Magic (Blue Jester)

By [Lorna Dee Cervantes](#)

*After Federico García Lorca*

Blue that I love you  
Blue that I hate you  
Fat blue in the face  
Disgraced blue that I erase  
You lone blue  
Blue of an alien race  
Strong blue eternally graced  
Blue that I know you  
Blue that I choose you  
Crust blue  
Chunky blue  
Moon blue glows that despise  
You — idolize you  
Blue and the band disappears  
Blue of the single left dog  
Blue of the eminent red fog  
Blue that I glue you to me  
You again and again blue  
Blue blue of the helium  
Bubble of loveloss

Blue of the whirlwind  
The blue being again  
Blue of the endless rain  
Blue that I paint you  
Blue that I knew you  
Blue of the blinking lights  
Blue of the landing at full tilt  
Blue of the wilt  
Flower of nightfall  
Blue of the shadow  
In yellowed windows  
Blue of the blown  
And broken glass  
Blue of the Blue Line  
Underlines in blue  
Blue of the ascending nude  
Blue before the blackness  
Of new blue of our winsome  
Bedlam Blue of the blue  
Bed alone: blue of the one  
Who looks on blue of what  
Remains of cement fall  
Blue of the vague crescent  
Ship sailing blue of the rainbow  
Of wait blue that I whore  
You — blue that I adore you  
Blue of the bluest door  
Blue my painted city  
In blue (it blew.)

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Valentine

By [Lorna Dee Cervantes](#)

Cherry plums suck a week's soak,  
overnight they explode into the scenery of before  
your touch. The curtains open on the end of our past.  
Pink trumpets on the vines bare to the hummingbirds.  
Butterflies unclasp from the purse of their couplings, they  
light and open on the doubled hands of eucalyptus fronds.  
They sip from the pistils for seven generations that bear  
them through another tongue as the first year of our  
punishing mathematic begins clicking the calendar

forward. They land like seasoned rocks on the  
decks of the cliffs. They take another turn  
on the spiral of life where the blossoms  
blush & pale in a day of dirty dawn  
where the ghost of you webs  
your limbs through branches  
of cherry plum. Rare bird,  
extinct color, you stay in  
my dreams in x-ray. In  
rerun, the bone of you  
stripping sweethearts  
folds and layers the  
shedding petals of  
my grief into a  
decayed holo-  
gram—my  
for ever  
empty  
art.

## I Once Was a Child

By [Victoria Chang](#)

I once was a child am a child am someone's child  
not my mother's not my father's the boss  
gave us special treatment treatment for something  
special a lollipop or a sticker glitter from the  
  
toy box the better we did the better the plastic prize made  
in China one year everyone got a spinning top  
one year everyone got a tap on their shoulders  
one year everyone was fired everyone  
  
fired but me one year we all lost our words one year  
my father lost his words to a stroke  
a stroke of bad luck stuck his words  
used to be so worldly his words fired  
  
him let him go without notice can they do that  
can she do that yes she can in this land she can  
once we sang songs around a piano *this land is your land*  
*this land is my land* in this land someone always  
  
owns the land in this land someone who owns  
the land owns the buildings on the land owns

the people in the buildings unless an earthquake  
sucks the land in like a long noodle

## Mr. Darcy

By [Victoria Chang](#)

In the end she just wanted the house  
and a horse not much more what  
if he didn't own the house or worse  
not even a horse how do we

separate the things from a man the man from  
the things is a man still the same  
without his reins here it rains every fifteen  
minutes it would be foolish to

marry a man without an umbrella did  
Cinderella really love the prince or  
just the prints on the curtains in the  
ballroom once I went window-

shopping but I didn't want a window when  
do you know it's time to get a new  
man one who can win more things at the  
fair I already have four stuffed

pandas from the fair I won fair and square  
is it time to be less square to wear  
something more revealing in *North and*  
*South* she does the dealing gives him

the money in the end but she falls in love  
with him when he has the money when  
he is still running away if the water is  
running in the other room is it wrong

for me to not want to chase it because it owns  
nothing else when I wave to a man I  
love what happens when another man with  
a lot more bags waves back

## In Childhood

By [Sarah A. Chavez](#)

In childhood Christy and I played in the dumpster across the street  
from Pickett & Sons Construction. When we found bricks, it was best.  
Bricks were most useful. We drug them to our empty backyard  
and stacked them in the shape of a room. For months  
we collected bricks, one on top another. When the walls  
reached as high as my younger sister's head, we laid down.  
Hiding in the middle of our room, we watched the cycle  
of the sun, gazed at the stars, clutched hands and felt at home.

## Self-Portrait as So Much Potential

By [Chen Chen](#)

Dreaming of one day being as fearless as a mango.  
  
As friendly as a tomato. Merciless to chin & shirtfront.  
  
Realizing I hate the word "sip."  
  
But that's all I do.  
  
I drink. So slowly.  
  
& say I'm tasting it. When I'm just bad at taking in liquid.  
  
I'm no mango or tomato. I'm a rusty yawn in a rumored year. I'm an arctic attic.  
  
Come amble & ampersand in the slippery polar clutter.  
  
I am not the heterosexual neat freak my mother raised me to be.  
  
I am a gay sipper, & my mother has placed what's left of her hope on my brothers.  
  
She wants them to gulp up the world, spit out solid degrees, responsible grandchildren ready  
to gobble.  
  
They will be better than mangoes, my brothers.  
  
Though I have trouble imagining what that could be.  
  
Flying mangoes, perhaps. Flying mango-tomato hybrids. Beautiful sons.

# Summer

By [Chen Chen](#)

You are the ice cream sandwich connoisseur of your generation.

Blessed are your floral shorteralls, your deeply pink fanny pack with <sup>[ ]</sup><sub>SEP</sub>travel-size lint roller just in case.

Level of splendiferous in your outfit: 200.

Types of invisible pain stemming from adolescent disasters in classrooms, locker rooms, & quite often Toyota Camrys: at least 10,000.

You are not a jigglypuff, not yet a wigglytuff.

Reporters & fathers call your generation “the worst.”

Which really means “queer kids who could go online & learn that queer doesn’t have to mean disaster.”

Or dead.

Instead, queer means, splendiferously, you.

& you means someone who knows that common flavors for ice cream <sup>[ ]</sup><sub>SEP</sub>sandwiches in Singapore include red bean, yam, & honeydew.

Your powers are great, are growing.

One day you will create an online personality quiz that also freshens the breath.

The next day you will tell your father, *You were wrong to say that I had to change.*

*To make me promise I would. To make me promise.*

*& promise.*

# The Bait

By [Eric Chock](#)

Saturday mornings, before  
my weekly chores,  
I used to sneak out of the house  
and across the street,  
grabbing the first grasshopper

walking in the damp California grass  
along the stream.  
Carefully hiding a silver hook  
beneath its green wings,  
I'd float it out  
across the gentle ripples  
towards the end of its life.  
Just like that.  
I'd give it the hook  
and let it ride.  
All I ever expected for it  
was that big-mouth bass  
awaiting its arrival.  
I didn't think  
that I was giving up one life  
to get another,  
that even childhood  
was full of sacrifice.  
I'd just take the bright green thing,  
pluck it off its only stalk,  
and give it away as if  
it were mine to give.  
I knew someone out there  
would be fooled,  
that someone would accept  
the precious gift.  
So I just sent it along  
with a plea of a prayer,  
hoping it would spread its wings this time  
and fly across that wet glass sky,  
no concern for what inspired  
its life, or mine,  
only instinct guiding pain  
towards the other side.

## **We Used Our Words We Used What Words We Had**

By [Franny Choi](#)

we used our words we used what words we had  
to weld, what words we had we wielded, kneeled,  
we knelt. & wept we wrung the wet the sweat  
we wracked our lips we rang for words to ward  
off sleep to warn to want ourselves. to want  
the earth we mouthed it wound our vowels until  
it fit, in fits the earth we mounted roused

& rocked we harped we yawned & tried to yawp  
& tried to fix, affixed, we facted, felt.  
we fattened fanfared anthemed hammered, felt  
the words' worth stagnate, snap in half in heat  
the wane the melt what words we'd hoarded halved  
& holey, porous. meanwhile tide still tide.  
& we: still washed for sounds to mark. & marked.

## The Craftsman

By [Marcus B. Christian](#)

I ply with all the cunning of my art  
This little thing, and with consummate care  
I fashion it—so that when I depart,  
Those who come after me shall find it fair  
And beautiful. It must be free of flaws—  
Pointing no laborings of weary hands;  
And there must be no flouting of the laws  
Of beauty—as the artist understands.

Through passion, yearnings infinite—yet dumb—  
I lift you from the depths of my own mind  
And gild you with my soul's white heat to plumb  
The souls of future men. I leave behind  
This thing that in return this solace gives:  
“He who creates true beauty ever lives.”

## First Love

By [John Clare](#)

I ne'er was struck before that hour  
With love so sudden and so sweet,  
Her face it bloomed like a sweet flower  
And stole my heart away complete.  
My face turned pale as deadly pale,  
My legs refused to walk away,  
And when she looked, what could I ail?  
My life and all seemed turned to clay.

And then my blood rushed to my face  
And took my eyesight quite away,  
The trees and bushes round the place  
Seemed midnight at noonday.  
I could not see a single thing,

Words from my eyes did start—  
They spoke as chords do from the string,  
And blood burnt round my heart.

Are flowers the winter's choice?  
Is love's bed always snow?  
She seemed to hear my silent voice,  
Not love's appeals to know.  
I never saw so sweet a face  
As that I stood before.  
My heart has left its dwelling-place  
And can return no more.

## **Love Lives Beyond the Tomb**

By [John Clare](#)

Love lives beyond  
The tomb, the earth, which fades like dew—  
I love the fond,  
The faithful, and the true

Love lives in sleep,  
'Tis happiness of healthy dreams  
Eve's dews may weep,  
But love delightful seems.

'Tis seen in flowers,  
And in the even's pearly dew  
On earth's green hours,  
And in the heaven's eternal blue.

'Tis heard in spring  
When light and sunbeams, warm and kind,  
On angels' wing  
Bring love and music to the wind.

And where is voice,  
So young, so beautiful and sweet  
As nature's choice,  
Where Spring and lovers meet?

Love lives beyond  
The tomb, the earth, the flowers, and dew.  
I love the fond,  
The faithful, young and true.

# At the Holiday Gas Station

By [John Lee Clark](#)

Near the Naked Juices I passed  
A man my fingers walking  
Across his back he turned and held up  
A box said what  
Might this be I said oh  
You're tactile too what's your name  
He said William Amos Miller I said  
I thought you were born in 1872 he said so  
You know who I am yes you're the man  
Who journeyed to the center of Earth  
In your mind he smiled on my arm said do  
You know that the Earth also journeyed  
To the center of my mind I said  
I never thought of that he asked  
Again about the box I shook it sniffed  
Said Mike and Ike is it fruit  
He inquired not exactly well  
I think I shall have an apple wait  
You haven't paid oh  
My money nowadays is no money he pushed  
Outside we walked across the ice  
To the intersection he made to go across  
Wait you can't go across we have to wait  
For help oh help he said crouching  
Until our hands touched the cold ground  
He said I said we said we see  
With our hands I jumped up and said you're the man

# My Therapist Wants to Know about My Relationship to Work

By [Tiana Clark](#)

I hustle  
upstream.  
I grasp.  
I grind.  
I control & panic. Poke  
balloons in my chest,  
always popping there,  
always my thoughts thump,  
thump. I snooze — wake & go

boom. All day, like this I short  
my breath. I scroll & scroll.  
I see what you wrote — I like.  
I heart. My thumb, so tired.  
My head bent down, but not  
in prayer, heavy from the looking.  
I see your face, your phone-lit  
faces. I tap your food, two times  
for more hearts. I retweet.  
I email: *yes & yes & yes*.  
Then I cry & need to say: *no-no-no*.  
Why does it take so long to reply?  
I FOMO & shout. I read. I never  
enough. New book. New post.  
New ping. A new tab, then another.  
Papers on the floor, scattered & stacked.  
So many journals, unbroken white spines,  
waiting. Did you hear that new new?  
I start to text back. Ellipsis, then I forget.  
I balk. I lazy the bed. I wallow when I write.  
I truth when I lie. I throw a book  
when a poem undoes me. I underline  
Clifton: *today we are possible*. I start  
from image. I begin with Phillis Wheatley.  
I begin with Phillis Wheatley. I begin  
with Phillis Wheatley reaching for coal.  
I start with a napkin, receipt, or my hand.  
I muscle memory. I stutter the page. I fail.  
Hit delete — scratch out one more line. I sonnet,  
then break form. I make tea, use two bags.  
Rooibos again. I bathe now. Epsom salt.  
No books or phone. Just water & the sound  
of water filling, glory — be my buoyant body,  
bowl of me. Yes, lavender, more bubbles  
& bath bomb, of course some candles too.  
All alone with Coltrane. My favorite, “Naima,”  
for his wife, now for me, inside my own womb.  
Again, I child back. I float. I sing. I simple  
& humble. Eyes close. I low my voice,  
was it a psalm? Don’t know. But I stopped.

## Then and Now

By [Tom Clark](#)

Then it was always

for now, later  
for later.  
And then years of now  
passed, and it grew later  
and later. Trapped  
in the shrinking  
chocolate box  
the confused sardine  
was unhappy. It  
leapt, and banged its head  
again. And afterward  
they said shall we  
repeat the experiment.  
And it said  
later for that.

## **[if mama / could see]**

By [Lucille Clifton](#)

if mama  
could see  
she would see  
lucy sprawling  
limbs of lucy  
decorating the  
backs of chairs  
lucy hair  
holding the mirrors up  
that reflect odd  
aspects of lucy.

if mama  
could hear  
she would hear  
lucysong rolled in the  
corners like lint  
exotic webs of lucysighs  
long lucy spiders explaining  
to obscure gods.

if mama  
could talk  
she would talk  
good girl  
good girl

good girl  
clean up your room.

## **mulberry fields**

By [Lucille Clifton](#)

they thought the field was wasting  
and so they gathered the marker rocks and stones and  
piled them into a barn they say that the rocks were shaped  
some of them scratched with triangles and other forms they  
must have been trying to invent some new language they say  
the rocks went to build that wall there guarding the manor and  
some few were used for the state house  
crops refused to grow  
i say the stones marked an old tongue and it was called eternity  
and pointed toward the river i say that after that collection  
no pillow in the big house dreamed i say that somewhere under  
here moulders one called alice whose great grandson is old now  
too and refuses to talk about slavery i say that at the  
masters table only one plate is set for supper i say no seed  
can flourish on this ground once planted then forsaken wild  
berries warm a field of bones  
bloom how you must i say

## **“oh antic God”**

By [Lucille Clifton](#)

oh antic God  
return to me  
my mother in her thirties  
leaned across the front porch  
the huge pillow of her breasts  
pressing against the rail  
summoning me in for bed.

I am almost the dead woman's age times two.

I can barely recall her song  
the scent of her hands  
though her wild hair scratches my dreams  
at night. return to me, oh Lord of then  
and now, my mother's calling,  
her young voice humming my name.

## won't you celebrate with me?

By [Lucille Clifton](#)

won't you celebrate with me  
what i have shaped into  
a kind of life? i had no model.  
born in babylon  
both nonwhite and woman  
what did i see to be except myself?  
i made it up  
here on this bridge between  
starshine and clay,  
my one hand holding tight  
my other hand; come celebrate  
with me that everyday  
something has tried to kill me  
and has failed.

## Say not the Struggle nought Availeth

By [Arthur Hugh Clough](#)

Say not the struggle nought availeth,  
The labour and the wounds are vain,  
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,  
And as things have been they remain.

If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars;  
It may be, in yon smoke concealed,  
Your comrades chase e'en now the fliers,  
And, but for you, possess the field.

For while the tired waves, vainly breaking  
Seem here no painful inch to gain,  
Far back through creeks and inlets making,  
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

And not by eastern windows only,  
When daylight comes, comes in the light,  
In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly,  
But westward, look, the land is bright.

# El Olvido

By [Judith Ortiz Cofer](#)

It is a dangerous thing  
to forget the climate of your birthplace,  
to choke out the voices of dead relatives  
when in dreams they call you  
by your secret name.  
It is dangerous  
to spurn the clothes you were born to wear  
for the sake of fashion; dangerous  
to use weapons and sharp instruments  
you are not familiar with; dangerous  
to disdain the plaster saints  
before which your mother kneels  
praying with embarrassing fervor  
that you survive in the place you have chosen to live:  
a bare, cold room with no pictures on the walls,  
a forgetting place where she fears you will die  
of loneliness and exposure.  
*Jesús, María, y José, she says,  
el olvido is a dangerous thing.*

# Women Who Love Angels

By [Judith Ortiz Cofer](#)

They are thin  
and rarely marry, living out  
their long lives  
in spacious rooms, French doors  
giving view to formal gardens  
where aromatic flowers  
grow in profusion.  
They play their pianos  
in the late afternoon  
tilting their heads  
at a gracious angle  
as if listening  
to notes pitched above  
the human range.  
Age makes them translucent;  
each palpitation of their hearts  
visible at temple or neck.  
When they die, it's in their sleep,  
their spirits shaking gently loose

from a hostess too well bred  
to protest.

## American, I Sing You Back

By [Allison Adelle Hedge Coke](#)

for Phil Young and my father Robert Hedge Coke;  
for Whitman and Hughes

America, I sing back. Sing back what sung you in.  
Sing back the moment you cherished breath.  
Sing you home into yourself and back to reason.

Before America began to sing, I sung her to sleep,  
held her cradleboard, wept her into day.  
My song gave her creation, prepared her delivery,  
held her severed cord beautifully beaded.

My song helped her stand, held her hand for first steps,  
nourished her very being, fed her, placed her three sisters strong.  
My song comforted her as she battled my reason  
broke my long-held footing sure, as any child might do.

As she pushed herself away, forced me to remove myself,  
as I cried this country, my song grew roses in each tear's fall.

My blood-veined rivers, painted pipestone quarries  
circled canyons, while she made herself maiden fine.

But here I am, here I am, here I remain high on each and every peak,  
carefully rumbling her great underbelly, prepared to pour forth singing—

and sing again I will, as I have always done.  
Never silenced unless in the company of strangers, singing  
the stoic face, polite repose, polite while dancing deep inside, polite  
Mother of her world. Sister of myself.

When my song sings aloud again. When I call her back to cradle.  
Call her to peer into waters, to behold herself in dark and light,  
day and night, call her to sing along, call her to mature, to envision—  
then, she will quake herself over. My song will make it so.

When she grows far past her self-considered purpose,  
I will sing her back, sing her back. I will sing. Oh I will—I do.  
America, I sing back. Sing back what sung you in.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Haiku

By [Henri Cole](#)

After the sewage flowed into the sea  
and took the oxygen away, the fishes fled,  
but the jellies didn't mind. They stayed  
and ate up the food the fishes left behind.  
I sat on the beach in my red pajamas  
and listened to the sparkling foam,  
like feelings being fustigated. Nearby,  
a crayfish tugged on a string. In the distance,  
a man waved. Unnatural cycles seemed to be  
establishing themselves, without regard to our lives.  
Deep inside, I could feel a needle skip:  
    Autumn dark.  
    Murmur of the saw.  
    Poor humans.

## Song of the Shattering Vessels

By [Peter Cole](#)

Either the world is coming together,  
or else the world is falling apart —  
    here — now — along these letters,  
    against the walls of every heart.

Today, tomorrow, within its weather,  
the end or beginning's about to start —  
    the world impossibly coming together  
    or very possibly falling apart.

Now the lovers' mouths are open —  
maybe the miracle's about to start:  
    the world within us coming together,  
    because all around us it's falling apart.

Even as they speak, he wonders,  
even as the fear departs:  
    Is that the world coming together?

Can they keep it from falling apart?

The image, gradually, is growing sharper;  
now the sound is like a dart:

It seemed their world was coming together,  
but in fact it was falling apart.

That's the nightmare, that's the terror,  
that's the Isaac of this art —  
which sees that the world might come together  
if only we're willing to take it apart.

The dream, the lure, is the prayer's answer,  
which can't be plotted on any chart —  
as we know the world that's coming together  
without our knowing is falling apart.

## the ISM

By [Wanda Coleman](#)

tired i count the ways in which it determines my life  
permeates everything. it's in the air  
lives next door to me in stares of neighbors  
meets me each day in the office. its music comes out the radio  
drives beside me in my car. strolls along with me  
down supermarket aisles  
it's on television  
and in the streets even when my walk is casual/undefined  
it's overhead flashing lights  
i find it in my mouth  
when i would speak of other things

## Marriage

By [Mary Elizabeth Coleridge](#)

No more alone sleeping, no more alone waking,  
Thy dreams divided, thy prayers in twain;  
Thy merry sisters tonight forsaking,  
Never shall we see, maiden, again.

Never shall we see thee, thine eyes glancing.  
Flashing with laughter and wild in glee,  
Under the mistletoe kissing and dancing,  
Wantonly free.

There shall come a matron walking sedately,  
Low-voiced, gentle, wise in reply.  
Tell me, O tell me, can I love her greatly?  
All for her sake must the maiden die!

## Constancy to an Ideal Object

By [Samuel Taylor Coleridge](#)

Since all that beat about in Nature's range,  
Or veer or vanish; why should'st thou remain  
The only constant in a world of change,  
O yearning Thought! that liv'st but in the brain?  
Call to the Hours, that in the distance play,  
The faery people of the future day—  
Fond Thought! not one of all that shining swarm  
Will breathe on thee with life-enkindling breath,  
Till when, like strangers shelt'ring from a storm,  
Hope and Despair meet in the porch of Death!  
Yet still thou haunt'st me; and though well I see,  
She is not thou, and only thou are she,  
Still, still as though some dear embodied Good,  
Some living Love before my eyes there stood  
With answering look a ready ear to lend,  
I mourn to thee and say—'Ah! loveliest friend!  
That this the meed of all my toils might be,  
To have a home, an English home, and thee!'  
Vain repetition! Home and Thou are one.  
The peacefull'st cot, the moon shall shine upon,  
Lulled by the thrush and wakened by the lark,  
Without thee were but a becalméd bark,  
Whose Helmsman on an ocean waste and wide  
Sits mute and pale his mouldering helm beside.

And art thou nothing? Such thou art, as when  
The woodman winding westward up the glen  
At wintry dawn, where o'er the sheep-track's maze  
The viewless snow-mist weaves a glist'ning haze,  
Sees full before him, gliding without tread,  
An image with a glory round its head;  
The enamoured rustic worships its fair hues,  
Nor knows he makes the shadow, he pursues!

# Kubla Khan

By [Samuel Taylor Coleridge](#)

*Or, a vision in a dream. A Fragment.*

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  
A stately pleasure-dome decree:  
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran  
Through caverns measureless to man  
Down to a sunless sea.  
So twice five miles of fertile ground  
With walls and towers were girdled round;  
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,  
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;  
And here were forests ancient as the hills,  
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted  
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!  
A savage place! as holy and enchanted  
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted  
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!  
And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,  
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,  
A mighty fountain momently was forced:  
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst  
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,  
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:  
And mid these dancing rocks at once and ever  
It flung up momently the sacred river.  
Five miles meandering with a mazy motion  
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,  
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,  
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean;  
And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far  
Ancestral voices prophesying war!  
The shadow of the dome of pleasure  
Floated midway on the waves;  
Where was heard the mingled measure  
From the fountain and the caves.  
It was a miracle of rare device,  
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!

A damsel with a dulcimer  
In a vision once I saw:  
It was an Abyssinian maid

And on her dulcimer she played,  
Singing of Mount Abora.  
Could I revive within me  
Her symphony and song,  
To such a deep delight 'twould win me,  
That with music loud and long,  
I would build that dome in air,  
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!  
And all who heard should see them there,  
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!  
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!  
Weave a circle round him thrice,  
And close your eyes with holy dread  
For he on honey-dew hath fed,  
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Work without Hope

By [Samuel Taylor Coleridge](#)

*Lines Composed 21st February 1825*

All Nature seems at work. Slugs leave their lair—  
The bees are stirring—birds are on the wing—  
And Winter slumbering in the open air,  
Wears on his smiling face a dream of Spring!  
And I the while, the sole unbusy thing,  
Nor honey make, nor pair, nor build, nor sing.

Yet well I ken the banks where amaranths blow,  
Have traced the fount whence streams of nectar flow.  
Bloom, O ye amaranths! bloom for whom ye may,  
For me ye bloom not! Glide, rich streams, away!  
With lips unbrightened, wreathless brow, I stroll:  
And would you learn the spells that drowse my soul?  
Work without Hope draws nectar in a sieve,  
And Hope without an object cannot live.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Sestina in Prose

By [Katharine Coles](#)

It was like climbing a mountain to those of us who'd climbed one. To the others, it was like, I suppose, something else. In other words, we let everybody find her own figure of speech.

Not that it—speech—lay thick on the ground, or mountain; it presented itself one word at a time, far between. A body had to keep an eye out, like for firewood at dusk, or else

miss her chance. Nobody else, let's face it, cared about metaphor, or even simile, the like-it-or-not-ness of the mountain pretty much getting between a body and her musing, in its going. One

step at a time, anyone could lose herself or someone else just staring at her feet. And *if a body meet a body* is not mere speech but something that could happen, like hopping a bus—though on the mountain

you'll catch no rides, worse luck, the mountain requires to be climbed on foot, one after the other, nothing else will get you up it. There's nothing like such obduracy but in the wild, nobody can tell you otherwise. No simple figure,

this struggle: just a crag, your burden, and your own two feet. Say otherwise, talk through your hat, which I don't care for.

## Snow Day

By [Billy Collins](#)

Today we woke up to a revolution of snow,  
its white flag waving over everything,  
the landscape vanished,  
not a single mouse to punctuate the blankness,  
and beyond these windows

the government buildings smothered,  
schools and libraries buried, the post office lost  
under the noiseless drift,  
the paths of trains softly blocked,  
the world fallen under this falling.

In a while, I will put on some boots  
and step out like someone walking in water,  
and the dog will porpoise through the drifts,  
and I will shake a laden branch  
sending a cold shower down on us both.

But for now I am a willing prisoner in this house,  
a sympathizer with the anarchic cause of snow.  
I will make a pot of tea  
and listen to the plastic radio on the counter,  
as glad as anyone to hear the news

that the Kiddie Corner School is closed,  
the Ding-Dong School, closed.  
the All Aboard Children's School, closed,  
the Hi-Ho Nursery School, closed,  
along with—some will be delighted to hear—

the Toadstool School, the Little School,  
Little Sparrows Nursery School,  
Little Stars Pre-School, Peas-and-Carrots Day School  
the Tom Thumb Child Center, all closed,  
and—clap your hands—the Peanuts Play School.

So this is where the children hide all day,  
These are the nests where they letter and draw,  
where they put on their bright miniature jackets,  
all darting and climbing and sliding,  
all but the few girls whispering by the fence.

And now I am listening hard  
in the grandiose silence of the snow,  
trying to hear what those three girls are plotting,  
what riot is afoot,  
which small queen is about to be brought down.

## Today

By [Billy Collins](#)

If ever there were a spring day so perfect,  
so uplifted by a warm intermittent breeze

that it made you want to throw  
open all the windows in the house

and unlatch the door to the canary's cage,  
indeed, rip the little door from its jamb,

a day when the cool brick paths  
and the garden bursting with peonies

seemed so etched in sunlight  
that you felt like taking

a hammer to the glass paperweight  
on the living room end table,

releasing the inhabitants  
from their snow-covered cottage

so they could walk out,  
holding hands and squinting

into this larger dome of blue and white,  
well, today is just that kind of day.

## Ecology

By [Jack Collom](#)

Surrounded by bone, surrounded by cells,  
by rings, by rings of hell, by hair, surrounded by  
air-is-a-thing, surrounded by silhouette, by honey-wet bees, yet  
by skeletons of trees, surrounded by actual, yes, for practical  
purposes, people, surrounded by surreal  
popcorn, surrounded by the reborn: Surrender in the center  
to surroundings. O surrender forever, never  
end her, let her blend around, surrender to the surroundings that  
surround the tender endo-surrender, that  
tumble through the tumbling to that blue that  
curls around the crumbling, to that, the blue that  
rumbles under the sun bounding the pearl that  
we walk on, talk on; we can chalk that  
up to experience, sensing the brown here that's  
blue now, a drop of water surrounding a cow that's  
black & white, the warbling Blackburnian twitter that's  
machining midnight orange in the light that's  
glittering in the light green visible wind. That's  
the ticket to the tunnel through the thicket that's  
a cricket's funnel of music to correct & pick it out  
from under the wing that whirls up over & out.

## son/daughter

By [Kai Conradi](#)

In a dream my dad fell

from the top of a steep white mountain

down into a blue crevasse  
like the space between two waves  
where the light shines through just enough  
to tell you  
you will miss this life dearly.

The falling took years.

I could hear him moving through air and then finally nothing.

In another dream my dad was an angel

his see-through body dangling in the air

floating above me face shimmery like tinfoil

and I cried and cried when he told me

*I can't come back to earth now not ever.*

When my dad told me

*You will always be my daughter*

maybe it was like that.

Will I be allowed to come back to earth

and be your son?

## Hunger Moon

By [Jane Cooper](#)

The last full moon of February stalks the fields; barbed wire casts a shadow.  
Rising slowly, a beam moved toward the west  
stealthily changing position

until now, in the small hours, across the snow  
it advances on my pillow  
to wake me, not rudely like the sun  
but with the cocked gun of silence.

I am alone in a vast room  
where a vain woman once slept.  
The moon, in pale buckskins, crouches  
on guard beside her bed.

Slowly the light wanes, the snow will melt  
and all the fences thrum in the spring breeze  
but not until that sleeper, trapped  
in my body, turns and turns.

## The Faithful

By [Jane Cooper](#)

Once you said joking slyly, *If I'm killed*  
*I'll come to haunt your solemn bed,*  
*I'll stand and glower at the head*  
*And see if my place is empty still, or filled.*

What was it woke me in the early darkness  
Before the first bird's twittering?  
—A shape dissolving and flittering  
Unsteady as a flame in a drafty house.

It seemed a concentration of the dark burning  
By the bedpost at my right hand  
While to my left that no man's land  
Of sheet stretched palely as a false morning....

All day I have been sick and restless. This evening  
Curtained, with all the lights on,  
I start up—only to sit down.  
Why should I grieve after ten years of grieving?

What if last night I was the one who lay dead  
While the dead burned beside me  
Trembling with passionate pity  
At my blameless life and shaking its flamelike head?

# Wonderbread

By [Alfred Corn](#)

Loaf after loaf, in several sizes,  
and never does it not look fresh,  
as though its insides weren't moist  
or warm crust not the kind that spices  
a room with the plump aroma of toast.

Found on the table; among shadows  
next to the kitchen phone; dispatched  
FedEx (without return address, though).  
Someone, possibly more than one  
person, loves me. Well then, who?

Amazing that bread should be so weightless,  
down-light when handled, as a me  
dying to taste it takes a slice.  
Which lasts just long enough to reach  
my mouth, but then, at the first bite,

Nothing! Nothing but air, thin air ....  
Oh. One more loaf of wonderbread,  
only a pun for bread, seductive  
visually, but you could starve.  
Get rid of it, throw it in the river—

Beyond which, grain fields. Future food for the just  
and the unjust, those who love, and do not love.

# NUMBERS

By [Mary Cornish](#)

I like the generosity of numbers.  
The way, for example,  
they are willing to count  
anything or anyone:  
two pickles, one door to the room,  
eight dancers dressed as swans.

I like the domesticity of addition—  
*add two cups of milk and stir—*  
the sense of plenty: six plums  
on the ground, three more  
falling from the tree.

And multiplication's school  
of fish times fish,  
whose silver bodies breed  
beneath the shadow  
of a boat.

Even subtraction is never loss,  
just addition somewhere else:  
five sparrows take away two,  
the two in someone else's  
garden now.

There's an amplitude to long division,  
as it opens Chinese take-out  
box by paper box,  
inside every folded cookie  
a new fortune.

And I never fail to be surprised  
by the gift of an odd remainder,  
footloose at the end:  
forty-seven divided by eleven equals four,  
with three remaining.

Three boys beyond their mother's call,  
two Italians off to the sea,  
one sock that isn't anywhere you look.

## **To the Angelbeast**

By [Eduardo C. Corral](#)

*For Arthur Russell*

All that glitters isn't music.

Once, hidden in tall grass,  
I tossed fistfuls of dirt into the air:  
doe after doe of leaping.

You said it was nothing  
but a trick of the light. Gold  
curves. Gold scarves.

Am I not your animal?

You'd wait in the orchard for hours  
to watch a deer  
break from the shadows.

You said it was like lifting a cello  
out of its black case.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Under the Edge of February

By [Jayne Cortez](#)

Under the edge of february  
in hawk of a throat  
hidden by ravines of sweet oil  
by temples of switchblades  
beautiful in its sound of fertility  
beautiful in its turban of funeral crepe  
beautiful in its camouflage of grief  
in its solitude of bruises  
in its arson of alert

Who will enter its beautiful calligraphy of blood

Its beautiful mask of fish net  
mask of hubcaps mask of ice picks mask  
of watermelon rinds mask of umbilical cords  
changing into a mask of rubber bands  
Who will enter this beautiful beautiful mask of  
punctured bladders moving with a mask of chapsticks

Compound of Hearts   Compound of Hearts

Where is the lucky number for this shy love  
this top-heavy beauty bathed with charcoal water  
self-conscious against a mosaic of broken bottles  
broken locks   broken pipes   broken  
bloods of broken spirits broken through like  
broken promises

Landlords   Junkies   Thieves  
enthroning themselves in you  
they burn up couches they burn down houses

and infuse themselves against memory  
every thought  
a pavement of old belts  
every performance  
a ceremonial pickup  
how many more orphans how many more neglected shrines  
how many stolen feet stolen fingers  
stolen watchbands of death  
in you how many times

Harlem

hidden by ravines of sweet oil  
by temples of switchblades  
beautiful in your sound of fertility  
beautiful in your turban of funeral crepe  
beautiful in your camouflage of grief  
in your solitude of bruises  
in your arson of alert  
beautiful

## **Dr. Booker T. Washington to the National Negro Business League**

By [Joseph Seamon Cotter Sr.](#)

'Tis strange indeed to hear us plead  
For selling and for buying  
When yesterday we said: "Away  
With all good things but dying."

The world's ago, and we're agog  
To have our first brief inning;  
So let's away through surge and fog  
However slight the winning.

What deeds have sprung from plow and pick!  
What bank-rolls from tomatoes!  
No dainty crop of rhetoric  
Can match one of potatoes.

Ye orators of point and pith,  
Who force the world to heed you,  
What skeletons you'll journey with  
Ere it is forced to feed you.

A little gold won't mar our grace,  
A little ease our glory.  
This world's a better bidding place  
When money clinks its story.

## **Light Shining out of Darkness**

By [William Cowper](#)

1

God moves in a mysterious way,  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants his footsteps in the sea,  
And rides upon the storm.

2

Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never-failing skill,  
He treasures up his bright designs,  
And works his sov'reign will.

3

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,  
The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy, and shall break  
In blessings on your head.

4

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust him for his grace;  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.

5

His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding ev'ry hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flow'r.

6

Blind unbelief is sure to err,  
And scan his work in vain;  
God is his own interpreter,  
And he will make it plain.

# For the Climbers

By [Kevin Craft](#)

Among the many lives you'll never lead,  
consider that of the wolverine, for whom avalanche  
is opportunity, who makes a festival  
of frozen marrow from the femur of an elk,  
who wears the crooked North Star like an amulet

of teeth. In the game of which animal  
would you return as, today I'm thinking  
snowshoe hare, a scuffle in the underbrush,  
one giant leap. You never see them  
coming and going, only the crosshairs

of their having passed, ascending the ridge, lost  
or not lost in succession forests giving way  
to open meadow where deep snow  
lingers and finally relents, uncovering  
acres of lily — glacier yellow, avalanche

white — daylight restaking its earthly claim.  
Every season swallows someone —  
Granite Mountain with its blunderbuss  
gullies, Tatoosh a lash on the tongue,  
those climbers caught if not unawares

then perfectly hapless, not thinking of riding  
that snowstorm to the summit, not thinking  
wolverine fever in the shivering blood,  
not thinking steelhead cutthroat rainbow  
or the languid river that will carry them out.

# Night Nurse

By [Michael Earl Craig](#)

This night nurse is different.  
She walks into my room and does not turn the light on.  
She thinks I am sleeping.  
I have just barely opened my left eye,  
am looking through the slightest slit,  
as moonlight exposes the room  
for what it really is — a collection  
of surfaces; lines and planes, mostly.  
The night nurse puts a foot up on the radiator

and braces her clipboard on her knee  
as she appears to take down a few notes.  
I imagine she is working on a sonnet,  
and that her ankle looks like polished walnut.  
You imagine she is working on a crossword,  
and that her feet are killing her.  
The slightest slit is like an old gate  
at a Japanese tea garden at night,  
in the rain, that is supposed to be closed,  
that is supposed to be locked.  
“Someone has locked up poorly,” you’d say.  
“Incorrectly.” But no one has asked you.

## At Melville’s Tomb

By [Hart Crane](#)

Often beneath the wave, wide from this ledge  
The dice of drowned men’s bones he saw bequeath  
An embassy. Their numbers as he watched,  
Beat on the dusty shore and were obscured.

And wrecks passed without sound of bells,  
The calyx of death’s bounty giving back  
A scattered chapter, livid hieroglyph,  
The portent wound in corridors of shells.

Then in the circuit calm of one vast coil,  
Its lashings charmed and malice reconciled,  
Frosted eyes there were that lifted altars;  
And silent answers crept across the stars.

Compass, quadrant and sextant contrive  
No farther tides ... High in the azure steeps  
Monody shall not wake the mariner.  
This fabulous shadow only the sea keeps.

## In Heaven

By [Stephen Crane](#)

XVIII

In Heaven,  
Some little blades of grass  
Stood before God.

“What did you do?”  
Then all save one of the little blades  
Began eagerly to relate  
The merits of their lives.  
This one stayed a small way behind  
Ashamed.  
Presently God said:  
“And what did you do?”  
The little blade answered: “Oh, my lord,  
“Memory is bitter to me  
“For if I did good deeds  
“I know not of them.”  
Then God in all His splendor  
Arose from His throne.  
“Oh, best little blade of grass,” He said.

## **In the Desert**

By [Stephen Crane](#)

In the desert  
I saw a creature, naked, bestial,  
Who, squatting upon the ground,  
Held his heart in his hands,  
And ate of it.  
I said, “Is it good, friend?”  
“It is bitter—bitter,” he answered;  
  
“But I like it  
“Because it is bitter,  
“And because it is my heart.”

## **The Properly Scholarly Attitude**

By [Adelaide Crapsey](#)

The poet pursues his beautiful theme;  
The preacher his golden beatitude;  
And I run after a vanishing dream—  
The glittering, will-o’-the-wispish gleam  
Of the properly scholarly attitude—  
The highly desirable, the very advisable,  
The hardly acquirable, properly scholarly attitude.

I envy the savage without any clothes,  
Who lives in a tropical latitude;

It's little of general culture he knows.  
But then he escapes the worrisome woes  
Of the properly scholarly attitude—  
The unceasingly sighed over, wept over, cried over,  
The futilely died over, properly scholarly attitude.

I work and I work till I nearly am dead,  
And could say what the watchman said—that I could!  
But still, with a sigh and a shake of the head,  
“You don't understand,” it is ruthlessly said,  
“The properly scholarly attitude—  
The aye to be sought for, wrought for and fought for,  
The ne'er to be caught for, properly scholarly attitude—”

I really am sometimes tempted to say  
That it's merely a glittering platitude;  
That people have just fallen into the way,  
When lacking a subject, to tell of the sway  
Of the properly scholarly attitude—  
The easily preachable, spread-eagle speechable,  
In practice unreachable, properly scholarly attitude.

## For Love

By [Robert Creeley](#)

*for Bobbie*

Yesterday I wanted to  
speak of it, that sense above  
the others to me  
important because all

that I know derives  
from what it teaches me.  
Today, what is it that  
is finally so helpless,

different, despairs of its own  
statement, wants to  
turn away, endlessly  
to turn away.

If the moon did not ...  
no, if you did not  
I wouldn't either, but

what would I not

do, what prevention, what  
thing so quickly stopped.  
That is love yesterday  
or tomorrow, not

now. Can I eat  
what you give me. I  
have not earned it. Must  
I think of everything

as earned. Now love also  
becomes a reward so  
remote from me I have  
only made it with my mind.

Here is tedium,  
despair, a painful  
sense of isolation and  
whimsical if pompous

self-regard. But that image  
is only of the mind's  
vague structure, vague to me  
because it is my own.

Love, what do I think  
to say. I cannot say it.  
What have you become to ask,  
what have I made you into,

companion, good company,  
crossed legs with skirt, or  
soft body under  
the bones of the bed.

Nothing says anything  
but that which it wishes  
would come true, fears  
what else might happen in

some other place, some  
other time not this one.  
A voice in my place, an  
echo of that only in yours.

Let me stumble into  
not the confession but  
the obsession I begin with  
now. For you

also (also)  
some time beyond place, or  
place beyond time, no  
mind left to

say anything at all,  
that face gone, now.  
Into the company of love  
it all returns.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## The Rain

By [Robert Creeley](#)

All night the sound had  
come back again,  
and again falls  
this quiet, persistent rain.

What am I to myself  
that must be remembered,  
insisted upon  
so often? Is it

that never the ease,  
even the hardness,  
of rain falling  
will have for me

something other than this,  
something not so insistent—  
am I to be locked in this  
final uneasiness.

Love, if you love me,  
lie next to me.  
Be for me, like rain,

the getting out

of the tiredness, the fatuousness, the semi-  
lust of intentional indifference.

Be wet  
with a decent happiness.

## Self-Portrait

By [Robert Creeley](#)

He wants to be  
a brutal old man,  
an aggressive old man,  
as dull, as brutal  
as the emptiness around him,

He doesn't want compromise,  
nor to be ever nice  
to anyone. Just mean,  
and final in his brutal,  
his total, rejection of it all.

He tried the sweet,  
the gentle, the "oh,  
let's hold hands together"  
and it was awful,  
dull, brutally inconsequential.

Now he'll stand on  
his own dwindling legs.  
His arms, his skin,  
shrink daily. And  
he loves, but hates equally.

## Somewhere

By [Robert Creeley](#)

The galloping collection of boards  
are the house which I afforded  
one evening to walk into  
just as the night came down.

Dark inside, the candle  
lit of its own free will, the attic

groaned then, the stairs  
led me up into the air.

From outside, it must have seemed  
a wonder that it was  
the inside *he* as *me* saw  
in the dark there.

## The World

By [Robert Creeley](#)

I wanted so ably  
to reassure you, I wanted  
the man you took to be me,

to comfort you, and got  
up, and went to the window,  
pushed back, as you asked me to,

the curtain, to see  
the outline of the trees  
in the night outside.

The light, love,  
the light we felt then,  
greyly, was it, that

came in, on us, not  
merely my hands or yours,  
or a wetness so comfortable,

but in the dark then  
as you slept, the grey  
figure came so close

and leaned over,  
between us, as you  
slept, restless, and

my own face had to  
see it, and be seen by it,  
the man it was, your

grey lost tired bewildered  
brother, unused, untaken—

hated by love, and dead,

but not dead, for an  
instant, saw me, myself  
the intruder, as he was not.

I tried to say, it is  
all right, she is  
happy, you are no longer

needed. I said,  
he is dead, and he  
went as you shifted

and woke, at first afraid,  
then knew by my own knowing  
what had happened—

and the light then  
of the sun coming  
for another morning  
in the world.

## Sparklers

By [Barbara Crooker](#)

We're writing our names with sizzles of light  
to celebrate the fourth. I use the loops of cursive,  
make a big *B* like the sloping hills on the west side  
of the lake. The rest, little *a*, *r*, one small *b*,  
spit and fizz as they scratch the night. On the side  
of the shack where we bought them, a handmade sign:  
*Trailer Full of Sparkles Ahead*, and I imagine crazy  
chrysanthemums, wheels of fire, glitter bouncing  
off metal walls. Here, we keep tracing in tiny  
pyrotechnics the letters we were given at birth,  
branding them on the air. And though my mother's  
name has been erased now, I write it, too:  
a big swooping *I*, a hissing *s*, an *a* that sighs  
like her last breath, and then I ring  
*belle, belle, belle* in the sulphuric smoky dark.

# Strewn

By [Barbara Crooker](#)

It'd been a long winter, rags of snow hanging on; then, at the end of April, an icy nor'easter, powerful as a hurricane. But now I've landed on the coast of Maine, visiting a friend who lives two blocks from the ocean, and I can't believe my luck, out this mild morning, race-walking along the strand. Every dog within fifty miles is off-leash, running for the sheer dopey joy of it. No one's in the water, but walkers and shellers leave their tracks on the hardpack. The flat sand shines as if varnished in a painting. Underfoot, strewn, are broken bits and pieces, deep indigo mussels, whorls of whelk, chips of purple and white wampum, hinges of quahog, fragments of sand dollars. Nothing whole, everything broken, washed up here, stranded. The light pours down, a rinse of lemon on a cold plate. All of us, broken, some way or other. All of us dazzling in the brilliant slanting light.

# Midnight Office

By [Cynthia Cruz](#)

The child is not dead.  
She is sleeping.

Gone from this world  
Which is broken.

The angel of Michael  
Outside the garden  
His circle of fire  
Maddening around the tree.

He put the word  
Back into her:  
A heavy kind of music.

Then she was free.  
As we all are.

All night I stood in the icy wind,  
Praying for the storm to destroy me.

But the wind blew through me  
Like I was a hologram.

If you say I am a mystic,  
Then fine: I'm a mystic.

The trees are not trees, anyway.

## Here is an Ear Hear

By [Victor Hernández Cruz](#)

*Is the ocean really inside seashells  
or is it all in your mind?*

—PICHON DE LA ONCE

Behold and soak like a sponge.  
I have discovered that the island of Puerto Rico  
is the ears of Saru-Saru, a poet reputed to have lived  
in Atlantis. On the day that the water kissed and  
embraced and filled all the holes of that giant  
missing link, this bard's curiosity was the greatest  
for he kept swimming and listening for causes.  
He picked up rocks before they sank and blew  
wind viciously into them. Finally he blew so hard  
into a rock that he busted his ear drums; angry,  
he recited poems as he tried turning into a bird  
to fly to green Brazil. His left ear opened up  
like a canal and a rock lodged in it. Rock attracts  
rock and many rocks attached to this rock. It got  
like a rocket. His ear stayed with it in a horizontal  
position. Finally after so many generations he got  
to hear what he most wanted: the sounds made by flowers  
as they stretched into the light. Behold, I have  
discovered that the island of Puerto Rico is the  
ears of Saru-Saru.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Two Guitars

By [Victor Hernández Cruz](#)

Two guitars were left in a room all alone  
They sat on different corners of the parlor  
In this solitude they started talking to each other  
My strings are tight and full of tears

The man who plays me has no heart  
I have seen it leave out of his mouth  
I have seen it melt out of his eyes  
It dives into the pores of the earth  
When they squeeze me tight I bring  
Down the angels who live off the chorus  
The trios singing loosen organs  
With melodious screwdrivers  
Sentiment comes off the hinges  
Because a song is a mountain put into  
Words and landscape is the feeling that  
Enters something so big in the harmony  
We are always in danger of blowing up  
With passion  
The other guitar:  
In 1944 New York  
When the Trio Los Panchos started  
With Mexican & Puerto Rican birds  
I am the one that one of them held  
Tight like a woman  
Their throats gardenia gardens  
An airport for dreams  
I've been in theaters and cabarets  
I played in an apartment on 102nd street  
After a baptism pregnant with women  
The men flirted and were offered  
Chicken soup  
Echoes came out of hallways as if from caves  
*Someone is opening the door now*  
The two guitars hushed and there was a  
Resonance in the air like what is left by  
The last chord of a bolero.

**[Buffalo Bill 's]**

By E. E. Cummings

Buffalo Bill 's  
defunct  
who used to  
ride a watersmooth-silver  
stallion  
and break onetwothreefourfive pigeonsjustlikethat

he was a handsome man

Jesus

and what i want to know is  
how do you like your blue-eyed boy  
Mister Death

## **[i carry your heart wth me(i carry it in)]**

By [E. E. Cummings](#)

i carry your heart with me(i carry it in  
my heart)i am never without it(anywhere  
i go you go,my dear;and whatever is done  
by only me is your doing,my darling)  
i fear  
no fate(for you are my fate,my sweet)i want  
no world(for beautiful you are my world,my true)  
and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant  
and whatever a sun will always sing is you

here is the deepest secret nobody knows  
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud  
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life;which grows  
higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)  
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart

i carry your heart(i carry it in my heart)

## **[in Just-]**

By [E. E. Cummings](#)

in Just-  
spring when the world is mud-  
luscious the little  
lame balloonman

whistles far and wee

and eddieandbill come  
running from marbles and  
piracies and it's  
spring

when the world is puddle-wonderful

the queer  
old balloonman whistles

far        and        wee  
and bettyandisbel come dancing

from hop-scotch and jump-rope and

it's  
spring  
and

the

goat-footed

balloonMan        whistles  
far  
and  
wee

## For My Contemporaries

By [J. V. Cunningham](#)

How time reverses  
The proud in heart!  
I now make verses  
Who aimed at art.

But I sleep well.  
Ambitious boys  
Whose big lines swell  
With spiritual noise,

Despise me not!  
And be not queasy  
To praise somewhat:  
Verse is not easy.

But rage who will.  
Time that procured me  
Good sense and skill  
Of madness cured me.

# Tonight I Can Almost Hear the Singing

By [Silvia Curbelo](#)

There is a music to this sadness.  
In a room somewhere two people dance.  
I do not mean to say desire is everything.  
A cup half empty is simply half a cup.  
How many times have we been there and not there?  
I have seen waitresses slip a night's  
worth of tips into the jukebox, their eyes  
saying *yes* to nothing in particular.  
Desire is not the point.  
Tonight your name is a small thing  
falling through sadness. We wake alone  
in houses of sticks, of straw, of wind.  
How long have we stood at the end of the pier  
watching that water going?  
In the distance the lights curve along  
Tampa Bay, a wishbone ready to snap  
and the night riding on that half promise,  
a half moon to light the whole damned sky.  
This is the way things are with us.  
Sometimes we love almost enough.  
We say *I can do this, I can do  
more than this* and faith feeds  
on its own version of the facts.  
In the end the heart turns on itself  
like hunger to a spoon.  
We make a wish in a vanishing landscape.  
Sadness is one more reference point  
like music in the distance.  
Two people rise from a kitchen table  
as if to dance. What do they know  
about love?

# The Garden

By [H. D.](#)

I

You are clear  
O rose, cut in rock,  
hard as the descent of hail.

I could scrape the colour

from the petals  
like spilt dye from a rock.

If I could break you  
I could break a tree.

If I could stir  
I could break a tree—  
I could break you.

## II

O wind, rend open the heat,  
cut apart the heat,  
rend it to tatters.

Fruit cannot drop  
through this thick air—  
fruit cannot fall into heat  
that presses up and blunts  
the points of pears  
and rounds the grapes.

Cut the heat—  
plough through it,  
turning it on either side  
of your path.

## Helen

By [H. D.](#)

All Greece hates  
the still eyes in the white face,  
the lustre as of olives  
where she stands,  
and the white hands.

All Greece reviles  
the wan face when she smiles,  
hating it deeper still  
when it grows wan and white,  
remembering past enchantments  
and past ills.

Greece sees unmoved,  
God's daughter, born of love,  
the beauty of cool feet  
and slenderest knees,  
could love indeed the maid,  
only if she were laid,  
white ash amid funereal cypresses.

## Leda

By [H. D.](#)

Where the slow river  
meets the tide,  
a red swan lifts red wings  
and darker beak,  
and underneath the purple down  
of his soft breast  
uncurls his coral feet.

Through the deep purple  
of the dying heat  
of sun and mist,  
the level ray of sun-beam  
has caressed  
the lily with dark breast,  
and flecked with richer gold  
its golden crest.

Where the slow lifting  
of the tide,  
floats into the river  
and slowly drifts  
among the reeds,  
and lifts the yellow flags,  
he floats  
where tide and river meet.

Ah kingly kiss—  
no more regret  
nor old deep memories  
to mar the bliss;  
where the low sedge is thick,  
the gold day-lily  
outspreads and rests  
beneath soft fluttering

of red swan wings  
and the warm quivering  
of the red swan's breast.

## Sheltered Garden

By [H. D.](#)

I have had enough.  
I gasp for breath.

Every way ends, every road,  
every foot-path leads at last  
to the hill-crest—  
then you retrace your steps,  
or find the same slope on the other side,  
precipitate.

I have had enough—  
border-pinks, clove-pinks, wax-lilies,  
herbs, sweet-cress.

O for some sharp swish of a branch—  
there is no scent of resin  
in this place,  
no taste of bark, of coarse weeds,  
aromatic, astringent—  
only border on border of scented pinks.

Have you seen fruit under cover  
that wanted light—  
pears wadded in cloth,  
protected from the frost,  
melons, almost ripe,  
smothered in straw?

Why not let the pears cling  
to the empty branch?  
All your coaxing will only make  
a bitter fruit—  
let them cling, ripen of themselves,  
test their own worth,  
nipped, shrivelled by the frost,  
to fall at last but fair  
with a russet coat.

Or the melon—  
let it bleach yellow  
in the winter light,  
even tart to the taste—  
it is better to taste of frost—  
the exquisite frost—  
than of wadding and of dead grass.

For this beauty,  
beauty without strength,  
chokes out life.  
I want wind to break,  
scatter these pink-stalks,  
snap off their spiced heads,  
fling them about with dead leaves—  
spread the paths with twigs,  
limbs broken off,  
trail great pine branches,  
hurled from some far wood  
right across the melon-patch,  
break pear and quince—  
leave half-trees, torn, twisted  
but showing the fight was valiant.

O to blot out this garden  
to forget, to find a new beauty  
in some terrible  
wind-tortured place.

## Passive Voice

By [Laura Da'](#)

I use a trick to teach students  
how to avoid passive voice.

Circle the verbs.  
Imagine inserting “by zombies”  
after each one.

Have the words been claimed  
by the flesh-hungry undead?  
If so, passive voice.

I wonder if these  
sixth graders will recollect,

on summer vacation,  
as they stretch their legs  
on the way home  
from Yellowstone or Yosemite  
and the byway's historical marker  
beckons them to the  
site of an Indian village—

Where *trouble was brewing*.  
Where, *after further hostilities, the army was directed to enter*.  
Where *the village was razed after the skirmish occurred*.  
Where *most were women and children*.

Riveted bramble of passive verbs  
etched in wood—  
stripped hands  
breaking up from the dry ground  
to pinch the meat  
of their young red tongues.

## **Delia 33: When men shall find thy flower, thy glory, pass**

By [Samuel Daniel](#)

When men shall find thy flower, thy glory, pass,  
And thou with careful brow sitting alone  
Received hast this message from thy glass,  
That tells thee truth and says that all is gone:  
Fresh shalt thou see in me the wounds thou madest,  
Though spent thy flame, in me the heat remaining;  
I that have lov'd thee thus before thou fadest,  
My faith shall wax when thou art in thy waning.  
The world shall find this miracle in me,  
That fire can burn when all the matter's spent;  
Then what my faith hath been thyself shall see,  
And that thou wast unkind thou mayst repent.  
Thou mayst repent that thou hast scorn'd my tears,  
When winter snows upon thy golden hairs.

## **The Robots are Coming**

By [Kyle Dargan](#)

with clear-cased woofers for heads,  
no eyes. They see us as a bat sees  
a mosquito—a fleshy echo,

a morsel of sound. You've heard  
their intergalactic tour busses  
purring at our stratosphere's curb.  
They await counterintelligence  
transmissions from our laptops  
and our blue teeth, await word  
of humanity's critical mass,  
our ripening. How many times  
have we dreamed it this way:  
the Age of the Machines,  
postindustrial terrors whose  
tempered paws—five welded fingers  
—wrench back our roofs,  
siderophilic tongues seeking blood,  
licking the crumbs of us from our beds.  
O, great nation, it won't be pretty.  
What land will we now barter  
for our lives ? A treaty inked  
in advance of the metal ones' footfall.  
Give them Gary. Give them Detroit,  
Pittsburgh, Braddock—those forgotten  
nurseries of girders and axels.  
Tell the machines we honor their dead,  
distant cousins. Tell them  
we tendered those cities to repose  
out of respect for welded steel's  
bygone era. Tell them Ford  
and Carnegie were giant men, that war  
glazed their palms with gold.  
Tell them we soft beings mourn  
manufacture's death as our own.

## **Across the Bay**

By [Donald Davie](#)

A queer thing about those waters: there are no  
Birds there, or hardly any.  
I did not miss them, I do not remember  
Missing them, or thinking it uncanny.

The beach so-called was a blinding splinter of limestone,  
A quarry outraged by hulls.  
We took pleasure in that: the emptiness, the hardness  
Of the light, the silence, and the water's stillness.

But this was the setting for one of our murderous scenes.  
This hurt, and goes on hurting:  
The venomous soft jelly, the undersides.  
We could stand the world if it were hard all over.

## Four Glimpses of Night

By [Frank Marshall Davis](#)

I

Eagerly  
Like a woman hurrying to her lover  
Night comes to the room of the world  
And lies, yielding and content  
Against the cool round face  
Of the moon.

II

Night is a curious child, wandering  
Between earth and sky, creeping  
In windows and doors, daubing  
The entire neighborhood  
With purple paint.  
Day  
Is an apologetic mother  
Cloth in hand  
Following after.

III

Peddling  
From door to door  
Night sells  
Black bags of peppermint stars  
Heaping cones of vanilla moon  
Until  
His wares are gone  
Then shuffles homeward  
Jingling the gray coins  
Of daybreak.

IV

Night's brittle song, sliver-thin

Shatters into a billion fragments  
Of quiet shadows  
At the blaring jazz  
Of a morning sun.

## Horns

By [Kwame Dawes](#)

In every crowd, there is the one  
with horns, casually moving through  
the bodies as if this is the living

room of a creature with horns,  
a long cloak and the song of tongues  
on the lips of the body. To see

the horns, one's heart rate must  
reach one hundred and seventy  
five beats per minute, at a rate

faster than the blink of an eye,  
for the body with horns lives  
in the space between the blink

and light — slow down the blink  
and somewhere in the white space  
between sight and sightlessness

is twilight, and in that place,  
that gap, the stop-time, the horn-  
headed creatures appear,

spinning, dancing, strolling  
through the crowd; and in the  
fever of revelation, you will

understand why the shaman  
is filled with the hubris  
of creation, why the healer

forgets herself and feels like  
angels about to take flight.  
My head throbs under

the mosquito mesh, the drums

do not stop through the night,  
the one with horns feeds

me sour porridge and nuts  
and sways, *Welcome, welcome.*

## Vagrants and Loiterers

By [Kwame Dawes](#)

*South Carolina, c.1950*

You got that clean waistcoat,  
the bright white of a well-tailored  
shirt, you got those loose-as-sacks  
slacks and some spit-polished shoes,  
and you know, whether you are looking  
like money, or about to take a stroll,  
to tilt that hat like you own  
the world; yeah, smoke your pipe,  
roll your tobacco, and hold loose  
as authority, your muscles, lithe  
and hard; and every so often, when  
you feel the urge, you reach into the waist  
pocket and pull out that watch on its  
chain, then look in the sky and say  
*Gonna be a cold one when it come,*  
like God gave you that fancy clock  
to tell the future. These are the easy  
boys of the goodly South; waiting for  
what is out of frame to happen:  
the sheriff with his questions, the  
paddy wagon, the chain gang, the weight  
of the world. Waiting, with such delicate  
dignity, fickle as the seasonal sky.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Portrait of My Gender as [Inaudible]

By [Meg Day](#)

I knew I was a god  
when you could not  
agree on my name

& still, none you spoke  
could force me to listen  
closer. Is this the nothing

the antelope felt when  
Adam, lit on his own  
entitling, dubbed family,

genus, species? So many  
descendants became  
doctors, delivered

babies, bestowed bodies  
names as if to say it is to make it  
so. Can it be a comfort between

us, the fact of my creation?  
I was made in the image  
of a thing without

an image & silence, too,  
is your invention. Who prays  
for a god except to appear

with answers, but never  
a body? A voice? If I told you  
you wouldn't believe me

because I was the one  
to say it. On the first day  
there was no sound

worth mentioning. If I, too,  
am a conductor of air, the only  
praise I know is in stereo

(one pair—an open hand & closed  
fist—will have to do). I made  
a photograph of my name:

there was a shadow in a field  
& I put my shadow in it. You  
can't hear me, but I'm there.

# Inheritance

By [Tyree Daye](#)

My mother will leave me her mother's deep-black  
cast-iron skillet someday,

I will fry okra in it,  
weigh my whole life on its black handle,  
lift it up to feel a people in my hand.

I will cook dinner  
for my mother on her rusting, bleached stove  
with this oiled star.

My mother made her body crooked  
all her life to afford this little wooden blue house.  
I want her green thumbs

wound around a squash's neck

to be wound around my wrist

telling me to stay longer. O what she grew with the dust

dancing in blue hours. What will happen to her body

left in the ground, to the bodies in the street,

the uncles turned to ash on the fireplace mantles

the cousins we've misplaced?

How many people make up this wound?

No one taught my mother how to bring us back to life,

so no one taught me.

O what we gather and O Lord

bless what we pass on.

# The Listeners

By [Walter de La Mare](#)

'Is there anybody there?' said the Traveller,  
Knocking on the moonlit door;  
And his horse in the silence champed the grasses

Of the forest's ferny floor:  
And a bird flew up out of the turret,  
Above the Traveller's head:  
And he smote upon the door again a second time;  
'Is there anybody there?' he said.  
But no one descended to the Traveller;  
No head from the leaf-fringed sill  
Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes,  
Where he stood perplexed and still.  
But only a host of phantom listeners  
That dwelt in the lone house then  
Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight  
To that voice from the world of men:  
Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair,  
That goes down to the empty hall,  
Harkening in an air stirred and shaken  
By the lonely Traveller's call.  
And he felt in his heart their strangeness,  
Their stillness answering his cry,  
While his horse moved, cropping the dark turf,  
'Neath the starred and leafy sky;  
For he suddenly smote on the door, even  
Louder, and lifted his head:—  
'Tell them I came, and no one answered,  
That I kept my word,' he said.  
Never the least stir made the listeners,  
Though every word he spake  
Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house  
From the one man left awake:  
Ay, they heard his foot upon the stirrup,  
And the sound of iron on stone,  
And how the silence surged softly backward,  
When the plunging hoofs were gone.

## Under the Lemon Tree

By [Marsha De La O](#)

Not rain, but fine mist  
falls from my lemon tree,  
a balm of droplets in green shadow.

Six years now my mother gone to earth.  
This dew, light as footsteps of the dead.  
She often walked out here, craned her neck,  
considered the fruit, hundreds of globes

in their leathery hides, figuring on  
custard and pudding, meringue and  
hollandaise.

But her plans didn't work out.

The tree goes on unceasingly—lemons fall  
and fold into earth and begin again—  
me, I come here as a salve against heat,  
come to languish, to let the soft bursts—  
essence of citrus, summer's distillate—  
drift into my face and settle. Water and gold  
brew in the quiet deeps at the far end  
of the season. Leaves swallow the body  
of light and the breath of water brims over.

My hands cup each other the way hers did.

## How I Learned Bliss

By [Oliver de la Paz](#)

I spied everything. The North Dakota license,  
the “Baby on Board” signs, dead raccoons, and deer carcasses.  
The Garfields clinging to car windows—the musky traces of old coffee.  
I was single-minded in the buzz saw tour I took through  
the flatlands of the country to get home. I just wanted to get there.  
Never mind the antecedent. I had lost stations miles ago  
and was living on cassettes and caffeine. Ahead, brushstrokes  
of smoke from annual fires. Only ahead to the last days of summer  
and to the dying theme of youth. How pitch-perfect  
the tire-on-shoulder sound was to mask the hiss of the tape deck ribbons.  
Everything. Perfect. As Wyoming collapses over the car  
like a wave. And then another mile marker. Another.

How can I say this more clearly? It was like opening a heavy book,  
letting the pages feather themselves and finding a dried flower.

## **Bent to the Earth**

By [Blas Manuel De Luna](#)

They had hit Ruben  
with the high beams, had blinded  
him so that the van  
he was driving, full of Mexicans  
going to pick tomatoes,  
would have to stop. Ruben spun

the van into an irrigation ditch,  
spun the five-year-old me awake  
to immigration officers,  
their batons already out,  
already looking for the soft spots on the body,  
to my mother being handcuffed  
and dragged to a van, to my father  
trying to show them our green cards.

They let us go. But Alvaro  
was going back.  
So was his brother Fernando.  
So was their sister Sonia. Their mother  
did not escape,  
and so was going back. Their father  
was somewhere in the field,  
and was free. There were no great truths

revealed to me then. No wisdom  
given to me by anyone. I was a child  
who had seen what a piece of polished wood  
could do to a face, who had seen his father  
about to lose the one he loved, who had lost  
some friends who would never return,  
who, later that morning, bent  
to the earth and went to work.

# Our Love on the Other Side of This Border

By [Anaïs Deal-Márquez](#)

Maybe I would have seen you trip  
over the steps in the patio in between  
classes, or we would have met on the  
soccer field covered in mud and you  
would have asked my name, that crooked  
smile spreading from your eyes to your  
mouth. Maybe I would have laughed.  
Maybe, we would have had a nieve in the  
plaza, and you would have held my hand  
after folklórico or at a fandango where I  
was learning to dance faster than my  
adrenaline. Maybe, you would have given  
me a bouquet of mango con chile y limón,  
or elote con queso and we'd count all the  
ways cuetes go off in this pueblo, and would  
walk the feria at night wrapped up in blankets  
drinking atole. Maybe, we would have fought  
over the meaning of God, maybe, that danzón  
after drinking the toritos would have made me  
cry. Maybe, I would have broken your heart over  
a plate of tamales and ponche, or maybe you  
would have cut me off with a joke. But maybe  
this land would have been large enough for our  
hearts to grow, the sun would feel different on  
our skin and the mercados with the viejitas  
would give a calmer pace to our lives. Maybe our  
cuts would be different here, with enough  
medicina to move through salt water. Maybe our  
roots would allow our bones to be enough.

## Grain Memory

By [Marlanda Dekine-Sapient Soul](#)

A wishbone branch falls  
from my Grandma Thelma's oak  
for me.

*What do you know about magic?* e<sup>1</sup> asks.

E bends e old body down, turns  
the wishbone branch into  
a cross, places it around my neck.

I am strapped at the Black River's right shoulder,  
remembering my Grandpa Mose never wore anything  
but church.

My purple head begins to feel  
cold as clergy, parched. I ask for water.  
E gives me water and rice, says to repeat  
after em:

*I am fly from nature. Nature fly. I am fly from*

*nature. Nature*

*fly. I am fly from nature. Nature*

*fly. I am fly*

*from nature. Nature fly. I am*

*fly from nature. Nature fly. I am fly from nature. Nature fly.*

*Ah, I get it! It's an affirmation, I say*

*and e laughs in windoceansongs.*

E whispers, *Do not be trapped by language.*

E voice begins to beat my chest  
cavity in rhythm, chaff threshed from grain,  
separating me from need.

I thought I'd snapped that wishbone branch myself. No.

I am fly from nature. Nature fly.

At dusk,  
gleaming marigolds gathered  
beneath my feet, singing:

*We were stolen shipped across the Atlantic*

*invasive is a word I heard*

*stolen thrash thrash thrash and we speak in bloom*

*Poem Note: In Gullah-Geechee language, "e/em" are gender-neutral pronouns.*

# Peculiar Properties

By [Juan Delgado](#)

On my cutting board, I discovered them,  
the tiniest of ants, roaming dots of lead.  
At first, they were too few to classify, hiding  
under crumbs, these scavengers of leftovers.  
Admiring their labor, I immediately granted them  
citizenship, these tailgaters of a kitchen's routines.

In Miami, I had no stove, working far from my home.  
My wife was a midnight call to San Bernardino.  
While searching for crumbs, especially for  
the taste of apricot jelly, they fell into a line  
across my cutting board; I saw it again,  
saw the line my sixth-grade teacher drew  
on the board, pointing to each end.

While he planted himself on his desk, he leaned  
his face toward us, telling us in a low voice:

"You don't see it yet, you're too young  
still, but that line in front of you continues  
infinitely on either side. And if there is  
the slightest slope in that line, either way,  
it will slowly begin to sag, then curve and veer  
and eventually one end will find the other.

And lines, lines are never perfect, they are  
like us, never completely straight. So just  
imagine the searching that goes on all  
around us, every day. And to happen on  
that union is really to witness the most earthly  
of forms you'll ever get to know. If you're lucky,  
you'll see that, even luckier if you're part  
of that union."

# Eve Revisited

By [Alison Hawthorne Deming](#)

Pomegranates fell from the trees  
in our sleep. If we stayed  
in the sun too long  
there were aloes  
to cool the burn.

Henbane for predators  
and succulents when the rain was scarce.

There was no glorified past  
to point the way  
true and natural  
for the sexes to meet.  
He kept looking to the heavens  
as if the answer were anywhere  
but here. I was so bored  
with our goodness  
I couldn't suck the juice  
from one more pear.

It's *here*, I kept telling him,  
*here*, rooted in the soil  
like every other tree  
you know. And I wove us  
a bed of its uppermost branches.

## Candles

By [Carl Dennis](#)

If on your grandmother's birthday you burn a candle  
To honor her memory, you might think of burning an extra  
To honor the memory of someone who never met her,  
A man who may have come to the town she lived in  
Looking for work and never found it.  
Picture him taking a stroll one morning,  
After a month of grief with the want ads,  
To refresh himself in the park before moving on.  
Suppose he notices on the gravel path the shards  
Of a green glass bottle that your grandmother,  
Then still a girl, will be destined to step on  
When she wanders barefoot away from her school picnic  
If he doesn't stoop down and scoop the mess up  
With the want-ad section and carry it to a trash can.

For you to burn a candle for him  
You needn't suppose the cut would be a deep one,  
Just deep enough to keep her at home  
The night of the hay ride when she meets Helen,  
Who is soon to become her dearest friend,  
Whose brother George, thirty years later,  
Helps your grandfather with a loan so his shoe store

Doesn't go under in the Great Depression  
And his son, your father, is able to stay in school  
Where his love of learning is fanned into flames,  
A love he labors, later, to kindle in you.

How grateful you are for your father's efforts  
Is shown by the candles you've burned for him.  
But today, for a change, why not a candle  
For the man whose name is unknown to you?  
Take a moment to wonder whether he died at home  
With friends and family or alone on the road,  
On the look-out for no one to sit at his bedside  
And hold his hand, the very hand  
It's time for you to imagine holding.

## **Black Boys Play the Classics**

By [Toi Derricotte](#)

The most popular “act” in  
Penn Station  
is the three black kids in ratty  
sneakers & T-shirts playing  
two violins and a cello—Brahms.  
White men in business suits  
have already dug into their pockets  
as they pass and they toss in  
a dollar or two without stopping.  
Brown men in work-soiled khakis  
stand with their mouths open,  
arms crossed on their bellies  
as if they themselves have always  
wanted to attempt those bars.  
One white boy, three, sits  
cross-legged in front of his  
idols—in ecstasy—  
their slick, dark faces,  
their thin, wiry arms,  
who must begin to look  
like angels!  
Why does this trembling  
pull us?  
A: *Beneath the surface we are one.*  
B: *Amazing! I did not think that they could speak this tongue.*

# The Minks

By [Toi Derricotte](#)

In the backyard of our house on Norwood,  
there were five hundred steel cages lined up,  
each with a wooden box  
roofed with tar paper;  
inside, two stories, with straw  
for a bed. Sometimes the minks would pace  
back and forth wildly, looking for a way out;  
or else they'd hide in their wooden houses, even when  
we'd put the offering of raw horse meat on their trays, as if  
they knew they were beautiful  
and wanted to deprive us.  
In spring the placid kits  
drank with glazed eyes.  
Sometimes the mothers would go mad  
and snap their necks.  
My uncle would lift the roof like a god  
who might lift our roof, look down on us  
and take us out to safety.  
Sometimes one would escape.  
He would go down on his hands and knees,  
aiming a flashlight like  
a bullet of light, hoping to catch  
the orange gold of its eyes.  
He wore huge boots, gloves  
so thick their little teeth couldn't bite through.  
"They're wild," he'd say. "Never trust them."  
Each afternoon when I put the scoop of raw meat rich  
with eggs and vitamins on their trays,  
I'd call to each a greeting.  
Their small thin faces would follow as if slightly curious.  
In fall they went out in a van, returning  
sorted, matched, their skins hanging down on huge metal  
hangers, pinned by their mouths.  
My uncle would take them out when company came  
and drape them over his arm—the sweetest cargo.  
He'd blow down the pelts softly  
and the hairs would part for his breath  
and show the shining underlife which, like  
the shining of the soul, gives us each  
character and beauty.

# My dad & sardines

By [Toi Derricotte](#)

my dad's going to give me a self  
back.  
i've made an altar called  
*The Altar for Healing the Father & Child*,  
& asked him what i could do  
for him so he would  
do nice for me. he said i should stop  
saying bad things about him &, since  
i've said just about everything bad  
i can think of &, since . . . well,  
no, i change my  
mind, i can't promise  
him that. but even healing is  
negotiable, so, if he's in  
heaven (or trying  
to get in), it wouldn't hurt  
to be in touch. the first thing i want is to be able to  
enjoy the little things again—for example, to stop peeling  
down the list of things i  
have to do &  
enjoy this poem, enjoy how, last night, scouring  
the cupboards, i found a  
can of sardines that  
must be five  
years old &, since i was home after a long  
trip &, since it was 1 a.m. & i hadn't eaten  
dinner &, since there was no other  
protein in the house,  
i cranked it open & remembered that  
my dad loved  
sardines—right before bed—with  
onions & mustard. i can't get into  
my dad's old heart, but i remember that look  
on his face when he would  
load mustard on a saltine cracker, lay a little  
fish on top, & tip it with a juicy slice  
of onion. then he'd look up from his soiled  
fingers with one eyebrow  
raised, a rakish  
grin that said—*all*  
*for me!*—as if he was  
getting away  
with murder.

# Passing

By [Toi Derricotte](#)

A professor invites me to his “Black Lit” class; they’re  
reading Larson’s *Passing*. One of the black  
students says, “Sometimes light-skinned blacks  
think they can fool other blacks,  
but *I* can always tell,” looking  
right through me.  
After I tell them I am black,  
I ask the class, “Was I passing  
when I was just sitting here,  
before I told you?” A white woman  
shakes her head desperately, as if  
I had deliberately deceived her.  
She keeps examining my face,  
then turning away  
as if she hopes I’ll disappear. Why presume  
“passing” is based on what I leave out  
and not what she fills in?  
In one scene in the book, in a restaurant,  
she’s “passing,”  
though no one checked her at the door—  
“Hey, you black?”  
My father, who looked white,  
told me this story: every year  
when he’d go to get his driver’s license,  
the man at the window filling  
out the form would ask,  
“White or black?” pencil poised, without looking up.  
My father wouldn’t pass, but he might  
use silence to trap a devil.  
When he didn’t speak, the man  
would look up at my father’s face.  
“What did he write?”  
my father quizzed me.

# After the Disaster

By [Abigail Deutsch](#)

*New York City, 2001*

One night, not long after the disaster,  
as our train was passing Astor,  
the car door opened with a shudder

and a girl came flying down the aisle,  
hair that looked to be all feathers  
and a half-moon smile  
making open air of our small car.

The crowd ignored her or they muttered  
“Hey, excuse me” as they passed her  
when the train had paused at Rector.  
The specter crowed “Excuse *me*,” swiftly  
turned, and ran back up the corridor,  
then stopped for me.  
We dove under the river.

She took my head between her fingers,  
squeezing till the birds began to stir.  
And then from out my eyes and ears  
a flock came forth — I couldn’t think or hear  
or breathe or see within that feather-world  
so silently I thanked her.

Such things were common after the disaster.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Big City Speech

By [W. S. Di Piero](#)

Use me  
Abuse me  
    Turn wheels of fire  
    on manhole hotheads

Sing me  
Sour me  
    Secrete dark matter’s sheen  
    on our smarting skin

Rise and shine  
In puddle shallows  
    under every Meryl Cheryl Caleb Syd  
    sommambulists and sleepyheads

Wake us  
Speak to us

Bless what you've nurtured in your pits  
the rats voles roaches and all outlivers  
of your obscene ethic and politics

Crawl on us  
Fall on us  
    you elevations that break and vein  
    down to sulfuric fiber-optic wrecks  
    through drill-bit dirt to bedrock

Beat our brows  
Flee our sorrows

Sleep tight with your ultraviolets  
righteous mica and drainage seeps

    your gorgeous color-chart container ships  
    and cab-top numbers squinting in the mist

## Chicago and December

By [W. S. Di Piero](#)

Trying to find my roost  
one lidded, late afternoon,  
the consolation of color  
worked up like neediness,  
like craving chocolate,  
I'm at Art Institute favorites:  
Velasquez's "Servant,"  
her bashful attention fixed  
to place things just right,  
Beckmann's "Self-Portrait,"  
whose fishy fingers seem  
never to do a day's work,  
the great stone lions outside  
monumentally pissed  
by jumbo wreaths and ribbons  
municipal good cheer  
yoked around their heads.  
Mealy mist. Furred air.  
I walk north across  
the river, Christmas lights  
crushed on skyscraper glass,  
bling stringing Michigan Ave.,

sunlight's last-gasp sighing  
through the artless fog.  
Vague fatigued promise hangs  
in the low darkened sky  
when bunched scrawny starlings  
rattle up from trees,  
switchback and snag  
like tossed rags dressing  
the bare wintering branches,  
black-on-black shining,  
and I'm in a moment  
more like a fore-moment:  
from the sidewalk, watching them  
poised without purpose,  
I feel lifted inside the common  
hazards and orders of things  
when from their stillness,  
the formal, aimless, not-waiting birds  
erupt again, clap, elated weather-  
making wing-clouds changing,  
smithereened back and forth,  
now already gone to follow  
the river's running course.

## Turning the Tables

By [Joel Dias-Porter](#)

*For Eardrum*

First hold the needle  
like a lover's hand  
Lower it slowly  
let it tongue  
the record's ear  
Then cultivate  
the sweet beats  
blooming in the valley  
of the groove  
Laugh at folks  
that make requests  
What chef would let  
the diners determine  
Which entrees  
make up the menu?  
Young boys

think it's about  
flashy flicks  
of the wrist  
But it's about filling the floor  
with the manic  
language of dance  
About knowing the beat  
of every record  
like a mama knows  
her child's cries  
Nobody cares  
how fast you scratch  
Cuz it ain't about  
soothing any itch  
It's about how many hairstyles  
are still standing  
At the end of the night.

## **Abecedarian Requiring Further Examination of Anglikan Seraphym Subjugation of a Wild Indian Rezervation**

By [Natalie Diaz](#)

Angels don't come to the reservation.  
Bats, maybe, or owls, boxy mottled things.  
Coyotes, too. They all mean the same thing—  
death. And death  
eats angels, I guess, because I haven't seen an angel  
fly through this valley ever.  
Gabriel? Never heard of him. Know a guy named Gabe though—  
he came through here one powwow and stayed, typical  
Indian. Sure he had wings,  
jailbird that he was. He flies around in stolen cars. Wherever he stops,  
kids grow like gourds from women's bellies.  
Like I said, no Indian I've ever heard of has ever been or seen an angel.  
Maybe in a Christmas pageant or something—  
Nazarene church holds one every December,  
organized by Pastor John's wife. It's no wonder  
Pastor John's son is the angel—everyone knows angels are white.  
Quit bothering with angels, I say. They're no good for Indians.  
Remember what happened last time  
some white god came floating across the ocean?  
Truth is, there may be angels, but if there are angels  
up there, living on clouds or sitting on thrones across the sea wearing  
velvet robes and golden rings, drinking whiskey from silver cups,  
we're better off if they stay rich and fat and ugly and

'xactly where they are—in their own distant heavens.  
You better hope you never see angels on the rez. If you do, they'll be marching you off to  
Zion or Oklahoma, or some other hell they've mapped out for us.

## The Heaven of Animals

By [James L. Dickey](#)

Here they are. The soft eyes open.  
If they have lived in a wood  
It is a wood.  
If they have lived on plains  
It is grass rolling  
Under their feet forever.

Having no souls, they have come,  
Anyway, beyond their knowing.  
Their instincts wholly bloom  
And they rise.  
The soft eyes open.

To match them, the landscape flowers,  
Outdoing, desperately  
Outdoing what is required:  
The richest wood,  
The deepest field.

For some of these,  
It could not be the place  
It is, without blood.  
These hunt, as they have done,  
But with claws and teeth grown perfect,

More deadly than they can believe.  
They stalk more silently,  
And crouch on the limbs of trees,  
And their descent  
Upon the bright backs of their prey

May take years  
In a sovereign floating of joy.  
And those that are hunted  
Know this as their life,  
Their reward: to walk

Under such trees in full knowledge

Of what is in glory above them,  
And to feel no fear,  
But acceptance, compliance.  
Fulfilling themselves without pain

At the cycle's center,  
They tremble, they walk  
Under the tree,  
They fall, they are torn,  
They rise, they walk again.

## **The Hospital Window**

By [James L. Dickey](#)

I have just come down from my father.  
Higher and higher he lies  
Above me in a blue light  
Shed by a tinted window.  
I drop through six white floors  
And then step out onto pavement.

Still feeling my father ascend,  
I start to cross the firm street,  
My shoulder blades shining with all  
The glass the huge building can raise.  
Now I must turn round and face it,  
And know his one pane from the others.

Each window possesses the sun  
As though it burned there on a wick.  
I wave, like a man catching fire.  
All the deep-dyed windowpanes flash,  
And, behind them, all the white rooms  
They turn to the color of Heaven.

Ceremoniously, gravely, and weakly,  
Dozens of pale hands are waving  
Back, from inside their flames.  
Yet one pure pane among these  
Is the bright, erased blankness of nothing.  
I know that my father is there,

In the shape of his death still living.  
The traffic increases around me  
Like a madness called down on my head.

The horns blast at me like shotguns,  
And drivers lean out, driven crazy—  
But now my propped-up father

Lifts his arm out of stillness at last.  
The light from the window strikes me  
And I turn as blue as a soul,  
As the moment when I was born.  
I am not afraid for my father—  
Look! He is grinning; he is not

Afraid for my life, either,  
As the wild engines stand at my knees  
Shredding their gears and roaring,  
And I hold each car in its place  
For miles, inciting its horn  
To blow down the walls of the world

That the dying may float without fear  
In the bold blue gaze of my father.  
Slowly I move to the sidewalk  
With my pin-tingling hand half dead  
At the end of my bloodless arm.  
I carry it off in amazement,

High, still higher, still waving,  
My recognized face fully mortal,  
Yet not; not at all, in the pale,  
Drained, otherworldly, stricken,  
Created hue of stained glass.  
I have just come down from my father.

## **The Strength of Fields**

By [James L. Dickey](#)

*... a separation from the world,  
a penetration to some source of power  
and a life-enhancing return ...*  
Van Gennep: Rites de Passage

Moth-force a small town always has,

Given the night.

What field-forms can be,  
Outlying the small civic light-decisions over  
A man walking near home?

Men are not where he is  
Exactly now, but they are around him around him like the strength

Of fields. The solar system floats on  
Above him in town-moths.

Tell me, train-sound,  
With all your long-lost grief,  
what I can give.

Dear Lord of all the fields  
what am I going to *do*?

Street-lights, blue-force and frail  
As the homes of men, tell me how to do it how  
To withdraw how to penetrate and find the source  
Of the power you always had  
light as a moth, and rising  
With the level and moonlit expansion  
Of the fields around, and the sleep of hoping men.

You? I? What difference is there? We can all be saved

By a secret blooming. Now as I walk  
The night and you walk with me we know simplicity  
Is close to the source that sleeping men  
Search for in their home-deep beds.  
We know that the sun is away we know that the sun can be conquered  
By moths, in blue home-town air.  
The stars splinter, pointed and wild. The dead lie under  
The pastures. They look on and help. Tell me, freight-train,  
When there is no one else  
To hear. Tell me in a voice the sea  
Would have, if it had not a better one: as it lifts,  
Hundreds of miles away, its fumbling, deep-structured roar  
Like the profound, unstoppable craving  
Of nations for their wish.

Hunger, time and the moon:

The moon lying on the brain  
as on the excited sea as on  
The strength of fields. Lord, let me shake  
With purpose. Wild hope can always spring  
From tended strength. Everything is in that.  
That and nothing but kindness. More kindness, dear Lord  
Of the renewing green. That is where it all has to start:

With the simplest things. More kindness will do nothing less  
Than save every sleeping one  
And night-walking one

Of us.

My life belongs to the world. I will do what I can.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## **“Hope” is the thing with feathers – (314)**

By [Emily Dickinson](#)

“Hope” is the thing with feathers –  
That perches in the soul –  
And sings the tune without the words –  
And never stops – at all –

And sweetest – in the Gale – is heard –  
And sore must be the storm –  
That could abash the little Bird  
That kept so many warm –

I’ve heard it in the chilliest land –  
And on the strangest Sea –  
Yet – never – in Extremity,  
It asked a crumb – of me.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: The inclusion or omission of the numeral in the title of the poem should not affect the accuracy score. It is optional during recitation.*

## **How many times these low feet staggered – (238)**

By [Emily Dickinson](#)

How many times these low feet staggered –  
Only the soldered mouth can tell –  
Try – can you stir the awful rivet –  
Try – can you lift the hasps of steel!

Stroke the cool forehead – hot so often –  
Lift – if you care – the listless hair –  
Handle the adamantine fingers  
Never a thimble – more – shall wear –

Buzz the dull flies – on the chamber window –

Brave – shines the sun through the freckled pane –  
Fearless – the cobweb swings from the ceiling –  
Indolent Housewife – in Daisies – lain!

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: The inclusion or omission of the numeral in the title of the poem should not affect the accuracy score. It is optional during recitation.*

## **I felt a Funeral, in my Brain, (340)**

By [Emily Dickinson](#)

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,  
And Mourners to and fro  
Kept treading – treading – till it seemed  
That Sense was breaking through –

And when they all were seated,  
A Service, like a Drum –  
Kept beating – beating – till I thought  
My mind was going numb –

And then I heard them lift a Box  
And creak across my Soul  
With those same Boots of Lead, again,  
Then Space – began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell,  
And Being, but an Ear,  
And I, and Silence, some strange Race,  
Wrecked, solitary, here –

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,  
And I dropped down, and down –  
And hit a World, at every plunge,  
And Finished knowing – then –

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: The inclusion or omission of the numeral in the title of the poem should not affect the accuracy score. It is optional during recitation.*

## **I heard a Fly buzz – when I died – (591)**

By [Emily Dickinson](#)

I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –  
The Stillness in the Room  
Was like the Stillness in the Air –  
Between the Heaves of Storm –

The Eyes around – had wrung them dry –  
And Breaths were gathering firm  
For that last Onset – when the King  
Be witnessed – in the Room –

I willed my Keepsakes – Signed away  
What portion of me be  
Assignable – and then it was  
There interposed a Fly –

With Blue – uncertain – stumbling Buzz –  
Between the light – and me –  
And then the Windows failed – and then  
I could not see to see –

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: The inclusion or omission of the numeral in the title of the poem should not affect the accuracy score. It is optional during recitation.*

## **It sifts from Leaden Sieves – (291)**

By [Emily Dickinson](#)

It sifts from Leaden Sieves –  
It powders all the Wood.  
It fills with Alabaster Wool  
The Wrinkles of the Road –

It makes an even Face  
Of Mountain, and of Plain –  
Unbroken Forehead from the East  
Unto the East again –

It reaches to the Fence –  
It wraps it Rail by Rail  
Till it is lost in Fleeces –  
It deals Celestial Vail

To Stump, and Stack – and Stem –  
A Summer's empty Room –  
Acres of Joints, where Harvests were,  
Recordless, but for them –

It Ruffles Wrists of Posts  
As Ankles of a Queen –  
Then stills it's Artisans – like Ghosts –

Denying they have been –

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: The inclusion or omission of the numeral in the title of the poem should not affect the accuracy score. It is optional during recitation.*

## **It was not Death, for I stood up, (355)**

By [Emily Dickinson](#)

It was not Death, for I stood up,  
And all the Dead, lie down –  
It was not Night, for all the Bells  
Put out their Tongues, for Noon.

It was not Frost, for on my Flesh  
I felt Siroccos – crawl –  
Nor Fire - for just my marble feet  
Could keep a Chancel, cool –

And yet, it tasted, like them all,  
The Figures I have seen  
Set orderly, for Burial  
Reminded me, of mine –

As if my life were shaven,  
And fitted to a frame,  
And could not breathe without a key,  
And 'twas like Midnight, some –

When everything that ticked – has stopped –  
And space stares – all around –  
Or Grisly frosts – first Autumn morns,  
Repeal the Beating Ground –

But most, like Chaos – Stopless – cool –  
Without a Chance, or spar –  
Or even a Report of Land –  
To justify – Despair.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: The inclusion or omission of the numeral in the title of the poem should not affect the accuracy score. It is optional during recitation.*

## **Much Madness is divinest Sense – (620)**

By [Emily Dickinson](#)

Much Madness is divinest Sense –

To a discerning Eye –  
Much Sense – the starkest Madness –  
'Tis the Majority  
In this, as all, prevail –  
Assent – and you are sane –  
Demur – you're straightway dangerous –  
And handled with a Chain –

***Note to Poetry Out Loud students:** The inclusion or omission of the numeral in the title of the poem should not affect the accuracy score. It is optional during recitation.*

## **A narrow Fellow in the Grass (1096)**

By [Emily Dickinson](#)

A narrow Fellow in the Grass  
Occasionally rides –  
You may have met him? Did you not  
His notice instant is –

The Grass divides as with a Comb,  
A spotted Shaft is seen,  
And then it closes at your Feet  
And opens further on –

He likes a Boggy Acre –  
A Floor too cool for Corn –  
But when a Boy and Barefoot  
I more than once at Noon

Have passed I thought a Whip Lash  
Unbraiding in the Sun  
When stooping to secure it  
It wrinkled And was gone –

Several of Nature's People  
I know, and they know me  
I feel for them a transport  
Of Cordiality

But never met this Fellow  
Attended or alone  
Without a tighter Breathing  
And Zero at the Bone.

***Note to Poetry Out Loud students:** The inclusion or omission of the numeral in the title of the poem should not affect the accuracy score. It is optional during recitation.*

## The Poets light but Lamps – (930)

By [Emily Dickinson](#)

The Poets light but Lamps –  
Themselves – go out –  
The Wicks they stimulate  
If vital Light

Inhere as do the Suns –  
Each Age a Lens  
Disseminating their  
Circumference –

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: The inclusion or omission of the numeral in the title of the poem should not affect the accuracy score. It is optional during recitation.*

## Safe in their Alabaster Chambers – (124)

By [Emily Dickinson](#)

Safe in their Alabaster Chambers –  
Untouched by Morning –  
and untouched by noon –  
Sleep the meek members of the Resurrection,  
Rafters of Satin and Roof of Stone –

Grand go the Years,  
In the Crescent above them –  
Worlds scoop their Arcs –  
and Firmaments – row –  
Diadems – drop –  
And Doges surrender –  
Soundless as Dots,  
On a Disk of Snow.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: The inclusion or omission of the numeral in the title of the poem should not affect the accuracy score. It is optional during recitation.*

## We Who Weave

By [LeConté Dill](#)

*On Tyrone Geter's "The Basket Maker #2"*

Weave me closer  
to you

with hands dyed indigo  
that rake oyster beds  
awake  
Smell you long  
before  
I see you  
Vanilla sweet  
Sweetgrass weaving  
wares that keep Yankees coming  
on ferries, no bridge  
Waters been troubled  
Makes you wonder  
who put the root on whom first  
with doors dyed indigo  
Pray the evil spirits away  
at the praise house  
Make John Hop to stave off John Deere  
We migrants  
fighting to stay put  
Even nomads come home  
for a Lowcountry boil  
a feast for hungry  
prodigal sons  
and daughters  
with hearts dyed indigo  
Dying for you to  
weave us closer

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## 1969

By [Alex Dimitrov](#)

The summer everyone left for the moon  
even those yet to be born. And the dead  
who can't vacation here but met us all there  
by the veil between worlds. The number one song  
in America was "In the Year 2525"  
because who has ever lived in the present  
when there's so much of the future  
to continue without us.  
How the best lover won't need to forgive you  
and surely take everything off your hands  
without having to ask, without knowing

your name, no matter the number of times  
you married or didn't, your favorite midnight movie,  
the cigarettes you couldn't give up,  
wanting to kiss other people you shouldn't  
and now to forever be kissed by the Earth.  
In the Earth. With the Earth.  
When we all briefly left it  
to look back on each other from above,  
shocked by how bright even our pain is  
running wildly beside us like an underground river.  
And whatever language is good for,  
a sign, a message left up there that reads:  
HERE MEN FROM THE PLANET EARTH  
FIRST SET FOOT UPON THE MOON  
JULY 1969, A.D.  
WE CAME IN PEACE FOR ALL MANKIND.  
Then returned to continue the war.

## **Tiger Mask Ritual**

By Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

When you put on the mask the thunder starts.  
Through the nostril's orange you can smell  
the far hope of rain. Up in the Nilgiris,  
glisten of eucalyptus, drip of pine, spiders tumbling  
from their silver webs.

The mask is raw and red as bark against your facebones.  
You finger the stripes ridged like weals  
out of your childhood. A wind is rising  
in the north, a scarlet light  
like a fire in the sky.

When you look through the eyeholes it is like falling.  
Night gauzes you in black. You are blind  
as in the beginning of the world. Sniff. Seek the moon.  
After a while you will know  
that creased musky smell is rising  
from your skin.

Once you locate the ears the drums begin.  
Your fur stiffens. A roar from the distant left,  
like monsoon water. You swivel your sightless head.  
Under your sheathed paw  
the ground shifts wet.

What is that small wild sound  
sheltering in your skull  
against the circle that always closes in  
just before dawn?

*Note: The poem refers to a ritual performed by some Rajasthani hill tribes to ensure rain and a good harvest.*

## **Mrs. Caldera's House of Things**

By [Gregory Djanikian](#)

You are sitting in Mrs. Caldera's kitchen,  
you are sipping a glass of lemonade  
and trying not to be too curious about  
the box of plastic hummingbirds behind you,  
the tray of tineless forks at your elbow.

You have heard about the backroom  
where no one else has ever gone  
and whatever enters, remains,  
refrigerator doors, fused coils,  
mower blades, milk bottles, pistons, gears.

"You never know," she says, rummaging  
through a cedar chest of recipes,  
"when something will come of use."

There is a vase of pencil tips on the table,  
a bowl full of miniature wheels and axles.

Upstairs, where her children slept,  
the doors will not close,  
the stacks of magazines are burgeoning,  
there are snow shoes and lampshades,  
bedsprings and picture tubes,  
and boxes and boxes of irreducibles!

You imagine the headline in the *Literalist Express*:  
House Founders Under Weight Of Past.

But Mrs Caldera is baking cookies,  
she is humming a song from childhood,  
her arms are heavy and strong,  
they have held babies, a husband,

tractor parts and gas tanks,  
what have they not found a place for?

It is getting dark, you have sat for a long time.  
If you move, you feel something will be disturbed,  
there is room enough only for your body.  
“Stay awhile,” Mrs. Caldera says,  
and never have you felt so valuable.

## **Rickshaw Boy**

By [Duy Doan](#)

The man I pulled tonight  
carried a load of books.

When I felt him watching  
me uphill, I grimaced.

He gave me lunar  
cakes the size

of two camel humps.  
When I answered him,

I smiled to his face.  
He wore the moonlight

in his specs. Pant  
seams clean as the embroidery

work of his book covers.  
One cannot grow rich

without a bit of cleverness.  
Should I have shown

him the secret of my deft  
touch? The Circling Moon,

the Graceful Swan? How East  
Wind beats West Wind

if other two winds say so?  
Snow falls on cedars.

# Mi Historia

By [David Dominguez](#)

My red pickup choked on burnt oil  
as I drove down Highway 99.  
In wind-tattered garbage bags  
I had packed my whole life:  
two pairs of jeans, a few T-shirts,  
an a pair of work boots.  
My truck needed work, and through  
the blue smoke rising from under the hood,  
I saw almond orchards, plums,  
and raisins spread out on paper trays,  
and acres of Mendota cotton my mother picked as a child.

My mother crawled through the furrows  
and plucked cotton balls that filled  
the burlap sack she dragged,  
shoulder-slung, through dried-up bolls,  
husks, weevils, dirt clods,  
and dust that filled the air with thirst.  
But when she grew tired,  
she slept on her mother's burlap,  
stuffed thick as a mattress,  
and Grandma dragged her over the land  
where time was told by the setting sun....

History cried out to me from the earth,  
in the scream of starling flight,  
and pounded at the hulls of seeds to be set free.  
History licked the asphalt with rubber,  
sighed in the windows of abandoned barns,  
slumped in the wind-blasted palms,  
groaned in the heat, and whispered its soft curses.  
I wanted my own history—not the earth's,  
nor the history of blood, nor of memory,  
and not the job founded for me at Galdini Sausage.  
I sought my own—a new bruise to throb hard  
as the asphalt that pounded the chassis of my truck.

# Break of Day

By [John Donne](#)

'Tis true, 'tis day, what though it be?  
O wilt thou therefore rise from me?

Why should we rise because 'tis light?  
Did we lie down because 'twas night?  
Love, which in spite of darkness brought us hither,  
Should in despite of light keep us together.

Light hath no tongue, but is all eye;  
If it could speak as well as spy,  
This were the worst that it could say,  
That being well I fain would stay,  
And that I loved my heart and honour so,  
That I would not from him, that had them, go.

Must business thee from hence remove?  
Oh, that's the worst disease of love,  
The poor, the foul, the false, love can  
Admit, but not the busied man.  
He which hath business, and makes love, doth do  
Such wrong, as when a married man doth woo.

## **The Good-Morrow**

By [John Donne](#)

I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I  
Did, till we loved? Were we not weaned till then?  
But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?  
Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers' den?  
'Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be.  
If ever any beauty I did see,  
Which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.

And now good-morrow to our waking souls,  
Which watch not one another out of fear;  
For love, all love of other sights controls,  
And makes one little room an everywhere.  
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,  
Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown,  
Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,  
And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;  
Where can we find two better hemispheres,  
Without sharp north, without declining west?  
Whatever dies, was not mixed equally;  
If our two loves be one, or, thou and I  
Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die.

## **Holy Sonnets: Batter my heart, three-person's God**

By [John Donne](#)

Batter my heart, three-person'd God, for you  
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;  
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend  
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.  
I, like an usurp'd town to another due,  
Labor to admit you, but oh, to no end;  
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,  
But is captiv'd, and proves weak or untrue.  
Yet dearly I love you, and would be lov'd fain,  
But am betroth'd unto your enemy;  
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,  
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,  
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,  
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

## **Holy Sonnets: Death, be not proud**

By [John Donne](#)

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee  
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;  
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow  
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.  
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,  
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,  
And soonest our best men with thee do go,  
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.  
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,  
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,  
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well  
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?  
One short sleep past, we wake eternally  
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

## **Hymn to God, My God, in My Sickness**

By [John Donne](#)

Since I am coming to that holy room,  
Where, with thy choir of saints for evermore,  
I shall be made thy music; as I come  
I tune the instrument here at the door,  
And what I must do then, think here before.

Whilst my physicians by their love are grown  
Cosmographers, and I their map, who lie  
Flat on this bed, that by them may be shown  
That this is my south-west discovery,  
*Per fretum febris*, by these straits to die,

I joy, that in these straits I see my west;  
For, though their currents yield return to none,  
What shall my west hurt me? As west and east  
In all flat maps (and I am one) are one,  
So death doth touch the resurrection.

Is the Pacific Sea my home? Or are  
The eastern riches? Is Jerusalem?  
Anyan, and Magellan, and Gibraltar,  
All straits, and none but straits, are ways to them,  
Whether where Japhet dwelt, or Cham, or Shem.

We think that Paradise and Calvary,  
Christ's cross, and Adam's tree, stood in one place;  
Look, Lord, and find both Adams met in me;  
As the first Adam's sweat surrounds my face,  
May the last Adam's blood my soul embrace.

So, in his purple wrapp'd, receive me, Lord;  
By these his thorns, give me his other crown;  
And as to others' souls I preach'd thy word,  
Be this my text, my sermon to mine own:  
"Therefore that he may raise, the Lord throws down."

## A Hymn to God the Father

By [John Donne](#)

Wilt thou forgive that sin where I begun,  
Which was my sin, though it were done before?  
Wilt thou forgive that sin, through which I run,  
And do run still, though still I do deplore?  
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,  
For I have more.

Wilt thou forgive that sin which I have won  
Others to sin, and made my sin their door?  
Wilt thou forgive that sin which I did shun  
A year or two, but wallow'd in, a score?

When thou hast done, thou hast not done,  
For I have more.

I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun  
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;  
But swear by thyself, that at my death thy Son  
Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore;  
And, having done that, thou hast done;  
I fear no more.

## Lovers' Infiniteness

By [John Donne](#)

If yet I have not all thy love,  
Dear, I shall never have it all;  
I cannot breathe one other sigh, to move,  
Nor can intreat one other tear to fall;  
And all my treasure, which should purchase thee—  
Sighs, tears, and oaths, and letters—I have spent.  
Yet no more can be due to me,  
Than at the bargain made was meant;  
If then thy gift of love were partial,  
That some to me, some should to others fall,  
Dear, I shall never have thee all.

Or if then thou gavest me all,  
All was but all, which thou hadst then;  
But if in thy heart, since, there be or shall  
New love created be, by other men,  
Which have their stocks entire, and can in tears,  
In sighs, in oaths, and letters, outbid me,  
This new love may beget new fears,  
For this love was not vow'd by thee.  
And yet it was, thy gift being general;  
The ground, thy heart, is mine; whatever shall  
Grow there, dear, I should have it all.

Yet I would not have all yet,  
He that hath all can have no more;  
And since my love doth every day admit  
New growth, thou shouldst have new rewards in store;  
Thou canst not every day give me thy heart,  
If thou canst give it, then thou never gavest it;  
Love's riddles are, that though thy heart depart,  
It stays at home, and thou with losing savest it;

But we will have a way more liberal,  
Than changing hearts, to join them; so we shall  
Be one, and one another's all.

## **Song: Go and catch a falling star**

By [John Donne](#)

Go and catch a falling star,  
Get with child a mandrake root,  
Tell me where all past years are,  
Or who cleft the devil's foot,  
Teach me to hear mermaids singing,  
Or to keep off envy's stinging,  
And find  
What wind  
Serves to advance an honest mind.

If thou be'st born to strange sights,  
Things invisible to see,  
Ride ten thousand days and nights,  
Till age snow white hairs on thee,  
Thou, when thou return'st, wilt tell me,  
All strange wonders that befell thee,  
And swear,  
No where  
Lives a woman true, and fair.

If thou find'st one, let me know,  
Such a pilgrimage were sweet;  
Yet do not, I would not go,  
Though at next door we might meet;  
Though she were true, when you met her,  
And last, till you write your letter,  
Yet she  
Will be  
False, ere I come, to two, or three.

## **The Sun Rising**

By [John Donne](#)

Busy old fool, unruly sun,  
Why dost thou thus,  
Through windows, and through curtains call on us?  
Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?

Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide  
Late school boys and sour prentices,  
Go tell court huntsmen that the king will ride,  
Call country ants to harvest offices,  
Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime,  
Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

Thy beams, so reverend and strong  
Why shouldst thou think?  
I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink,  
But that I would not lose her sight so long;  
If her eyes have not blinded thine,  
Look, and tomorrow late, tell me,  
Whether both th' Indias of spice and mine  
Be where thou leftst them, or lie here with me.  
Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,  
And thou shalt hear, All here in one bed lay.

She's all states, and all princes, I,  
Nothing else is.  
Princes do but play us; compared to this,  
All honor's mimic, all wealth alchemy.  
Thou, sun, art half as happy as we,  
In that the world's contracted thus.  
Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be  
To warm the world, that's done in warming us.  
Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;  
This bed thy center is, these walls, thy sphere.

## **A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning**

By [John Donne](#)

As virtuous men pass mildly away,  
And whisper to their souls to go,  
Whilst some of their sad friends do say  
The breath goes now, and some say, No:

So let us melt, and make no noise,  
No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move;  
'Twere profanation of our joys  
To tell the laity our love.

Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears,  
Men reckon what it did, and meant;  
But trepidation of the spheres,

Though greater far, is innocent.

Dull sublunary lovers' love  
(Whose soul is sense) cannot admit  
Absence, because it doth remove  
Those things which elemented it.

But we by a love so much refined,  
That our selves know not what it is,  
Inter-assured of the mind,  
Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss.

Our two souls therefore, which are one,  
Though I must go, endure not yet  
A breach, but an expansion,  
Like gold to airy thinness beat.

If they be two, they are two so  
As stiff twin compasses are two;  
Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show  
To move, but doth, if the other do.

And though it in the center sit,  
Yet when the other far doth roam,  
It leans and hearkens after it,  
And grows erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must,  
Like th' other foot, obliquely run;  
Thy firmness makes my circle just,  
And makes me end where I begun.

## Golden Retrievals

By [Mark Doty](#)

Fetch? Balls and sticks capture my attention  
seconds at a time. Catch? I don't think so.  
Bunny, tumbling leaf, a squirrel who's—oh  
joy—actually scared. Sniff the wind, then

I'm off again: muck, pond, ditch, residue  
of any thrillingly dead thing. And you?  
Either you're sunk in the past, half our walk,  
thinking of what you never can bring back,

or else you're off in some fog concerning  
—tomorrow, is that what you call it? My work:  
to unsnare time's warp (and woof!), retrieving,  
my haze-headed friend, you. This shining bark,

a Zen master's bronzy gong, calls you here,  
entirely, now: bow-wow, bow-wow, bow-wow.

## American Smooth

By [Rita Dove](#)

We were dancing—it must have  
been a foxtrot or a waltz,  
something romantic but  
requiring restraint,  
rise and fall, precise  
execution as we moved  
into the next song without  
stopping, two chests heaving  
above a seven-league  
stride—such perfect agony,  
one learns to smile through,  
ecstatic mimicry  
being the *sine qua non*  
of American Smooth.  
And because I was distracted  
by the effort of  
keeping my frame  
(the leftward lean, head turned  
just enough to gaze out  
past your ear and always  
smiling, smiling),  
I didn't notice  
how still you'd become until  
we had done it  
(for two measures?  
four?)—achieved flight,  
that swift and serene  
magnificence,  
before the earth  
remembered who we were  
and brought us down.

# Bannerker

By [Rita Dove](#)

What did he do except lie  
under a pear tree, wrapped in  
a great cloak, and meditate  
on the heavenly bodies?  
*Venerable*, the good people of Baltimore  
whispered, shocked and more than  
a little afraid. After all it was said  
he took to strong drink.  
Why else would he stay out  
under the stars all night  
and why hadn't he married?

But who would want him! Neither  
Ethiopian nor English, neither  
lucky nor crazy, a capacious bird  
humming as he penned in his mind  
another enflamed letter  
to President Jefferson—he imagined  
the reply, polite and rhetorical.  
Those who had been to Philadelphia  
reported the statue  
of Benjamin Franklin  
before the library

his very size and likeness.  
A wife? No, thank you.  
At dawn he milked  
the cows, then went inside  
and put on a pot to stew  
while he slept. The clock  
he whittled as a boy  
still ran. Neighbors  
woke him up  
with warm bread and quilts.  
At nightfall he took out

his rifle—a white-maned  
figure stalking the darkened  
breast of the Union—and  
shot at the stars, and by chance  
one went out. Had he killed?  
*I assure thee, my dear Sir!*  
Lowering his eyes to fields

sweet with the rot of spring, he could see  
a government's domed city  
rising from the morass and spreading  
in a spiral of lights....

## Flirtation

By [Rita Dove](#)

After all, there's no need  
to say anything

at first. An orange, peeled  
and quartered, flares

like a tulip on a wedgewood plate  
Anything can happen.

Outside the sun  
has rolled up her rugs

and night strewn salt  
across the sky. My heart

is humming a tune  
I haven't heard in years!

Quiet's cool flesh—  
let's sniff and eat it.

There are ways  
to make of the moment

a topiary  
so the pleasure's in

walking through.

## Reverie in Open Air

By [Rita Dove](#)

I acknowledge my status as a stranger:  
Inappropriate clothes, odd habits  
Out of sync with wasp and wren.  
I admit I don't know how

To sit still or move without purpose.  
I prefer books to moonlight, statuary to trees.

But this lawn has been leveled for looking,  
So I kick off my sandals and walk its cool green.  
Who claims we're mere muscle and fluids?  
My feet are the primitives here.  
As for the rest—ah, the air now  
Is a tonic of absence, bearing nothing  
But news of a breeze.

## The Secret Garden

By [Rita Dove](#)

I was ill, lying on my bed of old papers,  
when you came with white rabbits in your arms;  
and the doves scattered upwards, flying to mothers,  
and the snails sighed under their baggage of stone . . .

Now your tongue grows like celery between us:  
Because of our love-cries, cabbage darkens in its nest;  
the cauliflower thinks of her pale, plump children  
and turns greenish-white in a light like the ocean's.

I was sick, fainting in the smell of teabags,  
when you came with tomatoes, a good poetry.  
I am being wooed. I am being conquered  
by a cliff of limestone that leaves chalk on my breasts.

## April Love

By [Ernest Dowson](#)

We have walked in Love's land a little way,  
We have learnt his lesson a little while,  
And shall we not part at the end of day,  
With a sigh, a smile?  
A little while in the shine of the sun,  
We were twined together, joined lips, forgot  
How the shadows fall when the day is done,  
And when Love is not.  
We have made no vows--there will none be broke,  
Our love was free as the wind on the hill,  
There was no word said we need wish unspoke,  
We have wrought no ill.

So shall we not part at the end of day,  
Who have loved and lingered a little while,  
Join lips for the last time, go our way,  
With a sigh, a smile?

## **Idea 20: An evil spirit, your beauty, haunts me still**

By [Michael Drayton](#)

An evil spirit, your beauty, haunts me still,  
Wherewith, alas, I have been long possess'd,  
Which ceaseth not to tempt me to each ill,  
Nor gives me once but one poor minute's rest.  
In me it speaks, whether I sleep or wake;  
And when by means to drive it out I try,  
With greater torments then it me doth take,  
And tortures me in most extremity.  
Before my face it lays down my despairs,  
And hastes me on unto a sudden death;  
Now tempting me to drown myself in tears,  
And then in sighing to give up my breath.  
Thus am I still provok'd to every evil  
By this good-wicked spirit, sweet angel-devil.

## **Idea 43: Why should your fair eyes with such sovereign grace**

By [Michael Drayton](#)

Why should your fair eyes with such sovereign grace  
Disperse their rays on every vulgar spirit,  
Whilst I in darkness in the self-same place  
Get not one glance to recompense my merit?  
So doth the ploughman gaze the wandering star,  
And only rest contented with the light,  
That never learned what constellations are,  
Beyond the bent of his unknowing sight,  
O! why should beauty, custom to obey,  
To their gross sense apply herself so ill?  
Would God I were as ignorant as they,  
When I am made unhappy by my skill;  
Only compelled on this poor good to boast,  
Heavens are not kind to them that know them most.

## Idea 61: Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part

By [Michael Drayton](#)

Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part.  
Nay, I have done, you get no more of me;  
And I am glad, yea glad with all my heart,  
That thus so cleanly I myself can free.  
Shake hands for ever, cancel all our vows,  
And when we meet at any time again,  
Be it not seen in either of our brows  
That we one jot of former love retain.  
Now at the last gasp of Love's latest breath,  
When, his pulse failing, Passion speechless lies;  
When Faith is kneeling by his bed of death,  
And Innocence is closing up his eyes—  
Now, if thou wouldst, when all have given him over,  
From death to life thou might'st him yet recover!

## Song: “You charm'd me not with that fair face”

By [John Dryden](#)

*from An Evening's Love*

You charm'd me not with that fair face  
Though it was all divine:  
To be another's is the grace,  
That makes me wish you mine.

The Gods and Fortune take their part  
Who like young monarchs fight;  
And boldly dare invade that heart  
Which is another's right.

First mad with hope we undertake  
To pull up every bar;  
But once possess'd, we faintly make  
A dull defensive war.

Now every friend is turn'd a foe  
In hope to get our store:  
And passion makes us cowards grow,  
Which made us brave before.

**Note to Poetry Out Loud students:** This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.

# To the Memory of Mr. Oldham

By [John Dryden](#)

Farewell, too little and too lately known,  
Whom I began to think and call my own;  
For sure our souls were near ally'd; and thine  
Cast in the same poetic mould with mine.  
One common note on either lyre did strike,  
And knaves and fools we both abhorr'd alike:  
To the same goal did both our studies drive,  
The last set out the soonest did arrive.  
Thus Nisus fell upon the slippery place,  
While his young friend perform'd and won the race.  
O early ripe! to thy abundant store  
What could advancing age have added more?  
It might (what nature never gives the young)  
Have taught the numbers of thy native tongue.  
But satire needs not those, and wit will shine  
Through the harsh cadence of a rugged line.  
A noble error, and but seldom made,  
When poets are by too much force betray'd.  
Thy generous fruits, though gather'd ere their prime  
Still show'd a quickness; and maturing time  
But mellows what we write to the dull sweets of rhyme.  
Once more, hail and farewell; farewell thou young,  
But ah too short, Marcellus of our tongue;  
Thy brows with ivy, and with laurels bound;  
But fate and gloomy night encompass thee around.

# The Song of the Smoke

By [W.E.B. Du Bois](#)

I am the Smoke King  
I am black!  
I am swinging in the sky,  
I am wringing worlds awry;  
I am the thought of the throbbing mills,  
I am the soul of the soul-toil kills,  
Wraith of the ripple of trading rills;  
Up I'm curling from the sod,  
I am whirling home to God;  
I am the Smoke King  
I am black.

I am the Smoke King,

I am black!  
I am wreathing broken hearts,  
I am sheathing love's light darts;  
Inspiration of iron times  
Wedding the toil of toiling climes,  
Shedding the blood of bloodless crimes—  
Lurid lowering 'mid the blue,  
Torrid towering toward the true,  
I am the Smoke King,  
I am black.

I am the Smoke King,  
I am black!  
I am darkening with song,  
I am hearkening to wrong!  
I will be black as blackness can—  
The blacker the mantle, the mightier the man!  
For blackness was ancient ere whiteness began.  
I am daubing God in night,  
I am swabbing Hell in white:  
I am the Smoke King  
I am black.

I am the Smoke King  
I am black!  
I am cursing ruddy morn,  
I am hearsing hearts unborn:  
Souls unto me are as stars in a night,  
I whiten my black men—I blacken my white!  
What's the hue of a hide to a man in his might?  
Hail! great, gritty, grimy hands—  
Sweet Christ, pity toiling lands!  
I am the Smoke King  
I am black.

## **Fairy Tale with Laryngitis and Resignation Letter**

By [Jehanne Dubrow](#)

You remember the mermaid makes a deal,  
her tongue evicted from her throat,  
and moving is a knife-cut with every step.  
This is what escape from water means.  
Dear Colleagues, you write, for weeks  
I've been typing this letter in the bright  
kingdom of my imagination. Your body

is a ship of pain. Pleasure is when you climb  
the rocks and watch the moonlight  
touching everywhere you want to go,  
a silver world called faraway. Dear Colleagues,  
you write, this place is a few sentences  
contained by the cursor's rippling barrier—  
what happened here is only beaks  
and brackets, the serif's liquid stroke.  
The old story has witches, a prince in love  
with the surging silence of women,  
a knife that turns the water red. You write,  
Dear Colleagues, now these years are filed  
in the infinite oceans of bureaucracy.  
Everything bleaches or fades. In other words,  
goodbye. Sometimes it's possible to walk,  
although you've been told inside the oyster  
shell of your heart there is no soul.  
Creatures like you must end as a spray of salt,  
green droplets floating breathless in the air.

## Prison Song

By [Alan Dugan](#)

The skin ripples over my body like moon-wooded water,  
rearing to escape me. Where could it find another  
animal as naked as the one it hates to cover?  
Once it told me what was happening outside,  
who was attacking, who caressing, and what the air  
was doing to feed or freeze me. Now I wake up  
dark at night, in a textureless ocean of ignorance,  
or fruit bites back and water bruises like a stone.  
It's jealousy, because I look for other tools to know  
with, and other armor, better girded to my wish.  
So let it lie, turn off the clues or try to leave:  
sewn on me seamless like those painful shirts  
the body-hating saints wore, the sheath of hell  
is pierced to my darkness nonetheless: what traitors  
labor in my face, what hints they smuggle through  
its arching guard! But even in the night it jails,  
with nothing but its lies and silences to feed upon,  
the jail itself can make a scenery, sing prison songs,  
and set off fireworks to praise a homemade day.

# Dawn Chorus

By [Sasha Dugdale](#)

*March 29, 2010*

Every morning since the time changed  
I have woken to the dawn chorus  
And even before it sounded, I dreamed of it  
Loud, unbelievably loud, shameless, raucous

And once I rose and twitched the curtains apart  
Expecting the birds to be pressing in fright  
Against the pane like passengers  
But the garden was empty and it was night

Not a slither of light at the horizon  
Still the birds were bawling through the mists  
Terrible, invisible  
A million small evangelists

How they sing: as if each had pecked up a smoldering coal  
Their throats singed and swollen with song  
In dissonance as befits the dark world  
Where only travelers and the sleepless belong

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

# The Zebra Goes Wild Where the Sidewalk Ends

By [Henry Dumas](#)

I  
Neon stripes tighten my wall  
where my crayon landlord hangs  
from a bent nail.

My black father sits crooked  
in the kitchen  
drunk on Jesus' blood turned  
to cheap wine.

In his tremor he curses  
the landlord who grins  
from inside the rent book.

My father's eyes are  
bolls of cotton.

He sits upon the landlord's  
operating table,  
the needle of the nation  
sucking his soul.

II  
Chains of light race over  
my stricken city.  
Glittering web spun by  
the white widow spider.

I see this wild arena  
where we are harnessed  
by alien electric shadows.

Even when the sun washes  
the debris  
I will recall my landlord  
hanging in my room  
and my father moaning in  
Jesus' tomb.

In America all zebras  
are in the zoo.

I hear the piston bark  
and ibm spark:  
let us program rabies.  
the madness is foaming now.

No wild zebras roam the American plain.  
The mad dogs are running.  
The African zebra is gone into the dust.

I see the shadow thieves coming  
and my father on the specimen table.

## **The Debt**

By [Paul Laurence Dunbar](#)

This is the debt I pay  
Just for one riotous day,

Years of regret and grief,  
Sorrow without relief.

Pay it I will to the end —  
Until the grave, my friend,  
Gives me a true release —  
Gives me the clasp of peace.

Slight was the thing I bought,  
Small was the debt I thought,  
Poor was the loan at best —  
God! but the interest!

## Invitation to Love

By [Paul Laurence Dunbar](#)

Come when the nights are bright with stars  
Or come when the moon is mellow;  
Come when the sun his golden bars  
Drops on the hay-field yellow.  
Come in the twilight soft and gray,  
Come in the night or come in the day,  
Come, O love, whene'er you may,  
And you are welcome, welcome.

You are sweet, O Love, dear Love,  
You are soft as the nesting dove.  
Come to my heart and bring it to rest  
As the bird flies home to its welcome nest.

Come when my heart is full of grief  
Or when my heart is merry;  
Come with the falling of the leaf  
Or with the redd'ning cherry.  
Come when the year's first blossom blows,  
Come when the summer gleams and glows,  
Come with the winter's drifting snows,  
And you are welcome, welcome.

## The Paradox

By [Paul Laurence Dunbar](#)

I am the mother of sorrows,  
I am the ender of grief;

I am the bud and the blossom,  
I am the late-falling leaf.

I am thy priest and thy poet,  
I am thy serf and thy king;  
I cure the tears of the heartsick,  
When I come near they shall sing.

White are my hands as the snowdrop;  
Swart are my fingers as clay;  
Dark is my frown as the midnight,  
Fair is my brow as the day.

Battle and war are my minions,  
Doing my will as divine;  
I am the calmer of passions,  
Peace is a nursling of mine.

Speak to me gently or curse me,  
Seek me or fly from my sight;  
I am thy fool in the morning,  
Thou art my slave in the night.

Down to the grave will I take thee,  
Out from the noise of the strife;  
Then shalt thou see me and know me—  
Death, then, no longer, but life.

Then shalt thou sing at my coming,  
Kiss me with passionate breath,  
Clasp me and smile to have thought me  
Aught save the foeman of Death.

Come to me, brother, when weary,  
Come when thy lonely heart swells;  
I'll guide thy footsteps and lead thee  
Down where the Dream Woman dwells.

## **Thou Art My Lute**

By [Paul Laurence Dunbar](#)

Thou art my lute, by thee I sing,—  
My being is attuned to thee.  
Thou settest all my words a-wing,  
And meltest me to melody.

Thou art my life, by thee I live,  
From thee proceed the joys I know;  
Sweetheart, thy hand has power to give  
The meed of love—the cup of woe.

Thou art my love, by thee I lead  
My soul the paths of light along,  
From vale to vale, from mead to mead,  
And home it in the hills of song.

My song, my soul, my life, my all,  
Why need I pray or make my plea,  
Since my petition cannot fall;  
For I'm already one with thee!

## **We Wear the Mask**

By [Paul Laurence Dunbar](#)

We wear the mask that grins and lies,  
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—  
This debt we pay to human guile;  
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,  
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over-wise,  
In counting all our tears and sighs?  
Nay, let them only see us, while  
We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries  
To thee from tortured souls arise.  
We sing, but oh the clay is vile  
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;  
But let the world dream otherwise,  
We wear the mask!

## **The Idler**

By [Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson](#)

An idle lingerer on the wayside's road,  
He gathers up his work and yawns away;  
A little longer, ere the tiresome load  
Shall be reduced to ashes or to clay.

No matter if the world has marched along,  
And scorned his slowness as it quickly passed;  
No matter, if amid the busy throng,  
He greets some face, infantile at the last.

His mission? Well, there is but one,  
And if it is a mission he knows it, nay,  
To be a happy idler, to lounge and sun,  
And dreaming, pass his long-drawn days away.

So dreams he on, his happy life to pass  
Content, without ambitions painful sighs,  
Until the sands run down into the glass;  
He smiles—content—unmoved and dies.

And yet, with all the pity that you feel  
For this poor mothling of that flame, the world;  
Are you the better for your desperate deal,  
When you, like him, into infinitude are hurled?

## **To the Negro Farmers of the United States**

By [Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson](#)

God washes clean the souls and hearts of you,  
His favored ones, whose backs bend o'er the soil,  
Which grudging gives to them requite for toil  
In sober graces and in vision true.  
God places in your hands the pow'r to do  
A service sweet. Your gift supreme to foil  
The bare-fanged wolves of hunger in the moil  
Of Life's activities. Yet all too few  
Your glorious band, clean sprung from Nature's heart;  
The hope of hungry thousands, in whose breast  
Dwells fear that you should fail. God placed no dart  
Of war within your hands, but pow'r to start  
Tears, praise, love, joy, enwoven in a crest  
To crown you glorious, brave ones of the soil.

## **Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow**

By [Robert Duncan](#)

as if it were a scene made-up by the mind,  
that is not mine, but is a made place,

that is mine, it is so near to the heart,  
an eternal pasture folded in all thought  
so that there is a hall therein

that is a made place, created by light  
wherefrom the shadows that are forms fall.

Wherefrom fall all architectures I am  
I say are likenesses of the First Beloved  
whose flowers are flames lit to the Lady.

She it is Queen Under The Hill  
whose hosts are a disturbance of words within words  
that is a field folded.

It is only a dream of the grass blowing  
east against the source of the sun  
in an hour before the sun's going down

whose secret we see in a children's game  
of ring a round of roses told.

Often I am permitted to return to a meadow  
as if it were a given property of the mind  
that certain bounds hold against chaos,

that is a place of first permission,  
everlasting omen of what is.

## Requiem

By [Camille T. Dungy](#)

*Sing the mass—  
light upon me washing words  
now that I am gone.*

The sky was a hot, blue sheet the summer breeze fanned  
out and over the town. I could have lived forever  
under that sky. Forgetting where I was,  
I looked left, not right, crossed into a street  
and stepped in front of the bus that ended me.

Will you believe me when I tell you it was beautiful—  
my left leg turned to uselessness and my right shoe flung

some distance down the road? Will you believe me  
when I tell you I had never been so in love  
with anyone as I was, then, with everyone I saw?

The way an age-worn man held his wife's shaking arm,  
supporting the weight that seemed to sing from the heart  
she clutched. Knowing her eyes embraced the pile  
that was me, he guided her sacked body through the crowd.  
And the way one woman began a fast the moment she looked

under the wheel. I saw her swear off decadence.  
I saw her start to pray. You see, I was so beautiful  
the woman sent to clean the street used words  
like police tape to keep back a young boy  
seconds before he rounded the grisly bumper.

The woman who cordoned the area feared my memory  
would fly him through the world on pinions of passion  
much as, later, the sight of my awful beauty pulled her down  
to tears when she pooled my blood with water  
and swiftly, swiftly washed my stains away.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## **Always Something More Beautiful**

By [Stephen Dunn](#)

This time I came to the starting place  
with my best running shoes, and pure speed  
held back for the finish, came with only love  
of the clock and the underfooting  
and the other runners. Each of us would  
be testing excellence and endurance

in the other, though in the past I'd often  
veer off to follow some feral distraction  
down a side path, allowing myself  
to pursue something odd or beautiful,  
becoming acquainted with a few of the ways  
not to blame myself for failing to succeed.

I had come to believe what's beautiful  
had more to do with daring  
to take yourself seriously, to stay

the course, whatever the course might be.  
The person in front seemed ready to fade,  
his long, graceful stride shortening

as I came up along his side. I was sure now  
I'd at least exceed my best time.  
But the man with the famous final kick  
already had begun his move. *Beautiful*, I heard  
a spectator say, as if something inevitable  
about to come from nowhere was again on its way.

## In Love, His Grammar Grew

By [Stephen Dunn](#)

In love, his grammar grew  
rich with intensifiers, and adverbs fell  
madly from the sky like pheasants  
for the peasantry, and he, as sated  
as they were, lolled under shade trees  
until roused by moonlight  
and the beautiful fraternal twins  
*and* and *but*. Oh that was when  
he knew he couldn't resist  
a conjunction of any kind.  
One said *accumulate*, the other  
was a doubter who loved the wind  
and the mind that cleans up after it.  
For love  
he wanted to break all the rules,  
light a candle behind a sentence  
named Sheila, always running on  
and wishing to be stopped  
by the hard button of a period.  
Sometimes, in desperation, he'd look  
toward a mannequin or a window dresser  
with a penchant for parsing.  
But mostly he wanted you, Sheila,  
and the adjectives that could precede  
and change you: *bluesy*, *fly-by-night*,  
*queen of all that is and might be*.

# Propositions

By [Stephen Dunn](#)

Anyone who begins a sentence with, “In all honesty ... ”  
is about to tell a lie. Anyone who says, “This is how I feel”  
had better love form more than disclosure. Same for anyone  
who thinks he thinks well because he had a thought.

If you say, “You’re ugly” to an ugly person — no credit  
for honesty, which must always be a discovery, an act  
that qualifies as an achievement. If you persist  
you’re just a cruel bastard, a pig without a mirror,

somebody who hasn’t examined himself enough.  
A hesitation hints at an attempt to be honest, suggests  
a difficulty is present. A good sentence needs  
a clause or two, interruptions, set off by commas,

evidence of a slowing down, a rethinking.  
Before I asked my wife to marry me, I told her  
I’d never be fully honest. No one, she said,  
had ever said that to her. I was trying

to be radically honest, I said, but in fact  
had another motive. A claim without a “but” in it  
is, at best, only half true. In all honesty,  
I was asking in advance to be forgiven.

# Chord

By [Stuart Dybek](#)

A man steps out of sunlight,  
sunlight that streams like grace,

still gaping at blue sky  
staked across the emptiness of space,

into a history where shadows  
assume a human face.

A man slips into silence  
that began as a cry,

still trailing music  
although reduced to the sigh

of an accordion  
as it folds into its case.

## **Clothespins**

By [Stuart Dybek](#)

I once hit clothespins  
for the Chicago Cubs.  
I'd go out after supper  
when the wash was in  
and collect clothespins  
from under four stories  
of clothesline.  
A swing-and-a-miss  
was a strike-out;  
the garage roof, Willie Mays,  
pounding his mitt  
under a pop fly.  
Bushes, a double,  
off the fence, triple,  
and over, home run.  
The bleachers roared.  
I was all they ever needed for the flag.  
New records every game—  
once, 10 homers in a row!  
But sometimes I'd tag them  
so hard they'd explode,  
legs flying apart in midair,  
pieces spinning crazily  
in all directions.  
Foul Ball! What else  
could I call it?  
The bat was real.

## **Peligro**

By [Stuart Dybek](#)

Fire ran horrified  
from its ashes.

In the afterglow,  
cinematic shadows fled

from flesh and blood.  
Scars appeared,

followed years later  
by their wounds.

Blinks of red  
dinged relentlessly,

but there was  
nowhere to stop

for the train  
pulling its wreckage.

## **Their Story**

By [Stuart Dybek](#)

They were nearing the end of their story.  
The fire was dying, like the fire in the story.  
Each page turned was torn and fed  
to flames, until word by word the book  
burned down to an unmade bed of ash.  
Wet kindling from an orchard of wooden spoons,  
snow stewing, same old wind on the Gramophone,  
same old wounds. Turn up the blue dial  
under the kettle until darkness boils  
with fables, and mirrors defrost to the quick  
before fogging with steam, and dreams  
rattle their armor of stovepipes and ladles.  
Boots in the corner kick in their sleep.  
A jacket hangs from a question mark.

## **The Racist Bone**

By [Cornelius Eady](#)

I know this is a real thing, because  
When I was a kid, my big sister took me  
To the Capitol Theater, in my hometown  
Of Rochester, NY,

And there was a movie that afternoon,  
*The Tinger*, which starred Vincent Price,  
And what I remember best about the film

Was that it was about this extra, insect-like gland, that

We all appeared to have been born with,  
But nobody but sci-fi movie scientists knew about.  
If it wasn't fed properly, it would crawl up  
Your leg, and choke you to death with its claws!

Your only hope was if you saw it coming, and knew  
What it was, you could scream—loud.  
Which we did, when it crawled across the screen.  
Then the lights blacked out, and Vincent Price

Shouted it had skittered off the screen, hungry—which it hadn't;  
The Capitol was the Black movie house—25 cents a seat,  
The last drop of profit squeezed from the theatrical run.  
No need to pull Mr. Castle's hokey string and rubber model

Down the aisle for the likes of us.  
In our heads The Tingler scurried, our darkest screams,  
The horror we know, but won't talk about,  
From the mouth of the corpse

Like a weevil, looking for a home.  
So many characters perished  
In that movie—they never believed they had it in them  
Until those pincers closed.

## Let Us Consider

By [Russell Edson](#)

Let us consider the farmer who makes his straw hat his  
sweetheart; or the old woman who makes a floor lamp her son;  
or the young woman who has set herself the task of scraping  
her shadow off a wall....

Let us consider the old woman who wore smoked cows'  
tongues for shoes and walked a meadow gathering cow chips  
in her apron; or a mirror grown dark with age that was given  
to a blind man who spent his nights looking into it, which  
saddened his mother, that her son should be so lost in  
vanity....

Let us consider the man who fried roses for his dinner,  
whose kitchen smelled like a burning rose garden; or the man

who disguised himself as a moth and ate his overcoat, and for dessert served himself a chilled fedora....

## Sweet Tooth

By [Russell Edson](#)

A little girl made of sugar and spice and everything nice was eaten by someone with a sweet tooth the size of an elephant's tusk.

Ah, he said, this darn tooth, it's driving me nuts.

Then another voice is heard. It's the little girl's father who says, have you seen a little girl made of sugar and spice and everything nice?--Incidentally, what's that thing sticking out of your mouth like an elephant's tusk?

My sweet tooth, and it's really driving me nuts.

You ought to see a dentist.

But he might want to pull it, and I don't like people pulling at me. If they want to pull they should pull at their own pullables.

So true, said the little girl's father, people should pull at their own pullables and let other people's pullables alone. But still, he asked again, I wonder if you've seen a little girl made of sugar and spice and everything nice?

## The Unforgiven

By [Russell Edson](#)

After a series of indiscretions a man stumbled homeward, thinking, now that I am going down from my misbehavior I am to be forgiven, because how I acted was not the true self, which I am now returning to. And I am not to be blamed for the past, because I'm to be seen as one redeemed in the present...

But when he got to the threshold of his house his house said, go away, I am not at home.

Not at home? A house is always at home; where else can it be? said the man.

I am not at home to you, said his house.

And so the man stumbled away into another series of indiscretions...

## Beautiful Wreckage

By [W. D. Ehrhart](#)

What if I didn't shoot the old lady  
running away from our patrol,  
or the old man in the back of the head,  
or the boy in the marketplace?

Or what if the boy—but he didn't

have a grenade, and the woman in Hue  
didn't lie in the rain in a mortar pit  
with seven Marines just for food,

Gaffney didn't get hit in the knee,  
Ames didn't die in the river, Ski  
didn't die in a medevac chopper  
between Con Thien and Da Nang.

In Vietnamese, Con Thien means  
*place of angels*. What if it really was  
instead of the place of rotting sandbags,  
incoming heavy artillery, rats and mud.

What if the angels were Ames and Ski,  
or the lady, the man, and the boy,  
and they lifted Gaffney out of the mud  
and healed his shattered knee?

What if none of it happened the way I said?  
Would it all be a lie?  
Would the wreckage be suddenly beautiful?  
Would the dead rise up and walk?

## The Farmer

By [W. D. Ehrhart](#)

Each day I go into the fields  
to see what is growing  
and what remains to be done.  
It is always the same thing: nothing  
is growing, everything needs to be done.  
Plow, harrow, disc, water, pray  
till my bones ache and hands rub  
blood-raw with honest labor—  
all that grows is the slow  
intransigent intensity of need.  
I have sown my seed on soil  
guaranteed by poverty to fail.  
But I don't complain—except  
to passersby who ask me why  
I work such barren earth.  
They would not understand me  
if I stooped to lift a rock  
and hold it like a child, or laughed,

or told them it is their poverty  
I labor to relieve. For them,  
I complain. A farmer of dreams  
knows how to pretend. A farmer of dreams  
knows what it means to be patient.  
Each day I go into the fields.

## **In a London Drawingroom**

By [George Eliot](#)

The sky is cloudy, yellowed by the smoke.  
For view there are the houses opposite  
Cutting the sky with one long line of wall  
Like solid fog: far as the eye can stretch  
Monotony of surface & of form  
Without a break to hang a guess upon.  
No bird can make a shadow as it flies,  
For all is shadow, as in ways o'erhung  
By thickest canvass, where the golden rays  
Are clothed in hemp. No figure lingering  
Pauses to feed the hunger of the eye  
Or rest a little on the lap of life.  
All hurry on & look upon the ground,  
Or glance unmarking at the passers by  
The wheels are hurrying too, cabs, carriages  
All closed, in multiplied identity.  
The world seems one huge prison-house & court  
Where men are punished at the slightest cost,  
With lowest rate of colour, warmth & joy.

## **La Figlia che Piange**

By [T. S. Eliot](#)

O quam te memorem virgo ...

Stand on the highest pavement of the stair—  
Lean on a garden urn—  
Weave, weave the sunlight in your hair—  
Clasp your flowers to you with a pained surprise—  
Fling them to the ground and turn  
With a fugitive resentment in your eyes:  
But weave, weave the sunlight in your hair.

So I would have had him leave,

So I would have had her stand and grieve,  
So he would have left  
As the soul leaves the body torn and bruised,  
As the mind deserts the body it has used.  
I should find  
Some way incomparably light and deft,  
Some way we both should understand,  
Simple and faithless as a smile and shake of the hand.

She turned away, but with the autumn weather  
Compelled my imagination many days,  
Many days and many hours:  
Her hair over her arms and her arms full of flowers.  
And I wonder how they should have been together!  
I should have lost a gesture and a pose.  
Sometimes these cogitations still amaze  
The troubled midnight and the noon's repose.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## The Doubt of Future Foes

By [Queen Elizabeth I](#)

The doubt of future foes exiles my present joy,  
And wit me warns to shun such snares as threaten mine annoy;  
For falsehood now doth flow, and subjects' faith doth ebb,  
Which should not be if reason ruled or wisdom weaved the web.  
But clouds of joys untried do cloak aspiring minds,  
Which turn to rain of late repent by changed course of winds.  
The top of hope supposed the root upreared shall be,  
And fruitless all their grafted guile, as shortly ye shall see.  
The dazzled eyes with pride, which great ambition blinds,  
Shall be unsealed by worthy wights whose foresight falsehood finds.  
The daughter of debate that discord aye doth sow  
Shall reap no gain where former rule still peace hath taught to know.  
No foreign banished wight shall anchor in this port;  
Our realm brooks not seditious sects, let them elsewhere resort.  
My rusty sword through rest shall first his edge employ  
To poll their tops that seek such change or gape for future joy.

# On Monsieur's Depart

By [Queen Elizabeth I](#)

I grieve and dare not show my discontent,  
I love and yet am forced to seem to hate,  
I do, yet dare not say I ever meant,  
I seem stark mute but inwardly do prate.  
I am and not, I freeze and yet am burned,  
Since from myself another self I turned.

My care is like my shadow in the sun,  
Follows me flying, flies when I pursue it,  
Stands and lies by me, doth what I have done.  
His too familiar care doth make me rue it.  
No means I find to rid him from my breast,  
Till by the end of things it be suppress.

Some gentler passion slide into my mind,  
For I am soft and made of melting snow;  
Or be more cruel, love, and so be kind.  
Let me or float or sink, be high or low.  
Or let me live with some more sweet content,  
Or die and so forget what love ere meant.

## Or

By [Thomas Sayers Ellis](#)

Or Oreo, or  
worse. Or ordinary.  
Or your choice  
of category

or  
Color

or any color  
other than Colored  
or Colored Only.  
Or "Of Color"

or  
Other

or theory or discourse  
or oral territory.

Oregon or Georgia  
or Florida Zora

or  
Opportunity

or born poor  
or Corporate. Or Moor.  
Or a Noir Orpheus  
or Senghor

or  
Diaspora

or a horrendous  
and tore-up journey.  
Or performance. Or allegory's armor  
of ignorant comfort

or  
Worship

or reform or a sore chorus.  
Or Electoral Corruption  
or important ports  
of Yoruba or worry

or  
Neighbor

or fear of . . .  
of terror or border.  
Or all organized  
minorities.

## Early Elegy: Headmistress

By [Claudia Emerson](#)

The word itself: prim, retired, its artifact  
her portrait above the fireplace, on her face  
the boredom she abhorred, then perfected,  
her hands held upward—their emptiness  
a revision, cigarette and brandy snifter  
painted, intolerably, out, to leave her this  
lesser gesture: *What next?* or shrugged *Whatever*.

From the waist down she was never there.

## Concord Hymn

By [Ralph Waldo Emerson](#)

*Sung at the Completion of the Battle Monument, July 4, 1837*

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,  
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,  
Here once the embattled farmers stood  
And fired the shot heard round the world.

The foe long since in silence slept;  
Alike the conqueror silent sleeps;  
And Time the ruined bridge has swept  
Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.

On this green bank, by this soft stream,  
We set today a votive stone;  
That memory may their deed redeem,  
When, like our sires, our sons are gone.

Spirit, that made those heroes dare  
To die, and leave their children free,  
Bid Time and Nature gently spare  
The shaft we raise to them and thee.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Experience

By [Ralph Waldo Emerson](#)

The lords of life, the lords of life,—  
I saw them pass,  
In their own guise,  
Like and unlike,  
Portly and grim,—  
Use and Surprise,  
Surface and Dream,  
Succession swift and spectral Wrong,  
Temperament without a tongue,  
And the inventor of the game  
Omnipresent without name;—

Some to see, some to be guessed,  
They marched from east to west:  
Little man, least of all,  
Among the legs of his guardians tall,  
Walked about with puzzled look.  
Him by the hand dear Nature took,  
Dearest Nature, strong and kind,  
Whispered, 'Darling, never mind!  
To-morrow they will wear another face,  
The founder thou; these are thy race!'

## Give All to Love

By [Ralph Waldo Emerson](#)

Give all to love;  
Obey thy heart;  
Friends, kindred, days,  
Estate, good-fame,  
Plans, credit and the Muse,—  
Nothing refuse.

'T is a brave master;  
Let it have scope:  
Follow it utterly,  
Hope beyond hope:  
High and more high  
It dives into noon,  
With wing unspent,  
Untold intent:  
But it is a god,  
Knows its own path  
And the outlets of the sky.

It was never for the mean;  
It requireth courage stout.  
Souls above doubt,  
Valor unbending,  
It will reward,—  
They shall return  
More than they were,  
And ever ascending.

Leave all for love;  
Yet, hear me, yet,  
One word more thy heart behoved,

One pulse more of firm endeavor,—  
Keep thee to-day,  
To-morrow, forever,  
Free as an Arab  
Of thy beloved.

Cling with life to the maid;  
But when the surprise,  
First vague shadow of surmise  
Flits across her bosom young,  
Of a joy apart from thee,  
Free be she, fancy-free;  
Nor thou detain her vesture's hem,  
Nor the palest rose she flung  
From her summer diadem.

Though thou loved her as thyself,  
As a self of purer clay,  
Though her parting dims the day,  
Stealing grace from all alive;  
Heartily know,  
When half-gods go,  
The gods arrive.

## **The Snow-Storm**

By [Ralph Waldo Emerson](#)

Announced by all the trumpets of the sky,  
Arrives the snow, and, driving o'er the fields,  
Seems nowhere to alight: the whited air  
Hides hills and woods, the river, and the heaven,  
And veils the farm-house at the garden's end.  
The sled and traveller stopped, the courier's feet  
Delayed, all friends shut out, the housemates sit  
Around the radiant fireplace, enclosed  
In a tumultuous privacy of storm.

Come see the north wind's masonry.  
Out of an unseen quarry evermore  
Furnished with tile, the fierce artificer  
Curves his white bastions with projected roof  
Round every windward stake, or tree, or door.  
Speeding, the myriad-handed, his wild work  
So fanciful, so savage, nought cares he  
For number or proportion. Mockingly,

On coop or kennel he hangs Parian wreaths;  
A swan-like form invests the hidden thorn;  
Fills up the farmer's lane from wall to wall,  
Maugre the farmer's sighs; and, at the gate,  
A tapering turret overtops the work.  
And when his hours are numbered, and the world  
Is all his own, retiring, as he were not,  
Leaves, when the sun appears, astonished Art  
To mimic in slow structures, stone by stone,  
Built in an age, the mad wind's night-work,  
The frolic architecture of the snow.

## **I'm a Bad Engineer**

By [Chidozie George Emesowum](#)

I fold paper into  
An origami—mimic an airplane.  
Hand it to a little girl whose  
T-shirt reads fly. She leaps  
Outside with that sun-soft  
Smile, roots her feet  
Between  
The balcony railing, casting  
This false work into  
The lazy summer air. It is  
Motioning to

Fall—neither crashing  
Nor burning.

Sun  
Down—  
The afternoon wilting  
Under our eyes.  
I am a bad  
Engineer, I tell her.  
Say, things that tarry  
With air are lifted  
By gods—invisible arms,  
Outstretched, over the vast,  
Infinity spilling  
From their fingers.

She asks, what's out there?  
Say, too many stars,

Dancing naked  
In the holy dark,  
Neil's footprint  
Still fresh on  
Moon's dust.  
Something out there  
Looking back at us with  
Its bulgy eyes as  
Though it's looking  
Through a glass.

## Now I Pray

By [Kathy Engel](#)

Ashen face, wool hat bobbing,  
the young boy's eyes dart to me,  
then up at the man pulling a rolling  
suitcase, whose hand he holds,  
then back at me. His legs move  
as if without gravity. The man asks:  
Do you know a church on this street  
that serves free food? I want to say  
I know. That the names of churches  
on an Avenue called Americas roll  
out of me. I want to tell you  
it is temporary, their condition:  
suitcase, darting eyes, seeking free  
food at 9 pm in a big city on a school night.  
I want to tell you I don't for a moment  
wonder if that is really the boy's father  
or uncle or legitimate caretaker —  
something in the handholding and  
eyes, having watched too many  
episodes of *Law and Order*. I want  
to tell you I take them to a restaurant  
and pay for a warm meal or empty  
my wallet not worrying how  
offensive that might be because  
in the end hunger is hunger.  
I want to tell you I call someone  
who loves them — that there is someone —  
and say your guys are lost, can  
you come? I want to tell you I sit  
down on the sidewalk at the corner  
of Waverly and pray — that all

passing by, anonymous shoes  
marking the pavement, join  
in a chorus of prayer humming  
like cicadas in the Delta. I want to  
tell you the boy and the man eat food  
encircled by the warmth of bodies.  
I want to turn the cold night into a feast.  
I will tell you I am praying.

## **Turtle Came to See Me**

By [Margarita Engel](#)

The first story I ever write  
is a bright crayon picture  
of a dancing tree, the branches  
tossed by island wind.

I draw myself standing beside the tree,  
with a colorful parrot soaring above me,  
and a magical turtle clasped in my hand,  
and two yellow wings fluttering  
on the proud shoulders of my ruffled  
Cuban rumba dancer's  
fancy dress.

In my California kindergarten class,  
the teacher scolds me: REAL TREES  
DON'T LOOK LIKE THAT.

It's the moment  
when I first  
begin to learn  
that teachers  
can be wrong.

They have never seen  
the dancing plants  
of Cuba.

## **Earth, You Have Returned to Me**

By [Elaine Equi](#)

Can you imagine waking up  
every morning on a different planet,

each with its own gravity?

Slogging, wobbling,  
wavering. Atilt  
and out-of-sync  
with all that moves  
and doesn't.

Through years of trial  
and mostly error  
did I study this unsteady way —

changing pills, adjusting the dosage,  
never settling.

A long time we were separate,  
O Earth,  
but now you have returned to me.

## Intimate Detail

By [Heid E. Erdrich](#)

Late summer, late afternoon, my work  
interrupted by bees who claim my tea,  
even my pen looks flower-good to them.  
I warn a delivery man that my bees,  
who all summer have been tame as cows,  
now grow frantic, aggressive, difficult to shoo  
from the house. I blame the second blooms  
come out in hot colors, defiant vibrancy—  
unexpected from cottage cosmos, nicotianna,  
and bean vine. But those bees know, I'm told  
by the interested delivery man, they have only  
so many days to go. He sighs at sweetness untasted.

Still warm in the day, we inspect the bees.  
This kind stranger knows them in intimate detail.  
He can name the ones I think of as *shopping ladies*.  
Their fur coats ruffed up, yellow packages tucked  
beneath their wings, so weighted with their finds  
they ascend in slow circles, sometimes drop, while  
other bees whirl madly, dance the blossoms, ravish  
broadly so the whole bed bends and bounces alive.

He asks if I have kids, I say not yet. He has five,

all boys. He calls the honeybees his girls although  
he tells me they're *ungendered workers*  
who never produce offspring. Some hour drops,  
the bees shut off. In the long, cool slant of sun,  
spent flowers fold into cups. He asks me if I've ever  
seen a *Solitary Bee* where it sleeps. I say I've not.  
The nearest bud's a long-throated peach hollyhock.  
He cradles it in his palm, holds it up so I spy  
the intimacy of the sleeping bee. Little life safe in a petal,  
little girl, your few furious buzzings as you stir  
stay with me all winter, remind me of my work undone.

## Last Snow

By [Heid E. Erdrich](#)

Dumped wet and momentary on a dull ground  
that's been clear but clearly sleeping, for days.  
Last snow melts as it falls, piles up slush, runs in first light  
making a music in the streets we wish we could keep.  
Last snow. That's what we'll think for weeks to come.  
Close sun sets up a glare that smarts like a good cry.  
We could head north and north and never let this season go.  
Stubborn beast, the body reads the past in the change of light,  
knows the blow of grief in the time of trees' tight-fisted leaves.  
Stubborn calendar of bone. Last snow. Now it must always be so.

## Indian Boarding School: The Runaways

By [Louise Erdrich](#)

Home's the place we head for in our sleep.  
Boxcars stumbling north in dreams  
don't wait for us. We catch them on the run.  
The rails, old lacerations that we love,  
shoot parallel across the face and break  
just under Turtle Mountains. Riding scars  
you can't get lost. Home is the place they cross.

The lame guard strikes a match and makes the dark  
less tolerant. We watch through cracks in boards  
as the land starts rolling, rolling till it hurts  
to be here, cold in regulation clothes.  
We know the sheriff's waiting at midrun  
to take us back. His car is dumb and warm.  
The highway doesn't rock, it only hums

like a wing of long insults. The worn-down welts  
of ancient punishments lead back and forth.

All runaways wear dresses, long green ones,  
the color you would think shame was. We scrub  
the sidewalks down because it's shameful work.  
Our brushes cut the stone in watered arcs  
and in the soak frail outlines shiver clear  
a moment, things us kids pressed on the dark  
face before it hardened, pale, remembering  
delicate old injuries, the spines of names and leaves.

## Windigo

By [Louise Erdrich](#)

*For Angela*

*The Windigo is a flesh-eating, wintry demon with a man buried deep inside of it. In some Chippewa stories, a young girl vanquishes this monster by forcing boiling lard down its throat, thereby releasing the human at the core of ice.*

You knew I was coming for you, little one,  
when the kettle jumped into the fire.  
Towels flapped on the hooks,  
and the dog crept off, groaning,  
to the deepest part of the woods.

In the hackles of dry brush a thin laughter started up.  
Mother scolded the food warm and smooth in the pot  
and called you to eat.  
But I spoke in the cold trees:  
*New one, I have come for you, child hide and lie still.*

The sumac pushed sour red cones through the air.  
Copper burned in the raw wood.  
You saw me drag toward you.  
Oh touch me, I murmured, and licked the soles of your feet.  
You dug your hands into my pale, melting fur.

I stole you off, a huge thing in my bristling armor.  
Steam rolled from my wintry arms, each leaf shivered  
from the bushes we passed  
until they stood, naked, spread like the cleaned spines of fish.

Then your warm hands hummed over and shoveled themselves full

of the ice and the snow. I would darken and spill  
all night running, until at last morning broke the cold earth  
and I carried you home,  
a river shaking in the sun.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Who Burns for the Perfection of Paper

By [Martín Espada](#)

At sixteen, I worked after high school hours  
at a printing plant  
that manufactured legal pads:  
Yellow paper  
stacked seven feet high  
and leaning  
as I slipped cardboard  
between the pages,  
then brushed red glue  
up and down the stack.  
No gloves: fingertips required  
for the perfection of paper,  
smoothing the exact rectangle.  
Sluggish by 9 PM, the hands  
would slide along suddenly sharp paper,  
and gather slits thinner than the crevices  
of the skin, hidden.  
Then the glue would sting,  
hands oozing  
till both palms burned  
at the punchclock.

Ten years later, in law school,  
I knew that every legal pad  
was glued with the sting of hidden cuts,  
that every open lawbook  
was a pair of hands  
upturned and burning.

## “Find Work”

By [Rhina P. Espaillat](#)

*I tie my Hat—I crease my Shawl—  
Life's little duties do—precisely  
As the very least  
Were infinite—to me—  
—Emily Dickinson, #443*

My mother's mother, widowed very young  
of her first love, and of that love's first fruit,  
moved through her father's farm, her country tongue  
and country heart anaesthetized and mute  
with labor. So her kind was taught to do—  
“Find work,” she would reply to every grief—  
and her one dictum, whether false or true,  
tolled heavy with her passionate belief.  
Widowed again, with children, in her prime,  
she spoke so little it was hard to bear  
so much composure, such a truce with time  
spent in the lifelong practice of despair.  
But I recall her floors, scrubbed white as bone,  
her dishes, and how painfully they shone.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Weighing In

By [Rhina P. Espaillat](#)

What the scale tells you is how much the earth  
has missed you, body, how it wants you back  
again after you leave it to go forth  
  
into the light. Do you remember how  
earth hardly noticed you then? Others would rock  
you in their arms, warm in the flow  
  
that fed you, coaxed you upright. Then earth began  
to claim you with spots and fevers, began to lick  
at you with a bruised knee, a bloody shin,  
  
and finally to stoke you, body, drumming  
intimate coded messages through music  
you danced to unawares, there in your dreaming

and your poems and your obedient blood.  
Body, how useful you became, how lucky,  
heavy with news and breakage, rich, and sad,

sometimes, imagining that greedy zero  
you must have been, that promising empty sack  
of possibilities, never-to-come tomorrow.

But look at you now, body, soft old shoe  
that love wears when it's stirring, look down, look  
how earth wants what you weigh, needs what you know.

## to the notebook kid

By [Eve L. Ewing](#)

yo chocolate milk for breakfast kid.  
one leg of your sweatpants rolled up  
scrourging at the bottom of your mama's purse  
for bus fare and gum  
pen broke and you got ink on your thumb kid

what's good, hot on the cement kid  
White Castle kid  
tongue stained purple  
cussin on the court  
till your little brother shows up  
with half a candy bar kid

got that good B in science kid  
you earned it kid  
etch your name in a tree  
hug your granny on her birthday  
think of Alaska when they shootin  
curled-up dreams of salmon  
safety  
tundra  
the farthest away place you ever saw in a book  
polar bears your new chess partners  
pickax in the ice  
Northern Lights kid

keep your notebook where your cousins won't find it.  
leave it on my desk if you want  
shuffle under carbon paper

and a stamp that screams late

yellow and red to draw the eye from the ocean  
you keep hidden in a jacked-up five star.  
your mama thought there was a secret in there  
thought they would laugh  
but that ain't it.

it's that flows and flows and flows  
and lines like those rip-roaring  
bits you got  
bars till the end of time  
you could rap like  
helium bout to spring  
all of it  
down to you  
none left in the sun — fuelless  
while the last light pushes from your belly

climbing your ribs

and you laugh into the microphone  
and who is ready for that?

## Angels

By [B. H. Fairchild](#)

Elliot Ray Neiderland, home from college  
one winter, hauling a load of Herefords  
from Hogtown to Guymon with a pint of  
Ezra Brooks and a copy of Rilke's *Duineser  
Elegien* on the seat beside him, saw the ass-end  
of his semi gliding around in the side mirror  
as he hit ice and knew he would never live  
to see graduation or the castle at Duino.

In the hospital, head wrapped like a gift  
(the nurses had stuck a bow on top), he said  
four flaming angels crouched on the hood, wings  
spread so wide he couldn't see, and then  
the world collapsed. We smiled and passed a flask  
around. Little Bill and I sang *Your Cheatin'  
Heart* and laughed, and then a sudden quiet  
put a hard edge on the morning and we left.

*Siehe, ich lebe, Look, I'm alive*, he said,  
leaping down the hospital steps. The nurses  
waved, white dresses puffed out like pigeons  
in the morning breeze. We roared off in my Dodge,  
*Behold, I come like a thief!* he shouted to the town  
and gave his life to poetry. He lives, now,  
in the south of France. His poems arrive  
by mail, and we read them and do not understand.

## Early Occult Memory Systems of the Lower Midwest

By [B. H. Fairchild](#)

In his fifth year the son, deep in the backseat  
of his father's Ford and the *mysterium*  
of time, holds time in memory with words,  
*night, this night*, on the way to a stalled rig south  
of Kiowa Creek where the plains wind stacks  
the skeletons of weeds on barbed-wire fences  
and rattles the battered DeKalb sign to make  
the child think of time in its passing, of death.

Cattle stare at flat-bed haulers gunning clumps  
of black smoke and lugging damaged drill pipe  
up the gullied, mud-hollowed road. *Road, this  
road*. Roustabouts shouting from the crow's nest  
float like Ascension angels on a ring of lights.  
Chokecherries gouge the purpled sky, cloud-  
swags running the moon under, and starlight  
rains across the Ford's blue hood. *Blue, this blue*.

Later, where black flies haunt the mud tank,  
the boy walks along the pipe rack dragging  
a stick across the hollow ends to make a kind  
of music, and the creek throbs with frog songs,  
locusts, the rasp of tree limbs blown and scattered.  
The great horse people, his father, these sounds,  
these shapes saved from time's dark creek as the car  
moves across the moving earth: *world, this world*.

## Old Men Playing Basketball

By [B. H. Fairchild](#)

The heavy bodies lunge, the broken language  
of fake and drive, glamorous jump shot

slowed to a stutter. Their gestures, in love  
again with the pure geometry of curves,

rise toward the ball, falter, and fall away.  
On the boards their hands and fingertips  
tremble in tense little prayers of reach  
and balance. Then, the grind of bone

and socket, the caught breath, the sigh,  
the grunt of the body laboring to give  
birth to itself. In their toiling and grand  
sweeps, I wonder, do they still make love

to their wives, kissing the undersides  
of their wrists, dancing the old soft-shoe  
of desire? And on the long walk home  
from the VFW, do they still sing

to the drunken moon? Stands full, clock  
moving, the one in army fatigues  
and houseshoes says to himself, *pick and roll*,  
and the phrase sounds musical as ever,

radio crooning songs of love after the game,  
the girl leaning back in the Chevy's front seat  
as her raven hair flames in the shuddering  
light of the outdoor movie, and now he drives,

gliding toward the net. A glass wand  
of autumn light breaks over the backboard.  
Boys rise up in old men, wings begin to sprout  
at their backs. The ball turns in the darkening air.

## The Poem You've Been Waiting For

By [Tarfia Faizullah](#)

I saw then the white-eyed man  
leaning in to see if I was ready

yet to go where he has been waiting  
to take me. I saw then the gnawing

sounds my faith has been making  
and I saw too that the shape it sings

in is the color of cast-iron mountains  
I drove so long to find I forgot I had

been looking for them, for the you  
I once knew and the you that was born

waiting for me to find you. I have been  
twisting and turning across these lifetimes

where forgetting me is what you do  
so you don't have to look at yourself. I saw

that I would drown in a creek carved out  
of a field our incarnations forged the first path

through to those mountains. I invited you to stroll  
with me there again for the first time, to pause

and sprawl in the grass while I read to you  
the poem you hadn't known you'd been waiting

to hear. I read until you finally slept  
and all your jagged syntaxes softened into rest.

You're always driving so far from me towards  
the me I worry, without you, is eternity. I lay there,

awake, keeping watch while you snored.  
I waited, as I always seem to, for you

to wake up and come back to me.

## **Pigeons**

By [Huang Fan](#)

Translated By Huang Fan and Margaret Ross

I've never seen pigeons argue  
I only see them soar  
I don't know if a pigeon is naïve or worldly  
I just know it has no past to make it toil through life

Maybe they're the tongues of the air  
Lazily expressing cars' sighs  
Maybe they're lined up on the roof  
Vying to perform snow's wedding

One day I stick my head out the window  
And realize their nation is the act of soaring  
Soaring makes my silence meaningless  
Thank god, they've taught me how to talk about nations!

Standing under a flock of pigeons, I think *oh*  
*People aren't even worth one flower blooming toward them*

*Note: Translated from the Chinese*

## Money Tree

By [Chanda Feldman](#)

*After David Hammons*

A shine to the bark, silver leaves aflicker  
and the wound that made the basketball hoop:  
a bicycle's metal wheel gouged in the tree,  
the trunk's burred lip that clamps it.

Whose childhood monument is this?  
In the foreground of whose childhood home,  
its blind-drawn windows? Where is the adolescent  
of the grass and weeds, after school? The adolescent

of the fluid leap and jump shot? Of the glissando  
stride and lay-up? The plosive *woop woop* cries sent up  
when the body satisfies the calculating eye?  
O the tree ashimmer in hypotheticals' blooms—

where's the undissuaded youth who sought  
a scarce grace here? Who sought to make bank?  
The shoulder and arm and wrist on repeat  
even as day went thoroughly dark

who refused to come inside until they exhausted  
the audience of their mind? *O* extraordinary dunk,  
*O* hard slam, shudder the immovable tree.  
Where is the glimmer of a sign

one might one day rise among the ordinals  
to be ranked *first, first, first*? Wouldn't  
it be possible? Because *if not, if not, if not*.

**Note to Poetry Out Loud students:** This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.

# A Wing and a Prayer

By Beth Ann Fennelly

We thought the birds were singing louder. We were almost certain they were. We spoke of this, when we spoke, if we spoke, on our zoom screens or in the backyard with our podfolk. Dang, you hear those birds? Don't they sound loud? We shouted to the neighbor, and from behind her mask she agreed. The birds are louder this spring. This summer. I've never heard such loud birds. Listen to 'em sing. But the birds aren't singing louder. In fact, the opposite. Ornithologists have recorded lowered decibel levels of bird song. In the absence of noise pollution—our planes overhead, our cars rushing past with their motors and horns, our bars leaking music onto the street corners—the birds don't need to shout. So why are we hearing birdsong now, when it is quieter? Because we need it more. Poetry in the pandemic: birdsong that was there all along.

## Constantly Risking Absurdity (#15)

By [Lawrence Ferlinghetti](#)

Constantly risking absurdity  
and death  
whenever he performs  
above the heads  
of his audience  
the poet like an acrobat  
climbs on rime  
to a high wire of his own making  
and balancing on eyebeams  
above a sea of faces  
paces his way  
to the other side of day  
performing entrechats  
and sleight-of-foot tricks  
and other high theatrics  
and all without mistaking  
any thing  
for what it may not be

For he's the super realist  
   who must perforce perceive  
       taut truth  
   before the taking of each stance or step  
 in his supposed advance  
   toward that still higher perch  
 where Beauty stands and waits

with gravity  
to start her death-defying leap

And he  
a little charleychaplin man  
who may or may not catch  
her fair eternal form  
spreadeagled in the empty air  
of existence

## I Genitory Perduiti

By [Lawrence Ferlinghetti](#)

The dove-white gulls  
on the wet lawn in Washington Square  
in the early morning fog  
each a little ghost in the gloaming  
Souls transmigrated maybe  
from Hudson's shrouded shores  
across all the silent years—  
Which one's my maybe mafioso father  
in his so white suit and black shoes  
in his real estate office Forty-second Street  
or at the front table wherever he went—  
Which my dear lost mother with faded smile  
locked away from me in time—  
Which my big brother Charley  
selling switching-signals all his life  
on the New York Central—  
And which good guy brother Clem  
sweating in Sing Sing's darkest offices  
deputy-warden thirty years  
watching executions in the wooden armchair  
(with leather straps and black hood)  
He too gone mad with it in the end—  
And which my nearest brother Harry  
still kindest and dearest in a far suburb—  
I see them now all turn to me at last  
gull-eyed in the white dawn  
about to call to me  
across the silent grass

# Queens Cemetery, Setting Sun

By [Lawrence Ferlinghetti](#)

Airport bus from JFK  
cruising through Queens  
passing huge endless cemetery  
by Long Island's old expressway  
(once a dirt path for wheelless Indians)  
myriad small tombstones tilted up  
gesturing statues on parapets  
stone arms or wings upraised  
lost among illegible inscriptions  
And the setting yellow sun  
painting all of them  
on one side only  
with an ochre brush  
Rows and rows and rows and rows  
of small stone slabs  
tilted toward the sun forever  
While on the far horizon  
Mannahatta's great stone slabs  
skyscraper tombs and parapets  
casting their own long black shadows  
over all these long-haired graves  
the final restless places  
of old-country potato farmers  
dustbin pawnbrokers  
dead dagos and Dublin bouncers  
tinsmiths and blacksmiths and roofers  
house painters and house carpenters  
cabinet makers and cigar makers  
garment workers and streetcar motormen  
railroad switchmen and signal salesmen  
swabbers and sweepers and swampers  
steam-fitters and key-punch operators  
ward heelers and labor organizers  
railroad dicks and smalltime mafiosi  
shopkeepers and saloon keepers and doormen  
icemen and middlemen and conmen  
housekeepers and housewives and dowagers  
French housemaids and Swedish cooks  
Brooklyn barmaids and Bronxville butlers  
opera singers and gandy dancers  
pitchers and catchers  
in the days of ragtime baseball  
poolroom hustlers and fight promoters

Catholic sisters of charity  
parish priests and Irish cops  
Viennese doctors of delirium  
now all abandoned in eternity  
parcels in a dead-letter office  
inscrutable addresses on them  
beyond further deliverance  
in an America wheeling past them  
and disappearing oblivious  
into East River's echoing tunnels  
down the great American drain

## **Retired Ballerinas, Central Park West**

By [Lawrence Ferlinghetti](#)

Retired ballerinas on winter afternoons  
    walking their dogs  
        in Central Park West  
(or their cats on leashes—  
    the cats themselves old highwire artists)  
The ballerinas  
    leap and pirouette  
        through Columbus Circle  
while winos on park benches  
    (laid back like drunken Goudonovs)  
    hear the taxis trumpet together  
        like horsemen of the apocalypse  
            in the dusk of the gods  
It is the final witching hour  
    when swains are full of swan songs  
And all return through the dark dusk  
    to their bright cells  
        in glass highrises  
or sit down to oval cigarettes and cakes  
        in the Russian Tea Room  
or climb four flights to back rooms  
        in Westside brownstones  
    where faded playbill photos  
        fall peeling from their frames  
        like last year's autumn leaves

# Courtesy

By [David Ferry](#)

It is an afternoon toward the end of August:  
Autumnal weather, cool following on,  
And riding in, after the heat of summer,  
Into the empty afternoon shade and light,

The shade full of light without any thickness at all;  
You can see right through and right down into the depth  
Of the light and shade of the afternoon; there isn't  
Any weight of the summer pressing down.

In the backyard of the house next door there's a kid,  
Maybe eleven or twelve, and a young man,  
Visitors at the house whom I don't know,  
The house in which the sound of some kind of party,

Perhaps even a wedding, is going on.  
Somehow you can tell from the tone of their voices  
That they don't know each other very well—  
Two guests at the party, one of them, maybe,

A friend of the bride or groom, the other the son  
Or the younger brother, maybe, of somebody there.  
A couple of blocks away the wash of traffic  
Dimly sounds, as if we were near the ocean.

They're shooting baskets, amiably and mildly.  
The noise of the basketball, though startlingly louder  
Than the voices of the two of them as they play,  
Is peaceable as can be, something like meter.

The earnest voice of the kid, girlish and manly,  
And the voice of the young man, carefully playing the game  
Of having a grown-up conversation with him:  
I can tell the young man is teaching the boy by example,

The easy way he dribbles the ball and passes it  
Back with a single gesture of wrist to make it  
Easy for the kid to be in synch;  
Giving and taking, perfectly understood.

# Seen Through a Window

By [David Ferry](#)

A man and a woman are sitting at a table.  
It is supper time. The air is green. The walls  
Are white in the green air, as rocks under water  
Retain their own true color, though washed in green.  
I do not know either the man or the woman,  
Nor do I know whatever they know of each other.  
Though washed in my eye they keep their own true color.

The man is all his own hunched strength, the body's  
Self and strength, that bears, like weariness,  
Itself upon itself, as a stone's weight  
Bears heavily on itself to be itself.  
Heavy the strength that bears the body down.  
And the way he feeds is like a dreamless sleep.  
The dreaming of a stone is how he feeds.

The woman's arms are plump, mottled a little  
The flesh, like standing milk, and on one arm  
A blue bruise, got in some household labor or other,  
Flowering in the white. Her staring eye,  
Like some bird's cry called from some deepest wood,  
Says nothing of what it is but what it is.  
Such silence is the bird's cry of the stone.

# What It Does

By [David Ferry](#)

The sea bit,  
As they said it would,  
And the hill slid,  
As they said it would,  
And the poor dead  
Nodded agog  
The poor head.

O topmost lofty  
Tower of Troy,  
The poem apparently  
Speaks with joy  
Of terrible things.  
Where is the pleasure  
The poetry brings?

Tell if you can,  
What does it make?  
A city of man  
That will not shake,  
Or if it shake,  
Shake with the splendor  
Of the poem's pleasure.

## The Tree

By [Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea](#)

Fair tree! for thy delightful shade  
'Tis just that some return be made;  
Sure some return is due from me  
To thy cool shadows, and to thee.  
When thou to birds dost shelter give,  
Thou music dost from them receive;  
If travellers beneath thee stay  
Till storms have worn themselves away,  
That time in praising thee they spend  
And thy protecting pow'r commend.  
The shepherd here, from scorching freed,  
Tunes to thy dancing leaves his reed;  
Whilst his lov'd nymph, in thanks, bestows  
Her flow'ry chaplets on thy boughs.  
Shall I then only silent be,  
And no return be made by me?  
No; let this wish upon thee wait,  
And still to flourish be thy fate.  
To future ages may'st thou stand  
Untouch'd by the rash workman's hand,  
Till that large stock of sap is spent,  
Which gives thy summer's ornament;  
Till the fierce winds, that vainly strive  
To shock thy greatness whilst alive,  
Shall on thy lifeless hour attend,  
Prevent the axe, and grace thy end;  
Their scatter'd strength together call  
And to the clouds proclaim thy fall;  
Who then their ev'ning dews may spare  
When thou no longer art their care,  
But shalt, like ancient heroes, burn,  
And some bright hearth be made thy urn.

# Coy Mistress

By [Annie Finch](#)

Sir, I am not a bird of prey:  
a Lady does not seize the day.  
I trust that brief Time will unfold  
our youth, before he makes us old.  
How could we two write lines of rhyme  
were we not fond of numbered Time  
and grateful to the vast and sweet  
trials his days will make us meet?  
The Grave's not just the body's curse;  
no skeleton can pen a verse!  
So while this numbered World we see,  
let's sweeten Time with poetry,  
and Time, in turn, may sweeten Love  
and give us time our love to prove.  
You've praised my eyes, forehead, breast:  
you've all our lives to praise the rest.

# Insect

By [Annie Finch](#)

That hour-glass-backed,  
orchard-legged,  
heavy-headed will,  
  
paper-folded,  
wedge-contorted,  
savage—dense to kill—  
  
pulls back on backward-moving,  
arching  
high legs still,  
  
lowered through a deep, knees-reaching,  
feathered down  
green will,  
  
antenna-honest,  
thread-descending,  
carpeted as if with skill,  
  
a focus-changing,  
sober-reaching,

tracing, killing will.

## Scintilla, Star

By [Jameson Fitzpatrick](#)

In the old place, there was no place  
that did not see me.  
Wherever I went mothers whispered  
about me like a Greek chorus:  
*I heard that boy ...* I heard that.  
I was just a boy. But it was  
true, what they said, that I liked  
other boys, that I had stolen Sarah's,  
though he was four years older  
and they were very much in love.  
I made him break up with her  
in a Chili's parking lot  
while I waited inside. I was  
fourteen. How embarrassing  
to have been fourteen, to have eaten  
at that Chili's, often. That summer  
I had no taste for anything  
but him. Faintly of chlorine.  
When he left for college  
I had no one. Sarah's friends  
stared me down at school.  
I found it was better,  
if I could not be no one,  
to be someone. Small, but  
particular. Specified, which was  
an apprenticeship for special.  
Cold, another word for cool.

## Cartoon Physics, part 1

By [Nick Flynn](#)

Children under, say, *ten*, shouldn't know  
that the universe is ever-expanding,  
inexorably pushing into the vacuum, galaxies  
  
swallowed by galaxies, whole  
  
solar systems collapsing, all of it

acted out in silence. At ten we are still learning

the rules of cartoon animation,

that if a man draws a door on a rock  
only he can pass through it.

Anyone else who tries

will crash into the rock. Ten-year-olds  
should stick with burning houses, car wrecks,  
ships going down—earthbound, tangible

disasters, arenas

where they can be heroes. You can run  
back into a burning house, sinking ships

have lifeboats, the trucks will come  
with their ladders, if you jump

you will be saved. A child

places her hand on the roof of a schoolbus,  
& drives across a city of sand. She knows

the exact spot it will skid, at which point  
the bridge will give, who will swim to safety  
& who will be pulled under by sharks. She will learn

that if a man runs off the edge of a cliff  
he will not fall

until he notices his mistake.

## **Cathedral of Salt**

By [Nick Flynn](#)

Beneath all this I'm carving a cathedral  
of salt. I keep

the entrance hidden, no one seems to notice  
the hours I'm missing ... I'll

bring you one night, it's where  
I go when I

hang up the phone ...

Neither you  
nor your soul is waiting for me at

the end of this, I know that, the salt  
nearly clear after I

chisel out the pews, the see-through  
altar, the opaque

panes of glass that depict the stations of  
our cross — *Here is the day*

*we met, here is the day we remember we*  
*met...* The air down here

will kill us, some say, some wear paper  
masks, some still imagine the air above the green

trees, thick with bees

building solitary nests out of petals. What's  
the name for this? *Ineffable*? The endless

white will blind you, some say,  
but what is there to see we haven't already

seen? Some say it's  
like poking a stick into a river — you might as well

simply write about the stick.

Or the river.

## The Other Side

By [Jennifer Elise Foerster](#)

My crown.  
My room.  
Surrounding snow.

These are not my  
hands, my winter shoes

carried off by uncertain music.

There was a meadow  
behind my house  
and if I should see myself there  
she would tell me  
there was never a meadow

and then walk through me  
as if through a cloud  
and carry on in her own  
solitary direction.

Crows still caw  
in her palace garden—  
tram rails, rain,  
stammering moon.

Once lilacs bloomed  
their huge white knuckles  
breaking the winter of my room—

it was a dream—French windows  
on a Viennese street.

Every street I cross  
angling alongside  
smoggy postwar artifices

branches scratch  
against my sleep.

How my body was a branch  
in my sleep.

And when I woke  
years later  
I peered down upon it  
leafless and stiff.

No roosts left, no caw.  
No birds blooming  
in my dream's green crooks.

Afternoons alone  
are labyrinthine.

I wander the city, searching  
for what? Friends,  
we knew where to find each other,  
tapping the window of the winter room.

We were thinner then,  
younger than the chestnut trees.

Everything has its seed  
much later  
and on the other side of time.

## **The Card Players**

By [Calvin Forbes](#)

A fourth was needed so one of the three  
Invited a friend and I came along as a spare  
In case a chair was empty since I could fill  
In as easily as I could shout out a rhyme.

As the jive flowed like the River Jordan  
And Joshua and his trumpets sounded the alarm  
The winning cards slam damned on the table  
And I laughed along with morning noon and night.

My three big brothers: bold smart handsome.  
One slim as a stick of dynamite, the second solid  
As a line backer and the third crazy enough  
To fight them both if they let it roll beyond talk.

Treated me like a child even after I had my first.  
The three of them (ace king and a wild card)  
Improbably born within four years as if Daddy  
And Momma were trying to break a record

Or win a bet about how many diapers a woman  
Could change in a single day without cursing  
The hand God had dealt her; the odds were even  
Until I came along years later to tell their story.

## **Momma Said**

By [Calvin Forbes](#)

The slice I ate I want it back

Those crumbs I swept up  
I'd like my share again  
I can still taste it like it was

The memory by itself is delicious  
Each bite was a small miracle  
Both nourishing and sweet  
I wish I had saved just a little bit

I know it wasn't a literal cake  
It's the thought that counts  
Like a gift that's not store-bought  
Making it even more special

Like a dream that makes you  
Want to go back to sleep  
You can't have your cake  
And eat it too Momma said

I was defiant and hardheaded  
And answered yes I can too  
The look she gave me said boy  
I hope you aren't a fool all your life

## **The Other Side of This World**

By [Calvin Forbes](#)

Put my glad rags in a cardboard box—  
This old jiggerboo never grew mature.  
Is everything in its place except me?  
Don't be surprised; I called all day

And the only person I could reach was  
The operator; and it's a sorry day when  
Nothing is coming down but your foot.  
And how deep is your stomach cause

That's how far your heart will fall!  
When I'm gone I might come back cause  
I'm always forgetting something special.  
A crease in my overalls, my collar stiff,

I cried as many tears as I have teeth.  
And I only got two in my mouth. Son of the  
Sun look out: as you get black you burn.

Is everything in its place except me?

## The Coming Woman

By [Mary Weston Fordham](#)

Just look, 'tis quarter past six, love—  
And not even the fires are caught;  
Well, you know I must be at the office—  
But, as usual, the breakfast 'll be late.

Now hurry and wake up the children;  
And dress them as fast as you can;  
'Poor dearies,' I know they'll be tardy,  
Dear me, 'what a slow, poky man!'

Have the tenderloin broiled nice and juicy—  
Have the toast browned and buttered all right;  
And be sure you settle the coffee:  
Be sure that the silver is bright.

When ready, just run up and call me—  
At eight, to the office I go,  
Lest poverty, grim, should o'ertake us—  
'Tis bread and butter,' you know.

The bottom from stocks may fall out,  
My bonds may get below par;  
Then surely, I seldom could spare you  
A nickel, to buy a cigar.

All ready? Now, while I am eating,  
Just bring up my wheel to the door;  
Then wash up the dishes; and, mind now,  
Have dinner promptly at four;

For tonight is our Woman's Convention,  
And I am to speak first, you know—  
The men veto us in private,  
But in public they shout, 'That's so.'

So 'by-by' – In case of a rap, love,  
Before opening the door, you must look;  
O! how could a civilized woman  
Exist, without a man cook.

# Serenade

By [Mary Weston Fordham](#)

Sleep, love sleep,  
The night winds sigh,  
In soft lullaby.  
The Lark is at rest  
With the dew on her breast.  
So close those dear eyes,  
That borrowed their hue  
From the heavens so blue,  
Sleep, love sleep.

Sleep, love sleep,  
The pale moon looks down  
On the valleys around,  
The Glow Moth is flying,  
The South wind is sighing,  
And I am low lying,  
With lute deftly strung,  
To pour out my song,  
Sleep, love sleep.

# Ant

By [Matthew Francis](#)

*After Robert Hooke*

All afternoon a reddish trickle  
out of the roots of the beech  
  
and across the lawn,  
  
a sort of rust that shines and dances.  
Close up, it proves to be ant,  
  
each droplet a horned  
  
traveler finicking its way round  
the crooked geometry  
  
of a grass forest.  
  
A finger felled in their path rocks them,  
amazed, back on their haunches.

I see them tasting  
the air for subtle intelligence,  
till one ventures to scale it,  
and others follow.

They are fidgety subjects to draw.  
If you sink the feet in glue

the rest twists and writhes;

kill one, the juices evaporate  
in seconds, leaving only

the shriveled casing.

I dunked one in brandy. It struggled  
till the air rose from its mouth

in pinprick bubbles.

I let it soak an hour, then dried it,  
observed the spherical head,

the hairlike feelers,

the grinning vice of its sideways jaw,  
the coppery armor plate

with its scattered spines.

Some draft stirred it then. It rose to all  
its feet, and set off across

the rough miles of desk.

***Note to Poetry Out Loud students:*** This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.

# Eagle Plain

By [Robert Francis](#)

The American eagle is not aware he is  
the American eagle. He is never tempted  
to look modest.

When orators advertise the American eagle's  
virtues, the American eagle is not listening.  
This is his virtue.

He is somewhere else, he is mountains away  
but even if he were near he would never  
make an audience.

The American eagle never says he will serve  
if drafted, will dutifully serve etc. He is  
not at our service.

If we have honored him we have honored one  
who unequivocally honors himself by  
overlooking us.

He does not know the meaning of magnificent.  
Perhaps we do not altogether either  
who cannot touch him.

# Part for the Whole

By [Robert Francis](#)

When others run to windows or out of doors  
To catch the sunset whole, he is content  
With any segment anywhere he sits.

From segment, fragment, he can reconstruct  
The whole, prefers to reconstruct the whole,  
As if to say, I see more seeing less.

A window to the east will serve as well  
As window to the west, for eastern sky  
Echoes the western sky. And even less—

A patch of light that picture-glass happens  
To catch from window-glass, fragment of fragment,  
Flawed, distorted, dulled, nevertheless

Gives something unglased nature cannot give:  
The old obliquity of art, and proves  
Part may be more than whole, least may be best.

## Another Antipastoral

By [Vievee Francis](#)

I want to put down what the mountain has awakened.

My mouthful of grass.

My curious tale. I want to stand still but find myself moved patch by patch.

There's a bleat in my throat. Words fail me here. Can you understand? I sink to my knees tired or not. I now know the ragweed from the goldenrod, and the blinding beauty of green. Don't you see? I am shedding my skins. I am a paper hive, a wolf spider, the creeping ivy, the ache of a birch, a heifer, a doe. I have fallen from my dream of progress: the clear-cut glass, the potted and balconied tree, the lemon-waxed wood over a marbled pillar, into my own nocturne. The lullabies I had forgotten. How could I know what slept inside? What would rend my fantasies to cud and up from this belly's wet straw-strewn field—

these soundings.

## The Heart Shows No Signs

By [Ru Freeman](#)

The heart, the surgeon says, does not reveal  
the small rifts, the hairline cracks which

split the hairline cracks they conceal cops  
and robbers in a stretch of skin flaunting

star-scars with show of blood bone  
the ledges of what it holds tight in checkmate

moves: bend this and break  
fight first and bleed to earn

needle finger wrap caress balm  
the salvation of sight Behold what beauty

lasts, what outlasts itself The curtain  
calls the ovation Seize the beginning

that ends this way: off center stage above  
fractured ribs the heart succumbs in silence

All is dark. Listen     a *kommos* sung solo  
It is too late to repair anything.

## The American Soldier

By [Philip Freneau](#)

*A Picture from the Life  
To serve with love,  
And shed your blood,  
    Approved may be above,  
But here below  
(Example shew,)  
'Tis dangerous to be good.*

*--Lord Oxford*

Deep in a vale, a stranger now to arms,  
Too poor to shine in courts, too proud to beg,  
He, who once warred on *Saratoga's* plains,  
Sits musing o'er his scars, and wooden leg.

Remembering still the toil of former days,  
To other hands he sees his earnings paid;--  
*They* share the due reward—*he* feeds on praise.  
Lost in the abyss of want, misfortune's shade.

Far, far from domes where splendid tapers glare,  
'Tis his from dear bought *peace* no wealth to win,  
Removed alike from courtly cringing 'squires,  
The great-man's *Levee*, and the proud man's grin.

Sold are those arms which once on Britons blazed,  
When, flushed with conquest, to the charge they came;  
That power repelled, and *Freedom's* fabrick raised,  
She leaves her soldier—*famine and a name!*

**Note to Poetry Out Loud students:** This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.

# Accquainted with the Night

By [Robert Frost](#)

I have been one acquainted with the night.  
I have walked out in rain—and back in rain.  
I have outwalked the furthest city light.

I have looked down the saddest city lane.  
I have passed by the watchman on his beat  
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet  
When far away an interrupted cry  
Came over houses from another street,

But not to call me back or say good-bye;  
And further still at an unearthly height,  
One luminary clock against the sky

Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.  
I have been one acquainted with the night.

# After Apple-Picking

By [Robert Frost](#)

My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree  
Toward heaven still,  
And there's a barrel that I didn't fill  
Beside it, and there may be two or three  
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.  
But I am done with apple-picking now.  
Essence of winter sleep is on the night,  
The scent of apples: I am drowsing off.  
I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight  
I got from looking through a pane of glass  
I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough  
And held against the world of hoary grass.  
It melted, and I let it fall and break.  
But I was well  
Upon my way to sleep before it fell,  
And I could tell  
What form my dreaming was about to take.  
Magnified apples appear and disappear,  
Stem end and blossom end,  
And every fleck of russet showing clear.

My instep arch not only keeps the ache,  
It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.  
I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.  
And I keep hearing from the cellar bin  
The rumbling sound  
Of load on load of apples coming in.  
For I have had too much  
Of apple-picking: I am overtired  
Of the great harvest I myself desired.  
There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,  
Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.  
For all  
That struck the earth,  
No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,  
Went surely to the cider-apple heap  
As of no worth.  
One can see what will trouble  
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.  
Were he not gone,  
The woodchuck could say whether it's like his  
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,  
Or just some human sleep.

## Fire and Ice

By [Robert Frost](#)

Some say the world will end in fire,  
Some say in ice.  
From what I've tasted of desire  
I hold with those who favor fire.  
But if it had to perish twice,  
I think I know enough of hate  
To say that for destruction ice  
Is also great  
And would suffice.

## Mowing

By [Robert Frost](#)

There was never a sound beside the wood but one,  
And that was my long scythe whispering to the ground.  
What was it it whispered? I knew not well myself;  
Perhaps it was something about the heat of the sun,  
Something, perhaps, about the lack of sound—

And that was why it whispered and did not speak.  
It was no dream of the gift of idle hours,  
Or easy gold at the hand of fay or elf:  
Anything more than the truth would have seemed too weak  
To the earnest love that laid the swale in rows,  
Not without feeble-pointed spikes of flowers  
(Pale orchises), and scared a bright green snake.  
The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows.  
My long scythe whispered and left the hay to make.

## **The Road Not Taken**

By [Robert Frost](#)

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

## **Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening**

By [Robert Frost](#)

Whose woods these are I think I know.  
His house is in the village though;  
He will not see me stopping here  
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farmhouse near  
Between the woods and frozen lake  
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake  
To ask if there is some mistake.  
The only other sound's the sweep  
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.

## **Flaxman**

By [Margaret Fuller](#)

We deemed the secret lost, the spirit gone,  
Which spake in Greek simplicity of thought,  
And in the forms of gods and heroes wrought  
Eternal beauty from the sculptured stone,—  
A higher charm than modern culture won  
With all the wealth of metaphysic lore,  
Gifted to analyze, dissect, explore.  
A many-colored light flows from one sun;  
Art, 'neath its beams, a motley thread has spun;  
The prism modifies the perfect day;  
But thou hast known such mediums to shun,  
And cast once more on life a pure, white ray.  
Absorbed in the creations of thy mind,  
Forgetting daily self, my truest self I find.

## **Spellcaster**

By [Jeannine Hall Gailey](#)

A golden-haired girl born  
in a month of sacrifice,  
poor little lamb

throws off her wool coat  
and pulls out boots she stole  
and rides off on a reindeer instead

and of course she can speak to roses—  
isn't that the point?  
Eventually she ends up in a castle

but it's not her home.  
It's a place to liberate,  
to escape, to decimate.

The whole place collapses,  
a series of chandeliers made  
of glass and ice. Off she goes.

Blackberries and currants in her pockets.  
Roses blooming in her footpaths.  
Wouldn't you rather be the girl  
that casts her own spells?

## Choices

By [Tess Gallagher](#)

I go to the mountain side  
of the house to cut saplings,  
and clear a view to snow  
on the mountain. But when I look up,  
saw in hand, I see a nest clutched in  
the uppermost branches.  
I don't cut that one.  
I don't cut the others either.  
Suddenly, in every tree,  
an unseen nest  
where a mountain  
would be.

*for Drago Štambuk*

**Note to Poetry Out Loud students:** Recitation of the dedication at the end of the poem is optional.  
Inclusion or omission of the dedication should not affect your accuracy score.

## Refusing Silence

By [Tess Gallagher](#)

Heartbeat trembling  
your kingdom

of leaves  
near the ceremony  
of water, I never  
insisted on you. I admit  
I delayed. I was the Empress  
of Delay. But it can't be  
put off now. On the sacred branch  
of my only voice – I insist.  
Insist for us all,  
which is the job  
of the voice, and especially  
of the poet. Else  
what am I for, what use  
am I if I don't  
insist?  
There are messages to send.  
Gatherings and songs.  
Because we need  
to insist. Else what are we  
for? What use  
are we?

## After the War

By [Rachel Galvin](#)

*For Joseph Flum*

When he got to the farmhouse, he rifled through  
the cabinets, drawers, and cupboards,  
and his buddies did too. The place was abandoned,  
or so he thought, and his buddies did too.

He tried to talk to people in town, and his buddies did too,  
but he was the only one whose Yiddish made it  
across into German. They took his meaning.  
He, in the farmhouse, took a camera and a gun,

but his buddies, who knows. About the gun,  
it's also hard to say, but after the war he took up  
photography, why not, and shot beautiful women  
for years. Got pretty good at it, and how.

Won prizes and engraved plates, put them in a drawer, forgot  
the war, forgot his buddies, forgot the women, forgot the drawer.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Revelations

By [Suzi F. Garcia](#)

There's a beast in my belly, so they locked me out of paradise. I circle outside,  
search for a new entry; when I throw myself on the gates, the fence burns  
my skin.

Please, my tears freeze on my face. Weeks pass, and she moves from belly  
to heart. With each pump, my blood purples, my teeth grow into sharp points.  
On my knees, I scratch and dig, I growl. Let me in. I cut my own tongue on  
a canine,

mauve the river ice at my feet. Months go by. My head aches with her, my  
eyes reflect

back a snowstorm. I am coming for you. I shake the gates, I howl, I twist  
and break

them open at last. Their fear has fed me, and I am warm despite the lack of  
sun—

I make my own heat. When I am finished, I walk back out the gates—reborn  
of ash,

I have crowned myself with antlers, and this world is my home.

## And If I Did, What Then?

By [George Gascoigne](#)

“And if I did, what then?  
Are you aggriev'd therefore?  
The sea hath fish for every man,  
And what would you have more?”

Thus did my mistress once,  
Amaze my mind with doubt;  
And popp'd a question for the nonce  
To beat my brains about.

Whereto I thus replied:  
“Each fisherman can wish  
That all the seas at every tide  
Were his alone to fish.

“And so did I (in vain)  
But since it may not be,  
Let such fish there as find the gain,  
And leave the loss for me.

“And with such luck and loss  
I will content myself,  
Till tides of turning time may toss  
Such fishers on the shelf.

“And when they stick on sands,  
That every man may see,  
Then will I laugh and clap my hands,  
As they do now at me.”

## **A Poem in which I Try to Express My Glee at the Music My Friend Has Given Me**

By [Ross Gay](#)

*—for Patrick Rosal*

Because I must not  
get up to throw down in a café in the Midwest,  
I hold something like a clownfaced herd  
of bareback and winged elephants  
stomping in my chest,  
I hold a thousand  
kites in a field loosed from their tethers  
at once, I feel  
my skeleton losing track  
somewhat of the science I’ve made of tamp,  
feel it rising up shriek and groove,  
rising up a river guzzling a monsoon,  
not to mention the butterflies  
of the loins, the hummingbirds  
of the loins, the thousand  
dromedaries of the loins, oh body  
of sunburst, body  
of larkspur and honeysuckle and honeysuccor  
bloom, body of treetop holler,  
oh lightspeed body  
of gasp and systole, the mandible’s ramble,  
the clavicle swoon, the spine’s  
trillion teeth oh, drift  
of hip oh, trill of ribs,  
oh synaptic clamor and juggernaut  
swell oh gutracket  
blastoff and sugartongue  
syntax oh throb and pulse and rivulet

swing and glottal thing  
and kick-start heart and heel-toe heart  
ooh ooh ooh a bullfight  
where the bull might  
take flight and win!

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Sorrow is Not My Name

By [Ross Gay](#)

—after Gwendolyn Brooks

No matter the pull toward brink. No  
matter the florid, deep sleep awaits.  
There is a time for everything. Look,  
just this morning a vulture  
nodded his red, grizzled head at me,  
and I looked at him, admiring  
the sickle of his beak.  
Then the wind kicked up, and,  
after arranging that good suit of feathers  
he up and took off.  
Just like that. And to boot,  
there are, on this planet alone, something like two  
million naturally occurring sweet things,  
some with names so generous as to kick  
the steel from my knees: agave, persimmon,  
stick ball, the purple okra I bought for two bucks  
at the market. Think of that. The long night,  
the skeleton in the mirror, the man behind me  
on the bus taking notes, yeah, yeah.  
But look; my niece is running through a field  
calling my name. My neighbor sings like an angel  
and at the end of my block is a basketball court.  
I remember. My color's green. I'm spring.

—for Walter Aikens

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score. Recitation of the dedication at the end of the poem is optional. Inclusion or omission of the dedication should not affect your accuracy score.*

# Wedding Poem

By [Ross Gay](#)

for Keith and Jen

Friends I am here to modestly report  
seeing in an orchard  
in my town  
a goldfinch kissing  
a sunflower  
again and again  
dangling upside down  
by its tiny claws  
steadying itself by snapping open  
like an old-timey fan  
its wings  
again and again,  
until, swooning, it tumbled off  
and swooped back to the very same perch,  
where the sunflower curled its giant  
swirling of seeds  
around the bird and leaned back  
to admire the soft wind  
nudging the bird's plumage,  
and friends I could see  
the points on the flower's stately crown  
soften and curl inward  
as it almost indiscernibly lifted  
the food of its body  
to the bird's nuzzling mouth  
whose fervor  
I could hear from  
oh 20 or 30 feet away  
and see from the tiny hulls  
that sailed from their  
good racket,  
which good racket, I have to say  
was making me blush,  
and rock up on my tippy-toes,  
and just barely purse my lips  
with what I realize now  
was being, simply, glad,  
which such love,  
if we let it,  
makes us feel.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## **“No, I wasn’t meant to love and be loved”**

By [Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib](#)

Translated by Vijay Seshadri

No, I wasn’t meant to love and be loved.  
If I’d lived longer, I would have waited longer.

Knowing you are faithless keeps me alive and hungry.  
Knowing you faithful would kill me with joy.

Delicate are you, and your vows are delicate, too,  
so easily do they break.

You are a laconic marksman. You leave me  
not dead but perpetually dying.

I want my friends to heal me, succor me.  
Instead, I get analysis.

Conflagrations that would make stones drip blood  
are campfires compared to my anguish.

Two-headed, inescapable anguish!—  
Love’s anguish or the anguish of time.

Another dark, severing, incommunicable night.  
Death would be fine, if I only died once.

I would have liked a solitary death,  
not this lavish funeral, this grave anyone can visit.

You are mystical, Ghalib, and, also, you speak beautifully.  
Are you a saint, or just drunk as usual?

## **At Noon**

By [Reginald Gibbons](#)

The thick-walled room’s cave-darkness,  
cool in summer, soothes  
by saying, This is the truth, not the taut  
cicada-strummed daylight.

Rest here, out of the flame—the thick air’s  
stirred by the fan’s four  
slow-moving spoons; under the house the stone  
has its feet in deep water.  
Outside, even the sun god, dressed in this life  
as a lizard, abruptly rises  
on stiff legs and descends blasé toward the shadows.

## Harold & the Purple Crayon

By [D. Gilson](#)

Berkeley psychologists told Harold  
his anger was justified. What parents  
let their child go for a midnight walk  
under no moon? *I couldn’t have  
been more than four*, Harold told  
the doctor in her crisp beige office.  
*Doctor, could it ever be OK  
for a four-year-old to eat nine  
different types of pie?* Harold asked her.  
*Call me Lisa*, the doctor replied.  
Everyone knew Harold could draw.  
By sophomore year, he was critiquing  
grad students. By twenty, Harold knew  
exactly when to quote Sontag. Standing  
in front of a professor’s latest pastel  
of Mojave succulents: *This just makes me think  
how in place of a hermeneutics, we need  
an erotics of art*. Harold’s professors  
would hum & nod their dragon heads  
(though none of them understood, exactly,  
what Harold said). By senior year, Harold  
became distant, his work increasingly angry:  
apple trees, their fruit rotting in monochrome  
purple, under the notable lack of a moon.

## Where the Wild Things Go

By [D. Gilson](#)

The night Max wore his wolf suit  
made him infamous, bred the child star  
never sent to bed. Middle school,  
Max started drinking. *Not in my house*,  
his mother begged, *No, no, no, wild thing*.

Max reminded her who bought  
this condo, who paid for her meds.  
Freshman year, Max raved. Roared  
his terrible roar, rolled, and almost  
wound up in a warehouse dead.  
Where, oh where, do the wild things  
go? To rehab in high school.  
To college on residual book sales.  
Max kept his head down. Laughed  
at drunken frat boys. *Bro, let the wild  
rumpus start.* Max said, *No thanks,*  
and volunteered for the Peace Corps  
instead. Two years in Kenya, one  
in Belarus, the president thought  
Max might be of some use. Max  
moved to Washington, appointed  
at the State Department a cultural  
attaché. One important day Max wore  
his wolf-gray suit, then drove home  
well past rush hour in a freak snow storm.  
Max drove on the deserted beltway,  
thought it his throne. *Yes, Max belted,*  
*this is where the wild things roam.*

## Photo of a Girl on a Beach

By [Carmen Giménez Smith](#)

Once when I was harmless  
and didn't know any better,

a mirror to the front of me  
and an ocean behind,

I lay wedged in the middle of daylight,  
paper-doll thin, dreaming,

then I vanished. I gave the day a fingerprint,  
then forgot.

I sat naked on a towel  
on a hot June Monday.

The sun etched the inside of my eyelids,  
while a boy dozed at my side.

The smell of all oceans was around us—  
steamy salt, shell, and sweat,

but I reached for the distant one.  
A tide rose while I slept,

and soon I was alone. Try being  
a figure in memory. It's hollow there.

For truth's sake, I'll say she was on a beach  
and her eyes were closed.

She was bare in the sand, long,  
and the hour took her bit by bit.

## **Becoming a Redwood**

By [Dana Gioia](#)

Stand in a field long enough, and the sounds  
start up again. The crickets, the invisible  
toad who claims that change is possible,

And all the other life too small to name.  
First one, then another, until innumerable  
they merge into the single voice of a summer hill.

Yes, it's hard to stand still, hour after hour,  
fixed as a fencepost, hearing the steers  
snort in the dark pasture, smelling the manure.

And paralyzed by the mystery of how a stone  
can bear to be a stone, the pain  
the grass endures breaking through the earth's crust.

Unimaginable the redwoods on the far hill,  
rooted for centuries, the living wood grown tall  
and thickened with a hundred thousand days of light.

The old windmill creaks in perfect time  
to the wind shaking the miles of pasture grass,  
and the last farmhouse light goes off.

Something moves nearby. Coyotes hunt  
these hills and packs of feral dogs.  
But standing here at night accepts all that.

You are your own pale shadow in the quarter moon,  
moving more slowly than the crippled stars,  
part of the moonlight as the moonlight falls,

Part of the grass that answers the wind,  
part of the midnight's watchfulness that knows  
there is no silence but when danger comes.

## **The End of the World**

By [Dana Gioia](#)

"We're going," they said, "to the end of the world."  
So they stopped the car where the river curled,  
And we scrambled down beneath the bridge  
On the gravel track of a narrow ridge.

We tramped for miles on a wooded walk  
Where dog-hobble grew on its twisted stalk.  
Then we stopped to rest on the pine-needle floor  
While two ospreys watched from an oak by the shore.

We came to a bend, where the river grew wide  
And green mountains rose on the opposite side.  
My guides moved back. I stood alone,  
As the current streaked over smooth flat stone.

Shelf by stone shelf the river fell.  
The white water goosetailed with eddying swell.  
Faster and louder the current dropped  
Till it reached a cliff, and the trail stopped.

I stood at the edge where the mist ascended,  
My journey done where the world ended.  
I looked downstream. There was nothing but sky,  
The sound of the water, and the water's reply.

## **Insomnia**

By [Dana Gioia](#)

Now you hear what the house has to say.  
Pipes clanking, water running in the dark,  
the mortgaged walls shifting in discomfort,  
and voices mounting in an endless drone

of small complaints like the sounds of a family  
that year by year you've learned how to ignore.

But now you must listen to the things you own,  
all that you've worked for these past years,  
the murmur of property, of things in disrepair,  
the moving parts about to come undone,  
and twisting in the sheets remember all  
the faces you could not bring yourself to love.

How many voices have escaped you until now,  
the venting furnace, the floorboards underfoot,  
the steady accusations of the clock  
numbering the minutes no one will mark.  
The terrible clarity this moment brings,  
the useless insight, the unbroken dark.

## **Pity the Beautiful**

By [Dana Gioia](#)

Pity the beautiful,  
the dolls, and the dishes,  
the babes with big daddies  
granting their wishes.

Pity the pretty boys,  
the hunks, and Apollos,  
the golden lads whom  
success always follows.

The hotties, the knock-outs,  
the tens out of ten,  
the drop-dead gorgeous,  
the great leading men.

Pity the faded,  
the bloated, the blowsy,  
the paunchy Adonis  
whose luck's gone lousy.

Pity the gods,  
no longer divine.  
Pity the night  
the stars lose their shine.

# BLK History Month

By [Nikki Giovanni](#)

If Black History Month is not  
viable then wind does not  
carry the seeds and drop them  
on fertile ground  
rain does not  
dampen the land  
and encourage the seeds  
to root  
sun does not  
warm the earth  
and kiss the seedlings  
and tell them plain:  
You're As Good As Anybody Else  
You've Got A Place Here, Too

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: The title of this poem may be recited "BLK History Month" or "Black History Month." Either is acceptable and should not affect your accuracy score.*

# Mothers

By [Nikki Giovanni](#)

the last time i was home  
to see my mother we kissed  
exchanged pleasantries  
and unpleasantries pulled a warm  
comforting silence around  
us and read separate books

i remember the first time  
i consciously saw her  
we were living in a three room  
apartment on burns avenue

mommy always sat in the dark  
i don't know how i knew that but she did

that night i stumbled into the kitchen  
maybe because i've always been  
a night person or perhaps because i had wet  
the bed  
she was sitting on a chair  
the room was bathed in moonlight diffused through

those thousands of panes landlords who rented  
to people with children were prone to put in windows  
she may have been smoking but maybe not  
her hair was three-quarters her height  
which made me a strong believer in the samson myth  
and very black

i'm sure i just hung there by the door  
i remember thinking: what a beautiful lady

she was very deliberately waiting  
perhaps for my father to come home  
from his night job or maybe for a dream  
that had promised to come by  
“come here” she said “i’ll teach you  
a poem: *i see the moon*  
*the moon sees me*  
*god bless the moon*  
*and god bless me”*

i taught it to my son  
who recited it for her  
just to say we must learn  
to bear the pleasures  
as we have borne the pains

## **The Song of the Feet**

By [Nikki Giovanni](#)

It is appropriate that I sing  
The song of the feet

The weight of the body  
And what the body chooses to bear  
Fall on me

I trampled the American wilderness  
Forged frontier trails  
Outran the mob in Tulsa  
Got caught in Philadelphia

And am still unrepaired

I soldiered on in Korea  
Jungled through Vietman sweated out Desert Storm  
Caved my way through Afghanistan

Tunneled the World Trade Center

And on the worst day of my life  
Walked behind JFK  
Shouldered MLK  
Stood embracing Sister Betty

I wiggle my toes  
In the sands of time  
Trusting the touch that controls my motion  
Basking in the warmth of the embrace  
Day's end offers with warm salty water

It is appropriate I sing  
The praise of the feet

I am a Black woman

## **Consider the Hands that Write this Letter**

By [Aracelis Girmay](#)

*after Marina Wilson*

Consider the hands  
that write this letter.

Left palm pressed flat against paper,  
as we have done before, over my heart,

in peace or reverence to the sea,  
some beautiful thing

I saw once, felt once: snow falling  
like rice flung from the giants' wedding,

or strangest of strange birds. & consider, then,  
the right hand, & how it is a fist,

within which a sharpened utensil,  
similar to the way I've held a spade,

the horse's reins, loping, the very fists  
I've seen from roads through Limay & Estelí.

For years, I have come to sit this way:

one hand open, one hand closed,  
like a farmer who puts down seeds & gathers up;  
food will come from that farming.  
  
Or, yes, it is like the way I've danced  
with my left hand opened around a shoulder,  
  
my right hand closed inside  
of another hand. & how I pray,  
  
I pray for this to be my way: sweet  
work alluded to in the body's position to its paper:  
  
left hand, right hand  
like an open eye, an eye closed:  
  
one hand flat against the trapdoor,  
the other hand knocking, knocking.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Indian Summer

By [Diane Glancy](#)

There's a farm auction up the road.  
Wind has its bid in for the leaves.  
Already bugs flurry the headlights  
between cornfields at night.  
If this world were permanent,  
I could dance full as the squaw dress  
on the clothesline.  
I would not see winter  
in the square of white yard-light on the wall.  
But something tugs at me.  
The world is at a loss and I am part of it  
migrating daily.  
Everything is up for grabs  
like a box of farm tools broken open.  
I hear the spirits often in the garden  
and along the shore of corn.  
I know this place is not mine.  
I hear them up the road again.  
This world is a horizon, an open sea.

Behind the house, the white iceberg of the barn.

## Nocturne

By [Louise Glück](#)

Mother died last night,  
Mother who never dies.

Winter was in the air,  
many months away  
but in the air nevertheless.

It was the tenth of May.  
Hyacinth and apple blossom  
bloomed in the back garden.

We could hear  
Maria singing songs from Czechoslovakia —

*How alone I am —*  
songs of that kind.

*How alone I am,*  
*no mother, no father —*  
*my brain seems so empty without them.*

Aromas drifted out of the earth;  
the dishes were in the sink,  
rinsed but not stacked.

Under the full moon  
Maria was folding the washing;  
the stiff sheets became  
dry white rectangles of moonlight.

*How alone I am, but in music*  
*my desolation is my rejoicing.*

It was the tenth of May  
as it had been the ninth, the eighth.

Mother slept in her bed,  
her arms outstretched, her head  
balanced between them.

# Town of Frijoles

By [Ray Gonzalez](#)

*For Juan Felipe Herrera*

In the town of frijoles,  
men eat their meals without  
washing their hands, wanting  
to bless their mothers' food  
with soil from the fields.

In the town of frijoles,  
boys beat on hollow pots,  
the last wiping of their sides  
with a piece of tortilla as  
holy a moment as taking  
the wafer in church.

In the town of frijoles,  
women undress to keep  
their babies warm, stories  
whispered into bald heads  
revealed as poems decades  
later, when it is early.

In the town of frijoles,  
old men cry for their  
fathers and mothers,  
tombstone ranches dotting  
the night moon where  
the pinto aromas extend  
beyond the bowl of the sun.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## (to crave what the light does crave)

By [Kevin Goodan](#)

to crave what the light does crave  
to shelter, to flee  
to gain desire of every splayed leaf  
to calm cattle, to heat the mare  
to coax dead flies back from slumber  
to turn the gaze of each opened bud

to ripe the fruit to rot the fruit  
and drive down under the earth  
to lord gentle dust  
to lend a glancing grace to llamas  
to gather dampness from fields  
and divide birds  
and divide the ewes from slaughter  
and raise the corn and bend the wheat  
and drive tractors to ruin  
burnish the fox, brother the hawk  
shed the snake, bloom the weed  
and drive all wind diurnal  
to blanch the fire and clot the cloud  
to husk, to harvest,  
sheave and chaff  
to choose the bird  
and voice the bird  
to sing us, veery, into darkness

## More Lies

By [Karin Gottshall](#)

Sometimes I say I'm going to meet my sister at the café—  
even though I have no sister—just because it's such  
a beautiful thing to say. I've always thought so, ever since

I read a novel in which two sisters were constantly meeting  
in cafés. Today, for example, I walked alone  
on the wet sidewalk, wearing my rain boots, expecting

someone might ask where I was headed. I bought  
a steno pad and a watch battery, the store windows  
fogged up. Rain in April is a kind of promise, and it costs

nothing. I carried a bag of books to the café and ordered  
tea. I like a place that's lit by lamps. I like a place  
where you can hear people talk about small things,

like the difference between azure and cerulean,  
and the price of tulips. It's going down. I watched  
someone who could be my sister walk in, shaking the rain

from her hair. I thought, even now florists are filling  
their coolers with tulips, five dollars a bundle. All over  
the city there are sisters. Any one of them could be mine.

# Poem

By [Jorie Graham](#)

The earth said  
remember me.  
The earth said  
don't let go,

said it one day  
when I was  
accidentally  
listening, I

heard it, I felt it  
like temperature,  
all said in a  
whisper—build to-

morrow, make right be-  
fall, you are not  
free, other scenes  
are not taking

place, time is not filled,  
time is not late, there is  
a thing the emptiness  
needs as you need

emptiness, it  
shrinks from light again &  
again, although all things  
are present, a

fact a day a  
bird that warps the  
arithmetic of per-  
fection with its

arc, passing again &  
again in the evening  
air, in the pre-  
vailing wind, making no

mistake—yr in-  
difference is yr  
principal beauty

the mind says all the

time—I hear it—I  
hear it every-  
where. The earth  
said remember

me. I am the  
earth it said. Re-  
member me.

## The Kiss

By [Robert Graves](#)

Are you shaken, are you stirred  
By a whisper of love,  
Spellbound to a word  
Does Time cease to move,  
Till her calm grey eye  
Expands to a sky  
And the clouds of her hair  
Like storms go by?

Then the lips that you have kissed  
Turn to frost and fire,  
And a white-steaming mist  
Obscures desire:  
So back to their birth  
Fade water, air, earth,  
And the First Power moves  
Over void and dearth.

Is that Love? no, but Death,  
A passion, a shout,  
The deep in-breath,  
The breath roaring out,  
And once that is flown,  
You must lie alone,  
Without hope, without life,  
Poor flesh, sad bone.

# Vain and Careless

By [Robert Graves](#)

Lady, lovely lady,  
Careless and gay!  
Once when a beggar called  
She gave her child away.

The beggar took the baby,  
Wrapped it in a shawl,  
“Bring her back,” the lady said,  
“Next time you call.”

Hard by lived a vain man,  
So vain and so proud,  
He walked on stilts  
To be seen by the crowd.

Up above the chimney pots,  
Tall as a mast,  
And all the people ran about  
Shouting till he passed.

“A splendid match surely,”  
Neighbours saw it plain,  
“Although she is so careless,  
Although he is so vain.”

But the lady played bobcherry,  
Did not see or care,  
As the vain man went by her  
Aloft in the air.

This gentle-born couple  
Lived and died apart.  
Water will not mix with oil,  
Nor vain with careless heart.

# On the Death of Richard West

By [Thomas Gray](#)

In vain to me the smiling Mornings shine,  
And reddening Phœbus lifts his golden fire;  
The birds in vain their amorous descant join;  
Or cheerful fields resume their green attire;

These ears, alas! for other notes repine,  
A different object do these eyes require;  
My lonely anguish melts no heart but mine;  
And in my breast the imperfect joys expire.  
Yet Morning smiles the busy race to cheer,  
And new-born pleasure brings to happier men;  
The fields to all their wonted tribute bear;  
To warm their little loves the birds complain;  
I fruitless mourn to him that cannot hear,  
And weep the more because I weep in vain.

## For a Traveler

By [Jessica Greenbaum](#)

I only have a moment so let me tell you the shortest story,  
about arriving at a long loved place, the house of friends in Maine,  
their lawn of wildflowers, their grandfather clock and candid  
portraits, their gabled attic rooms, and woodstove in the kitchen,  
all accessories of the genuine summer years before, when I was  
their son's girlfriend and tied an apron behind my neck, beneath  
my braids, and took from their garden the harvest for a dinner  
I would make alone and serve at their big table with the gladness  
of the found, and loved. The eggplant shone like polished wood,  
the tomatoes smelled like their furred collars, the dozen zucchini  
lined up on the counter like placid troops with the onions, their  
minions, and I even remember the garlic, each clove from its airmail  
envelope brought to the cutting board, ready for my instruction.  
And in this very slight story, a decade later, I came by myself,  
having been dropped by the airport cab, and waited for the family  
to arrive home from work. I walked into the lawn, waist-high  
in the swaying, purple lupines, the subject of June's afternoon light  
as I had never been addressed — a displaced young woman with  
cropped hair, no place to which I wished to return, and no one  
to gather me in his arms. That day the lupines received me,  
and I was in love with them, because they were all I had left,  
and in that same manner I have loved much of the world since then,  
and who is to say there is more of a reason, or more to love?

## Ex Machina

By [Linda Gregerson](#)

When love was a question, the message arrived  
in the beak of a wire and plaster bird. The coloratura  
was hardly to be believed. For flight,

it took three stagehands: two  
on the pulleys and one on the flute. And you  
thought fancy rained like grace.

Our fog machine lost in the Parcel Post, we improvised  
with smoke. The heroine dies of tuberculosis after all.  
Remorse and the raw night air: any plausible tenor

might cough. The passions, I take my clues  
from an obvious source, may be less like climatic events  
than we conventionalize, though I've heard

of tornadoes that break the second-best glassware  
and leave everything else untouched.  
There's a finer conviction than seamlessness

elicits: the Greeks knew a god  
by the clanking behind his descent.  
The heart, poor pump, protests till you'd think

it's rusted past redemption, but  
there's tuning in these counterweights,  
celebration's assembled voice.

## The Lamb

By [Linda Gregg](#)

It was a picture I had after the war.  
A bombed English church. I was too young  
to know the word *English* or *war*,  
but I knew the picture.  
The ruined city still seemed noble.  
The cathedral with its roof blown off  
was not less godly. The church was the same  
plus rain and sky. Birds flew in and out  
of the holes God's fist made in the walls.  
All our desire for love or children  
is treated like rags by the enemy.  
I knew so much and sang anyway.  
Like a bird who will sing until  
it is brought down. When they take  
away the trees, the child picks up a stick  
and says, this is a tree, this the house  
and the family. As we might. Through a door

of what had been a house, into the field  
of rubble, walks a single lamb, tilting  
its head, curious, unafraid, hungry.

## Chorus Sacerdotum

By [Fulke Greville, Baron Brooke](#)

*from Mustapha*

O wearisome condition of humanity!  
Born under one law, to another bound;  
Vainly begot and yet forbidden vanity;  
Created sick, commanded to be sound.  
What meaneth nature by these diverse laws?  
Passion and reason, self-division cause.  
Is it the mark or majesty of power  
To make offenses that it may forgive?  
Nature herself doth her own self deflower  
To hate those errors she herself doth give.  
For how should man think that he may not do,  
If nature did not fail and punish, too?  
Tyrant to others, to herself unjust,  
Only commands things difficult and hard,  
Forbids us all things which it knows is lust,  
Makes easy pains, impossible reward.  
If nature did not take delight in blood,  
She would have made more easy ways to good.  
We that are bound by vows and by promotion,  
With pomp of holy sacrifice and rites,  
To teach belief in good and still devotion,  
To preach of heaven's wonders and delights;  
Yet when each of us in his own heart looks  
He finds the God there, far unlike his books.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## The Last Word

By [Nikki Grimes](#)

I am a door of metaphor  
waiting to be opened.  
You'll find no lock, no key.  
All are free to enter, at will.

Simply step over the threshold.  
Remember to dress for travel, though.  
Visitors have been known  
to get carried away.

## Stomp

By [Nikki Grimes](#)

I come home,  
feet about to bleed  
from angry stomping.  
“Boy!” says Mom.  
“Quit making all that racket.”  
But what does she expect  
when, day after day,  
haters sling words at me  
like jagged stones  
designed to split my skin?  
I retreat to my room,  
collapse on the bed,  
count, “One. Two. Three...”  
When I get to ten,  
I snatch up journal and pen,  
flip to a clean page,  
and unload my hurt, my rage  
’til I can breathe, again.  
Letter by letter,  
I rediscover  
my power to decide  
which words matter,  
which words don’t,  
and whose.  
Calm, now, I remember:  
I get to choose.

## Charles Sumner

By [Charlotte L. Forten Grimké](#)

*On seeing some pictures of the interior of his house, Washington, D.C.*

Only the casket left, the jewel gone  
Whose noble presence filled these stately rooms,  
And made this spot a shrine where pilgrims came—  
Stranger and friend—to bend in reverence

Before the great, pure soul that knew no guile;  
To listen to the wise and gracious words  
That fell from lips whose rare, exquisite smile  
Gave tender beauty to the grand, grave face.

Upon these pictured walls we see thy peers,—  
Poet, and saint, and sage, painter, and king,—  
A glorious band;—they shine upon us still;  
Still gleam in marble the enchanting forms  
Whereupon thy artist eye delighted dwelt;  
Thy favorite Psyche droops her matchless face,  
Listening, methinks, for the beloved voice  
Which nevermore on earth shall sound her praise.

All these remain,—the beautiful, the brave,  
The gifted, silent ones; but thou art gone!  
Fair is the world that smiles upon us now;  
Blue are the skies of June, balmy the air  
That soothes with touches soft the weary brow;  
And perfect days glide into perfect nights,—  
Moonlit and calm; but still our grateful hearts  
Are sad, and faint with fear,— for thou art gone!

Oh friend beloved, with longing, tear-filled eyes  
We look up, up to the unclouded blue,  
And seek in vain some answering sign from thee.  
Look down upon us, guide and cheer us still  
From the serene height where thou dwellest now;  
Dark is the way without the beacon light  
Which long and steadfastly thy hand upheld.  
Oh, nerve with courage new the stricken hearts  
Whose dearest hopes seem lost in losing thee.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Late Summer

By [Jennifer Grotz](#)

Before the moths have even appeared  
to orbit around them, the streetlamps come on,  
a long row of them glowing uselessly

along the ring of garden that circles the city center,  
where your steps count down the dulling of daylight.

At your feet, a bee crawls in small circles like a toy unwinding.

Summer specializes in time, slows it down almost to dream.  
And the noisy day goes so quiet you can hear  
the bedraggled man who visits each trash receptacle

mutter in disbelief: Everything in the world is being thrown away!  
Summer lingers, but it's about ending. It's about how things  
redden and ripen and burst and come down. It's when

city workers cut down trees, demolishing  
one limb at a time, spilling the crumbs  
of twigs and leaves all over the tablecloth of street.

Sunglasses! the man softly exclaims  
while beside him blooms a large gray rose of pigeons  
huddled around a dropped piece of bread.

## **In Exchange for My Absence**

By [Cynthia Guardado](#)

Abuelo holds the end of a broom halfway bent  
over the pila, tries to scrub clean places in the walls  
he can no longer reach. I climb into the water-basin,  
in the pila's dark corners hides an algae-eating fish,  
in order to begin I must catch it. With a bucket I make waves  
in shallow water, search for what is tucked away from sight.  
Abuelo says, Me siento solo. His days lonely, long  
like the movie marathons he watches on TV.  
The fish circles in a bowl; already, I know I won't visit  
again tomorrow, know I don't love him anymore—  
the magic of childhood gone like his clamorous  
laugh, murky like the chaparro he still drinks. Abuelo  
stares at the faucet. He tells me to guard the fish,  
says if it hears water running from the tap it will jump.  
Its gills will be defenseless on the empty basin's  
concrete floor, its fins will shudder in air.

## **Words**

By [Barbara Guest](#)

The simple contact with a wooden spoon and the word  
recovered itself, began to spread as grass, forced  
as it lay sprawling to consider the monument where

patience looked at grief, where warfare ceased  
eyes curled outside themes to search the paper  
now gleaming and potent, wise and resilient, word  
entered its continent eager to find another as  
capable as a thorn. The nearest possession would  
house them both, they being then two might glide  
into this house and presently create a rather larger  
mansion filled with spoons and condiments, gracious  
as a newly laid table where related objects might gather  
to enjoy the interplay of gravity upon facetious hints,  
the chocolate dish presuming an endowment, the ladle  
of galactic rhythm primed as a relish dish, curved  
knives, finger bowls, morsel carriages words might  
choose and savor before swallowing so much was the  
sumptuousness and substance of a rented house where words  
placed dressing gowns as rosemary entered their scent  
percipient as elder branches in the night where words  
gathered, warped, then straightened, marking new wands.

## Father

By [Edgar Albert Guest](#)

My father knows the proper way  
The nation should be run;  
He tells us children every day  
Just what should now be done.  
He knows the way to fix the trusts,  
He has a simple plan;  
But if the furnace needs repairs,  
We have to hire a man.

My father, in a day or two  
Could land big thieves in jail;  
There's nothing that he cannot do,  
He knows no word like "fail."  
"Our confidence" he would restore,  
Of that there is no doubt;  
But if there is a chair to mend,  
We have to send it out.

All public questions that arise,  
He settles on the spot;  
He waits not till the tumult dies,  
But grabs it while it's hot.  
In matters of finance he can

Tell Congress what to do;  
But, O, he finds it hard to meet  
His bills as they fall due.

It almost makes him sick to read  
The things law-makers say;  
Why, father's just the man they need,  
He never goes astray.  
All wars he'd very quickly end,  
As fast as I can write it;  
But when a neighbor starts a fuss,  
'Tis mother has to fight it.

In conversation father can  
Do many wondrous things;  
He's built upon a wiser plan  
Than presidents or kings.  
He knows the ins and outs of each  
And every deep transaction;  
We look to him for theories,  
But look to ma for action.

## **It Couldn't Be Done**

By [Edgar Albert Guest](#)

Somebody said that it couldn't be done  
But he with a chuckle replied  
That "maybe it couldn't," but he would be one  
Who wouldn't say so till he'd tried.  
So he buckled right in with the trace of a grin  
On his face. If he worried he hid it.  
He started to sing as he tackled the thing  
That couldn't be done, and he did it!

Somebody scoffed: "Oh, you'll never do that;  
At least no one ever has done it;"  
But he took off his coat and he took off his hat  
And the first thing we knew he'd begun it.  
With a lift of his chin and a bit of a grin,  
Without any doubting or quiddit,  
He started to sing as he tackled the thing  
That couldn't be done, and he did it.

There are thousands to tell you it cannot be done,  
There are thousands to prophesy failure,

There are thousands to point out to you one by one,  
The dangers that wait to assail you.  
But just buckle in with a bit of a grin,  
Just take off your coat and go to it;  
Just start in to sing as you tackle the thing  
That “cannot be done,” and you’ll do it.

## On Quitting

By [Edgar Albert Guest](#)

How much grit do you think you’ve got?  
Can you quit a thing that you like a lot?  
You may talk of pluck; it’s an easy word,  
And where’er you go it is often heard;  
But can you tell to a jot or guess  
Just how much courage you now possess?

You may stand to trouble and keep your grin,  
But have you tackled self-discipline?  
Have you ever issued commands to you  
To quit the things that you like to do,  
And then, when tempted and sorely swayed,  
Those rigid orders have you obeyed?

Don’t boast of your grit till you’ve tried it out,  
Nor prate to men of your courage stout,  
For it’s easy enough to retain a grin  
In the face of a fight there’s a chance to win,  
But the sort of grit that is good to own  
Is the stuff you need when you’re all alone.

How much grit do you think you’ve got?  
Can you turn from joys that you like a lot?  
Have you ever tested yourself to know  
How far with yourself your will can go?  
If you want to know if you have grit,  
Just pick out a joy that you like, and quit.

It’s bully sport and it’s open fight;  
It will keep you busy both day and night;  
For the toughest kind of a game you’ll find  
Is to make your body obey your mind.  
And you never will know what is meant by grit  
Unless there’s something you’ve tried to quit.

# Lullaby in Fracktown

By [Lilace Mellin Guignard](#)

Child, when you're sad put on your blue shoes.  
You know that Mama loves you lollipops  
and Daddy still has a job to lose.

So put on a party hat. We'll play the kazoos  
loud and louder from the mountaintop.  
Child, when you're sad put on your blue shoes

and dance the polka with pink kangaroos,  
dolphin choirs singing "flip-flop, flip-flop."  
Hey, Daddy still has a job to lose —

don't be afraid. Close your eyes, snooze,  
because today our suns have flared and dropped.  
Tomorrow when you wake, put on your blue shoes.

Eat a good breakfast. Be good in school.  
Good boys go to college goody gumdrops  
so someday too you'll have a job to lose.

Waste trucks clatter by as the gray bird coos.  
Flames pour forth when the faucet's unstopped.  
Child, when you're sad put on your blue shoes.  
For now, Daddy still has a job to lose.

# The Man with Night Sweats

By [Thom Gunn](#)

I wake up cold, I who  
Prospered through dreams of heat  
Wake to their residue,  
Sweat, and a clinging sheet.

My flesh was its own shield:  
Where it was gashed, it healed.

I grew as I explored  
The body I could trust  
Even while I adored  
The risk that made robust,

A world of wonders in

Each challenge to the skin.

I cannot but be sorry  
The given shield was cracked,  
My mind reduced to hurry,  
My flesh reduced and wrecked.

I have to change the bed,  
But catch myself instead

Stopped upright where I am  
Hugging my body to me  
As if to shield it from  
The pains that will go through me,

As if hands were enough  
To hold an avalanche off.

## **Tamer and Hawk**

By [Thom Gunn](#)

I thought I was so tough,  
But gentled at your hands,  
Cannot be quick enough  
To fly for you and show  
That when I go I go  
At your commands.

Even in flight above  
I am no longer free:  
You seeled me with your love,  
I am blind to other birds—  
The habit of your words  
Has hooded me.

As formerly, I wheel  
I hover and I twist,  
But only want the feel,  
In my possessive thought,  
Of catcher and of caught  
Upon your wrist.

You but half civilize,  
Taming me in this way.  
Through having only eyes

For you I fear to lose,  
I lose to keep, and choose  
Tamer as prey.

## Pineapple

By [Ishwar Gupta](#)

Translated by: Arvind Krishna Mehrotra and Rosinka Chaudhuri

Such is their greed that no part is thrown away.  
Not crown, not base, not even the eyes  
gouged out from the rind by the eye-eaters.  
But why do I speak ill of them? I'm no better.  
When I throw away the rind my eyes fill with tears.  
I don't want to be called Eye-eater by others.

Add a dash of salt, a squeeze of lime,  
a spoon of sugar as divine as Chaitanya.  
Eat it bit by bit, let the mouth fill with juice,  
and watch the child Krishna dance and drool.

## God's Secretary

By [R. S. Gwynn](#)

Her e-mail inbox always overflows.  
Her outbox doesn't get much use at all.  
She puts on hold the umpteen-billionth call  
As music oozes forth to placate those  
Who wait, then disconnect. Outside, wind blows,  
Scything pale leaves. She sees a sparrow fall  
Fluttering to a claw-catch on a wall.  
Will He be in today? God only knows.

She hasn't seen His face—He's so aloof.  
She's long resigned He'll never know or love her  
But still can wish there were some call, some proof  
That He requires a greater service of her.  
Fingers of rain now drum upon the roof,  
Coming from somewhere, somewhere far above her.

## Little Girl

By [Tami Haaland](#)

She's with Grandma in front

of Grandma's house, backed  
by a willow tree, gladiola and roses.

Who did she ever want  
to please? But Grandma  
seems half-pleased and annoyed.

No doubt Mother frowns  
behind the lens, wants  
to straighten this sassy face.

Maybe laughs, too.  
Little girl with her mouth wide,  
tongue out, yelling

at the camera. See her little  
white purse full of treasure,  
her white sandals?

She has things to do,  
you can tell. Places to explore  
beyond the frame,

and these women picking flowers  
and taking pictures.  
Why won't they let her go?

## **Crepuscle with Muriel**

By [Marilyn Hacker](#)

Instead of a cup of tea, instead of a milk-  
silk whelk of a cup, of a cup of nearly six  
o'clock teatime, cup of a stumbling block,  
cup of an afternoon unredeemed by talk,  
cup of a cut brown loaf, of a slice, a lack  
of butter, blueberry jam that's almost black,  
instead of tannin seeping into the cracks  
of a pot, the void of an hour seeps out, infects  
the slit of a cut I haven't the wit to fix  
with a surgeon's needle threaded with fine-gauge silk  
as a key would thread the cylinder of a lock.  
But no key threads the cylinder of a lock.  
Late afternoon light, transitory, licks  
the place of the absent cup with its rough tongue, flicks  
itself out beneath the wheel's revolving spoke.

Taut thought's gone, with a blink of attention, slack,  
a vision of "death and distance in the mix"  
(she lost her words and how did she get them back  
when the corridor of a day was a lurching deck?  
The dream-life logic encodes in nervous tics  
she translated to a syntax which connects  
intense and unfashionable politics  
with morning coffee, Hudson sunsets, sex;  
then the short-circuit of the final stroke,  
the end toward which all lines looped out, then broke).  
What a gaze out the window interjects:  
on the southeast corner, a black Lab balks,  
tugged as the light clicks green toward a late-day walk  
by a plump brown girl in a purple anorak.  
The Bronx-bound local comes rumbling up the tracks  
out of the tunnel, over west Harlem blocks  
whose windows gleam on the animal warmth of bricks  
rouged by the fluvial light of six o'clock.

## Ice Child

By [John Haines](#)

Cold for so long, unable to speak,  
yet your mouth seems framed  
on a cry, or a stifled question.

Who placed you here, and left you  
to this lonely eternity of ash and ice,  
and himself returned to the dust  
fields, the church and the temple?

Was it God—the sun-god of the Incas,  
the imperial god of the Spaniards?  
Or only the priests of that god,  
self-elected—voice of the volcano  
that speaks once in a hundred years.

And I wonder, with your image before me,  
what life might you have lived,  
had you lived at all—whose companion,  
whose love? To be perhaps no more  
than a slave of that earthly master:

a jug of water on your shoulder,  
year after stunted year, a bundle

of reeds and corn, kindling  
for a fire on whose buried hearth?

There were furies to be fed, then  
as now: blood to fatten the sun,  
a heart for the lightning to strike.

And now the furies walk the streets,  
a swarm in the milling crowd.  
They stand to the podium, speak  
of their coming ascension ...

Through all this drift and clamor  
you have survived—in this cramped  
and haunted effigy, another entry  
on the historian's dated page.

Under the weight of this mountain—  
once a god, now only restless stone,  
we find your interrupted life,  
placed here among the trilobites  
and shells, so late unearthed.

## **The Sweater of Vladimir Ussachevsky**

By [John Haines](#)

Facing the wind of the avenues  
one spring evening in New York,  
I wore under my thin jacket  
a sweater given me by the wife  
of a genial Manchurian.

The warmth in that sweater changed  
the indifferent city block by block.  
The buildings were mountains  
that fled as I approached them.

The traffic became sheep and cattle  
milling in muddy pastures.  
I could feel around me the large  
movements of men and horses.

It was spring in Siberia or Mongolia,  
wherever I happened to be.  
Rough but honest voices called to me

out of that solitude:  
they told me we are all tired  
of this coiling weight,  
the oppression of a long winter;  
that it was time to renew our life,  
burn the expired contracts,  
elect new governments.

The old Imperial sun has set,  
and I must write a poem to the Emperor.  
I shall speak it like the man  
I should be, an inhabitant of the frontier,  
clad in sweat-darkened wool,  
my face stained by wind and smoke.

Surely the Emperor and his court  
will want to know what a fine  
and generous revolution begins tomorrow  
in one of his remote provinces...

(1967)

## **Ox Cart Man**

By [Donald Hall](#)

In October of the year,  
he counts potatoes dug from the brown field,  
counting the seed, counting  
the cellar's portion out,  
and bags the rest on the cart's floor.

He packs wool sheared in April, honey  
in combs, linen, leather  
tanned from deerhide,  
and vinegar in a barrel  
hooped by hand at the forge's fire.

He walks by his ox's head, ten days  
to Portsmouth Market, and sells potatoes,  
and the bag that carried potatoes,  
flaxseed, birch brooms, maple sugar, goose  
feathers, yarn.

When the cart is empty he sells the cart.  
When the cart is sold he sells the ox,

harness and yoke, and walks  
home, his pockets heavy  
with the year's coin for salt and taxes,

and at home by fire's light in November cold  
stitches new harness  
for next year's ox in the barn,  
and carves the yoke, and saws planks  
building the cart again.

## Wide Receiver

By [Mark Halliday](#)

In the huddle you said "Go long—get open"  
and at the snap I took off along the right sideline  
and then cut across left in a long arc  
and I'm sure I was open at several points—  
glancing back I saw you pump-fake more than once  
but you must not have been satisfied with what you saw downfield  
and then I got bumped off course and my hands touched the turf  
but I regained my balance and dashed back to the right  
I think or maybe first left and then right  
and I definitely got open but the throw never came—

maybe you thought I couldn't hang on to a ball flung so far  
or maybe you actually can't throw so far  
but in any case I feel quite open now,  
the defenders don't seem too interested in me  
I sense only open air all around me  
though the air is getting darker and it would appear  
by now we're well into the fourth quarter  
and I strongly doubt we can afford to settle for  
dinky little first downs if the score is what I think it is

so come on, star boy, fling a Hail Mary  
with a dream-coached combination of muscle and faith  
and I will gauge the arc and I will not be stupidly frantic  
and I will time my jump and—I'm just going to say  
in the cool gloaming of this weirdly long game  
it is not impossible that I will make the catch.

## Love Letter

By [Nathalie Handal](#)

I'd like to be a shrine, so I can learn from peoples' prayers the story of hearts. I'd like to be a scarf so I can place it over my hair and understand other worlds. I'd like to be the voice of a soprano singer so I can move through all borders and see them vanish with every spell-binding note. I'd like to be light so I illuminate the dark. I'd like to be water to fill bodies so we can gently float together indefinitely. I'd like to be a lemon, to be zest all the time, or an olive tree to shimmer silver on the earth. Most of all, I'd like to be a poem, to reach your heart and stay.

## On An Unsociable Family

By [Elizabeth Hands](#)

O what a strange parcel of creatures are we,  
Scarce ever to quarrel, or even agree;  
We all are alone, though at home altogether,  
Except to the fire constrained by the weather;  
Then one says, 'Tis cold', which we all of us know,  
And with unanimity answer, 'Tis so':  
With shrugs and with shivers all look at the fire,  
And shuffle ourselves and our chairs a bit nigher;  
Then quickly, preceded by silence profound,  
A yawn epidemical catches around:  
Like social companions we never fall out,  
Nor ever care what one another's about;  
To comfort each other is never our plan,  
For to please ourselves, truly, is more than we can.

## August 12 in the Nebraska Sand Hills Watching the Perseids Meteor Shower

By [Twyla Hansen](#)

In the middle of rolling grasslands, away from lights,  
a moonless night untethers its wild polka-dots,  
the formations we can name competing for attention  
in a twinkling and crowded sky-bowl.

Out from the corners, our eyes detect a maverick meteor,  
a transient streak, and lying back toward midnight  
on the heft of car hood, all conversation blunted,  
we are at once unnerved and somehow restored.

Out here, a furrow of spring-fed river threads  
through ranches in the tens of thousands of acres.  
Like cattle, we are powerless, by instinct can see  
why early people trembled and deliberated the heavens.

Off in the distance those cattle make themselves known,  
a bird song moves singular across the horizon.  
Not yet 2:00, and bits of comet dust, the Perseids,  
startle and skim the atmosphere like skipping stones.

In the leaden dark, we are utterly alone. As I rub the ridges  
on the back of your hand, our love for all things warm  
and pulsing crescendos toward dawn: this timeless awe,  
your breath floating with mine upward into the stars.

## Channel Firing

By [Thomas Hardy](#)

That night your great guns, unawares,  
Shook all our coffins as we lay,  
And broke the chancel window-squares,  
We thought it was the Judgment-day

And sat upright. While drearishome  
Arose the howl of wakened hounds:  
The mouse let fall the altar-crumbs,  
The worms drew back into the mounds,

The glebe cow drooled. Till God called, "No;  
It's gunnery practice out at sea  
Just as before you went below;  
The world is as it used to be:

"All nations striving strong to make  
Red war yet redder. Mad as hatters  
They do no more for Christ's sake  
Than you who are helpless in such matters.

"That this is not the judgment-hour  
For some of them's a blessed thing,  
For if it were they'd have to scour  
Hell's floor for so much threatening....

"Ha, ha. It will be warmer when  
I blow the trumpet (if indeed

I ever do; for you are men,  
And rest eternal sorely need).”

So down we lay again. “I wonder,  
Will the world ever saner be,”  
Said one, “than when He sent us under  
In our indifferent century!”

And many a skeleton shook his head.  
“Instead of preaching forty year,”  
My neighbour Parson Thirdly said,  
“I wish I had stuck to pipes and beer.”

Again the guns disturbed the hour,  
Roaring their readiness to avenge,  
As far inland as Stourton Tower,  
And Camelot, and starlit Stonehenge.

## **The Convergence of the Twain**

By [Thomas Hardy](#)

*(Lines on the loss of the "Titanic")*

I  
    In a solitude of the sea  
    Deep from human vanity,  
And the Pride of Life that planned her, stilly couches she.

II  
    Steel chambers, late the pyres  
    Of her salamandrine fires,  
Cold currents thrid, and turn to rhythmic tidal lyres.

III  
    Over the mirrors meant  
    To glass the opulent  
The sea-worm crawls — grotesque, slimed, dumb, indifferent.

IV  
    Jewels in joy designed  
    To ravish the sensuous mind  
Lie lightless, all their sparkles bleared and black and blind.

V  
    Dim moon-eyed fishes near

Gaze at the gilded gear  
And query: "What does this vaingloriousness down here?" ...

VI

Well: while was fashioning  
This creature of cleaving wing,  
The Immanent Will that stirs and urges everything

VII

Prepared a sinister mate  
For her — so gaily great —  
A Shape of Ice, for the time far and dissociate.

VIII

And as the smart ship grew  
In stature, grace, and hue,  
In shadowy silent distance grew the Iceberg too.

IX

Alien they seemed to be;  
No mortal eye could see  
The intimate welding of their later history,

X

Or sign that they were bent  
By paths coincident  
On being anon twin halves of one august event,

XI

Till the Spinner of the Years  
Said "Now!" And each one hears,  
And consummation comes, and jars two hemispheres.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## The Darkling Thrush

By [Thomas Hardy](#)

I leant upon a coppice gate  
When Frost was spectre-grey,  
And Winter's dregs made desolate  
The weakening eye of day.  
The tangled bine-stems scored the sky  
Like strings of broken lyres,

And all mankind that haunted nigh  
Had sought their household fires.

The land's sharp features seemed to be  
The Century's corpse outleant,  
His crypt the cloudy canopy,  
The wind his death-lament.  
The ancient pulse of germ and birth  
Was shrunken hard and dry,  
And every spirit upon earth  
Seemed fervourless as I.

At once a voice arose among  
The bleak twigs overhead  
In a full-hearted evensong  
Of joy illimited;  
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,  
In blast-beruffled plume,  
Had chosen thus to fling his soul  
Upon the growing gloom.

So little cause for carolings  
Of such ecstatic sound  
Was written on terrestrial things  
Afar or nigh around,  
That I could think there trembled through  
His happy good-night air  
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew  
And I was unaware.

## Hap

By [Thomas Hardy](#)

If but some vengeful god would call to me  
From up the sky, and laugh: "Thou suffering thing,  
Know that thy sorrow is my ecstasy,  
That thy love's loss is my hate's profiting!"

Then would I bear it, clench myself, and die,  
Steeled by the sense of ire unmerited;  
Half-eased in that a Powerfuller than I  
Had willed and meted me the tears I shed.

But not so. How arrives it joy lies slain,  
And why unblooms the best hope ever sown?

—Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain,  
And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan. . . .  
These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown  
Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain.

## The Last Performance

By [Thomas Hardy](#)

“I am playing my oldest tunes,” declared she,  
“All the old tunes I know,—  
Those I learnt ever so long ago.”  
—Why she should think just then she’d play them  
Silence cloaks like snow.

When I returned from the town at nightfall  
Notes continued to pour  
As when I had left two hours before:  
“It’s the very last time,” she said in closing;  
“From now I play no more.”

A few morns onward found her fading,  
And, as her life outflow,  
I thought of her playing her tunes right through;  
And I felt she had known of what was coming,  
And wondered how she knew.

## The Man He Killed

By [Thomas Hardy](#)

"Had he and I but met  
By some old ancient inn,  
We should have sat us down to wet  
Right many a nipperkin!

"But ranged as infantry,  
And staring face to face,  
I shot at him as he at me,  
And killed him in his place.

"I shot him dead because —  
Because he was my foe,  
Just so: my foe of course he was;  
That's clear enough; although

"He thought he'd 'list, perhaps,  
Off-hand like — just as I —  
Was out of work — had sold his traps —  
No other reason why.

"Yes; quaint and curious war is!  
You shoot a fellow down  
You'd treat if met where any bar is,  
Or help to half-a-crown."

## **Don't Bother the Earth Spirit**

By [Joy Harjo](#)

Don't bother the earth spirit who lives here. She is working on a story. It is the oldest story in the world and it is delicate, changing. If she sees you watching she will invite you in for coffee, give you warm bread, and you will be obligated to stay and listen. But this is no ordinary story. You will have to endure earthquakes, lightning, the deaths of all those you love, the most blinding beauty. It's a story so compelling you may never want to leave; this is how she traps you. See that stone finger over there? That is the only one who ever escaped.

## **Eagle Poem**

By [Joy Harjo](#)

To pray you open your whole self  
To sky, to earth, to sun, to moon  
To one whole voice that is you.  
And know there is more  
That you can't see, can't hear;  
Can't know except in moments  
Steadily growing, and in languages  
That aren't always sound but other  
Circles of motion.  
Like eagle that Sunday morning  
Over Salt River. Circled in blue sky  
In wind, swept our hearts clean  
With sacred wings.  
We see you, see ourselves and know  
That we must take the utmost care  
And kindness in all things.  
Breathe in, knowing we are made of  
All this, and breathe, knowing  
We are truly blessed because we  
Were born, and die soon within a

True circle of motion,  
Like eagle rounding out the morning  
Inside us.  
We pray that it will be done  
In beauty.  
In beauty.

## Once the World Was Perfect

By [Joy Harjo](#)

Once the world was perfect, and we were happy in that world.  
Then we took it for granted.  
Discontent began a small rumble in the earthly mind.  
Then Doubt pushed through with its spiked head.  
And once Doubt ruptured the web,  
All manner of demon thoughts  
Jumped through—  
We destroyed the world we had been given  
For inspiration, for life—  
Each stone of jealousy, each stone  
Of fear, greed, envy, and hatred, put out the light.  
No one was without a stone in his or her hand.  
There we were,  
Right back where we had started.  
We were bumping into each other  
In the dark.  
And now we had no place to live, since we didn't know  
How to live with each other.  
Then one of the stumbling ones took pity on another  
And shared a blanket.  
A spark of kindness made a light.  
The light made an opening in the darkness.  
Everyone worked together to make a ladder.  
A Wind Clan person climbed out first into the next world,  
And then the other clans, the children of those clans, their children,  
And their children, all the way through time—  
To now, into this morning light to you.

## Perhaps the World Ends Here

By [Joy Harjo](#)

The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, we must eat to live.

The gifts of earth are brought and prepared, set on the table. So it has been since creation, and it will go on.

We chase chickens or dogs away from it. Babies teethe at the corners. They scrape their knees under it.

It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be human. We make men at it, we make women.

At this table we gossip, recall enemies and the ghosts of lovers.

Our dreams drink coffee with us as they put their arms around our children. They laugh with us at our poor falling-down selves and as we put ourselves back together once again at the table.

This table has been a house in the rain, an umbrella in the sun.

Wars have begun and ended at this table. It is a place to hide in the shadow of terror. A place to celebrate the terrible victory.

We have given birth on this table, and have prepared our parents for burial here.

At this table we sing with joy, with sorrow. We pray of suffering and remorse. We give thanks.

Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing and crying, eating of the last sweet bite.

## Let the Light Enter

By [Frances Ellen Watkins Harper](#)

*The Dying Words of Goethe*

“Light! more light! the shadows deepen,  
And my life is ebbing low,  
Throw the windows widely open:  
Light! more light! before I go.

“Softly let the balmy sunshine  
Play around my dying bed,  
E’er the dimly lighted valley  
I with lonely feet must tread.

“Light! more light! for Death is weaving  
Shadows ‘round my waning sight,

And I fain would gaze upon him  
Through a stream of earthly light.”

Not for greater gifts of genius;  
Not for thoughts more grandly bright,  
All the dying poet whispers  
Is a prayer for light, more light.

Heeds he not the gathered laurels,  
Fading slowly from his sight;  
All the poet’s aspirations  
Centre in that prayer for light.

Gracious Saviour, when life’s day-dreams  
Melt and vanish from the sight,  
May our dim and longing vision  
Then be blessed with light, more light.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Learning to Read

By [Frances Ellen Watkins Harper](#)

Very soon the Yankee teachers  
Came down and set up school;  
But, oh! how the Rebs did hate it,—  
It was agin’ their rule.

Our masters always tried to hide  
Book learning from our eyes;  
Knowledge did’nt agree with slavery—  
’Twould make us all too wise.

But some of us would try to steal  
A little from the book.  
And put the words together,  
And learn by hook or crook.

I remember Uncle Caldwell,  
Who took pot liquor fat  
And greased the pages of his book,  
And hid it in his hat.

And had his master ever seen

The leaves upon his head,  
He'd have thought them greasy papers,  
But nothing to be read.

And there was Mr. Turner's Ben,  
Who heard the children spell,  
And picked the words right up by heart,  
And learned to read 'em well.

Well, the Northern folks kept sending  
The Yankee teachers down;  
And they stood right up and helped us,  
Though Rebs did sneer and frown.

And I longed to read my Bible,  
For precious words it said;  
But when I begun to learn it,  
Folks just shook their heads,

And said there is no use trying,  
Oh! Chloe, you're too late;  
But as I was rising sixty,  
I had no time to wait.

So I got a pair of glasses,  
And straight to work I went,  
And never stopped till I could read  
The hymns and Testament.

Then I got a little cabin  
A place to call my own—  
And I felt independent  
As the queen upon her throne.

## **Song for the People**

By [Frances Ellen Watkins Harper](#)

Let me make the songs for the people,  
Songs for the old and young;  
Songs to stir like a battle-cry  
Wherever they are sung.

Not for the clashing of sabres,  
For carnage nor for strife;  
But songs to thrill the hearts of men

With more abundant life.

Let me make the songs for the weary,  
Amid life's fever and fret,  
Till hearts shall relax their tension,  
And careworn brows forget.

Let me sing for little children,  
Before their footsteps stray,  
Sweet anthems of love and duty,  
To float o'er life's highway.

I would sing for the poor and aged,  
When shadows dim their sight;  
Of the bright and restful mansions,  
Where there shall be no night.

Our world, so worn and weary,  
Needs music, pure and strong,  
To hush the jangle and discords  
Of sorrow, pain, and wrong.

Music to soothe all its sorrow,  
Till war and crime shall cease;  
And the hearts of men grown tender  
Girdle the world with peace.

## Grandfather

By [Michael S. Harper](#)

In 1915 my grandfather's  
neighbors surrounded his house  
near the dayline he ran  
on the Hudson  
in Catskill, NY  
and thought they'd burn  
his family out  
in a movie they'd just seen  
and be rid of his kind:  
the death of a lone black  
family is *the Birth*  
*of a Nation*,  
or so they thought.  
His 5'4" waiter gait  
quenched the white jacket smile

he'd brought back from watered  
polish of my father  
on the turning seats,  
and he asked his neighbors  
up on his thatched porch  
for the first blossom of fire  
that would bring him down.  
They went away, his nation,  
spittooning their torched necks  
in the shadows of the riverboat  
they'd seen, posse decomposing;  
and I see him on Sutter  
with white bag from your  
restaurant, challenged by his first  
grandson to a foot-race  
he will win in white clothes.

I see him as he buys galoshes  
for his railed yard near Mineo's  
metal shop, where roses jump  
as the el circles his house  
toward Brooklyn, where his rain fell;  
and I see cigar smoke in his eyes,  
chocolate Madison Square Garden chews  
he breaks on his set teeth,  
stitched up after cancer,  
the great white nation immovable  
as his weight wilts  
and he is on a porch  
that won't hold my arms,  
or the legs of the race run  
forwards, or the film  
played backwards on his grandson's eyes.

## Here Where Coltrane Is

By [Michael S. Harper](#)

Soul and race  
are private dominions,  
memories and modal  
songs, a tenor blossoming,  
which would paint suffering  
a clear color but is not in  
this Victorian house  
without oil in zero degree

weather and a forty-mile-an-hour wind;  
it is all a well-knit family:  
*a love supreme.*

Oak leaves pile up on walkway  
and steps, catholic as apples  
in a special mist of clear white  
children who love my children.  
I play “Alabama”  
on a warped record player  
skipping the scratches  
on your faces over the fibrous  
conical hairs of plastic  
under the wooden floors.

Dreaming on a train from New York  
to Philly, you hand out six  
notes which become an anthem  
to our memories of you:  
oak, birch, maple,  
apple, cocoa, rubber.  
For this reason Martin is dead;  
for this reason Malcolm is dead;  
for this reason Coltrane is dead;  
in the eyes of my first son are the browns  
of these men and their music.

## **Makin’ Jump Shots**

By [Michael S. Harper](#)

He waltzes into the lane  
'cross the free-throw line,  
fakes a drive, pivots,  
floats from the asphalt turf  
in an arc of black light,  
and sinks two into the chains.

One on one he fakes  
down the main, passes  
into the free lane  
and hits the chains.

A sniff in the fallen air—  
he stuffs it through the chains  
riding high:  
“traveling” someone calls—

and he laughs, stepping  
to a silent beat, gliding  
as he sinks two into the chains.

## Wind Shear

By [Janice N. Harrington](#)

Under the magnolia, a winter-starved hare stills  
and pretends it is not there,

and wanting less of fearfulness  
I pretend that I do not see my camouflage, the wild promises  
in my gaze, and step carefully by.

Morning, bitter morning—  
lack and awful patience wait at every compass point.  
Mourning, mournful, the prairie seals wind-scored stems with snow.

Here inside a stalk of goldenrod  
a gall wasp will ride hard winter out.

Here between my ribs, wasps of lonely, wasps of  
not yet, not yet wait and ride hard winter out.

Such a slow season, laggard and mean.  
I can't explain the cardinals I've seen of late,

but the crows' black fists, the way they bully  
eave and air, stab the morning with the sharpest awe,

I understand it now. I see the reason and agree.

## gravity furnace

By [francine j. harris](#)

She wants to set the house on fire,  
gas in both hands, gas on the wall.

*It'd be like the sea torched from its floor.* She'd run like light

from basement windows. or maybe  
suck all arms to room ablaze, so housed

in gut piping. the copper hollowed, reaching to a

heated black rot at bottom. Like ants; maybe she crawl in the dark.

low on the belly maybe she thug out late, lay low  
and ink eight walls. lay low like cold, she might

strip bare, black glass. sometimes strut, sometimes  
hide late. she runs from house to ember,

a sum of sink. She breathes through flame  
a room of spoons. one

bar brick, one black-eyed room splatter, one torch  
spent for each arm, from coal to alley, she heaves

hue of concrete into each limb. A house of blue-ring flames  
to mimic; someone better run.

## **The Emerald Mosque on the Hill**

By [Raza Ali Hasan](#)

In the lull, the afternoon sun warms  
the linseed field. The flowers are quiet,

their bright subdued in the green  
while the mind wanders

to the emerald mosque upon the hill,  
built around a flowing spring,

the easy absolutions and ablutions  
in that mosque where the spring water

has been let loose to meander  
over marble courtyards and inner chambers,

across the geometric, green-tiled floor that  
cools the heels of the faithful.

## **After the Gentle Poet Kobayashi Issa**

By [Robert Hass](#)

New Year's morning—  
everything is in blossom!  
I feel about average.

A huge frog and I  
staring at each other,  
neither of us moves.

This moth saw brightness  
in a woman's chamber—  
burned to a crisp.

Asked how old he was  
the boy in the new kimono  
stretched out all five fingers.

Blossoms at night,  
like people  
moved by music

Napped half the day;  
no one  
punished me!

Fiftieth birthday:

From now on,  
It's all clear profit,  
every sky.

Don't worry, spiders,  
I keep house  
casually.

These sea slugs,  
they just don't seem  
*Japanese*.

Hell:

Bright autumn moon;  
pond snails crying  
in the saucepan.

## **Meditations at Lagunitas**

By [Robert Hass](#)

All the new thinking is about loss.

In this it resembles all the old thinking.  
The idea, for example, that each particular erases  
the luminous clarity of a general idea. That the clown-  
faced woodpecker probing the dead sculpted trunk  
of that black birch is, by his presence,  
some tragic falling off from a first world  
of undivided light. Or the other notion that,  
because there is in this world no one thing  
to which the bramble of *blackberry* corresponds,  
a word is elegy to what it signifies.  
We talked about it late last night and in the voice  
of my friend, there was a thin wire of grief, a tone  
almost querulous. After a while I understood that,  
talking this way, everything dissolves: *justice*,  
*pine*, *hair*, *woman*, *you* and *I*. There was a woman  
I made love to and I remembered how, holding  
her small shoulders in my hands sometimes,  
I felt a violent wonder at her presence  
like a thirst for salt, for my childhood river  
with its island willows, silly music from the pleasure boat,  
muddy places where we caught the little orange-silver fish  
called *pumpkinseed*. It hardly had to do with her.  
Longing, we say, because desire is full  
of endless distances. I must have been the same to her.  
But I remember so much, the way her hands dismantled bread,  
the thing her father said that hurt her, what  
she dreamed. There are moments when the body is as numinous  
as words, days that are the good flesh continuing.  
Such tenderness, those afternoons and evenings,  
saying *blackberry*, *blackberry*, *blackberry*.

## The Ocean

By [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#)

The Ocean has its silent caves,  
Deep, quiet, and alone;  
Though there be fury on the waves,  
Beneath them there is none.

The awful spirits of the deep  
Hold their communion there;  
And there are those for whom we weep,  
The young, the bright, the fair.

Calmly the wearied seamen rest

Beneath their own blue sea.  
The ocean solitudes are blest,  
For there is purity.

The earth has guilt, the earth has care,  
Unquiet are its graves;  
But peaceful sleep is ever there,  
Beneath the dark blue waves.

## **“Oh could I raise the darken’d veil”**

By [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#)

Oh could I raise the darken’d veil,  
Which hides my future life from me,  
Could unborn ages slowly sail,  
Before my view—and could I see  
My every action painted there,  
To cast one look I would not dare.  
There poverty and grief might stand,  
And dark Despair’s corroding hand,  
Would make me seek the lonely tomb  
To slumber in its endless gloom.  
Then let me never cast a look,  
Within Fate’s fix’d mysterious book.

## **Flying Lesson**

By [Dolores Hayden](#)

Focus on the shapes. *Cirrus*, a curl,  
*stratus*, a layer, *cumulus*, a heap.

*Humilis*, a small cloud,  
*cumulus humilis*, a fine day to fly.

*Incus*, the anvil, stay grounded.  
*Nimbus*, rain, be careful,

don’t take off near *nimbostratus*,  
a shapeless layer

of rain, hail, ice, or snow.  
Ice weighs on the blades of your propeller,

weighs on the entering edge of your wings.

Read a cloud,  
  
decode it,  
a dense, chilly mass  
  
can shift, flood with light.  
Watch for clouds closing under you,  
  
the sky opens in a breath,  
shuts in a heartbeat.

## Frederick Douglass

By [Robert Hayden](#)

When it is finally ours, this freedom, this liberty, this beautiful  
and terrible thing, needful to man as air,  
usable as earth; when it belongs at last to all,  
when it is truly instinct, brain matter, diastole, systole,  
reflex action; when it is finally won; when it is more  
than the gaudy mumbo jumbo of politicians:  
this man, this Douglass, this former slave, this Negro  
beaten to his knees, exiled, visioning a world  
where none is lonely, none hunted, alien,  
this man, superb in love and logic, this man  
shall be remembered. Oh, not with statues' rhetoric,  
not with legends and poems and wreaths of bronze alone,  
but with the lives grown out of his life, the lives  
fleshing his dream of the beautiful, needful thing.

## Those Winter Sundays

By [Robert Hayden](#)

Sundays too my father got up early  
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,  
then with cracked hands that ached  
from labor in the weekday weather made  
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.  
  
I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.  
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,  
and slowly I would rise and dress,  
fearing the chronic angers of that house,  
  
Speaking indifferently to him,

who had driven out the cold  
and polished my good shoes as well.  
What did I know, what did I know  
of love's austere and lonely offices?

## **American Sonnet for My Past and Future Assassin ["Inside me is a black-eyed animal"]**

By [Terrance Hayes](#)

Inside me is a black-eyed animal  
Bracing in a small stall. As if a bird  
Could grow without breaking its shell.  
As if the clatter of a thousand black  
Birds whipping in a storm could be held  
In a shell. Inside me is a huge black  
Bull balled small enough to fit inside  
The bead of a nipple ring. I mean to leave  
A record of my raptures. I was raised  
By a beautiful man. I loved his grasp of time.  
My mother shaped my grasp of space.  
Would you rather spend the rest of eternity  
With your wild wings bewildering a cage or  
With your four good feet stuck in a plot of dirt?

## **The Golden Shovel**

By [Terrance Hayes](#)

*after Gwendolyn Brooks*

I. 1981

When I am so small Da's sock covers my arm, we  
cruise at twilight until we find the place the real

men lean, bloodshot and translucent with cool.  
His smile is a gold-plated incantation as we

drift by women on bar stools, with nothing left  
in them but approachlessness. This is a school

I do not know yet. But the cue sticks mean we  
are rubbed by light, smooth as wood, the lurk

of smoke thinned to song. We won't be out late.

Standing in the middle of the street last night we

watched the moonlit lawns and a neighbor strike  
his son in the face. A shadow knocked straight

Da promised to leave me everything: the shovel we  
used to bury the dog, the words he loved to sing

his rusted pistol, his squeaky Bible, his sin.  
The boy's sneakers were light on the road. We

watched him run to us looking wounded and thin.  
He'd been caught lying or drinking his father's gin.

He'd been defending his ma, trying to be a man. We  
stood in the road, and my father talked about jazz,

how sometimes a tune is born of outrage. By June  
the boy would be locked upstate. That night we

got down on our knees in my room. *If I should die  
before I wake.* Da said to me, *it will be too soon.*

## II. 1991

Into the tented city we go, we-  
akened by the fire's ethereal

afterglow. Born lost and cool-  
er than heartache. What we

know is what we know. The left  
hand severed and school-

ed by cleverness. A plate of we-  
ekdays cooking. The hour lurk-

ing in the afterglow. A late-  
night chant. Into the city we

go. Close your eyes and strike  
a blow. Light can be straight-

ened by its shadow. What we  
break is what we hold. A sing-

ular blue note. An outcry sin-  
ged exiting the throat. We

push until we thin, thin-  
king we won't creep back again.

While God licks his kin, we  
sing until our blood is jazz,

we swing from June to June.  
We sweat to keep from we-

eping. Groomed on a die-  
t of hunger, we end too soon.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## New Folk

By [Terrance Hayes](#)

I said Folk was dressed in Blues but hairier and hemped.  
After "We acoustic banjo disciples!" Jebediah said, "When  
and whereforth shall the bucolic blacks with good tempers  
come to see us pluck as Elizabeth Cotton intended?"  
We stole my Uncle Windchime's minivan, penned a simple  
ballad about the drag of lovelessness and drove the end  
of the chitlin' circuit to a joint skinny as a walk-in temple  
where our new folk was not that new, but strengthened  
by our twelve bar conviction. A month later, in pulled  
a parade of well meaning alabaster post adolescents.  
We noticed the sand-tanned and braless ones piled  
in the ladder-backed front row with their boyfriends  
first because beneath our twangor slept what I'll call  
a hunger for the outlawable. One night J asked me when  
sisters like Chapman would arrive. I shook my chin wool  
then, and placed my hand over the guitar string's wind-  
ow til it stilled. "When the moon's black," I said. "Be faithful."

## The Good in the Evil World

By [Rebecca Hazelton](#)

Before the war leaned in and blew out

the candles, there were many long days  
where lovers called themselves lovers  
and a house was a dream but also  
four walls, a roof. A father called  
to his daughter to see the monarch butterflies,  
pausing in their migration to fan the goldenrod,  
a tiger in each coy disclosure.  
A young man reached for a blackberry  
and found draped on a branch a green snake  
the color of matcha. A snake the color of matcha  
sighed in the sun. People drove in cars.  
There were jobs and someone had to work  
every morning. A man quit his job  
but it was no tragedy. He didn't like the work.  
Another man slid in and found it comfortable  
enough, and just as easily slid in beside  
the man's wife and into the everyday rhythms  
of his life and that was no tragedy either.  
After rains, a ring of mushrooms would delicately  
crack the earth. Spanish moss harbored red mites.  
The sky wasn't interesting. No one looked up.

## The Lyric In A Time of War

By [Eloise Klein Healy](#)

*for Sappho*

Let my music be found wanting  
in comparison  
to yours (as it must)

let me be found loving  
(as you were)  
extravagantly the beautiful

let me find you  
and the song (forever)  
between us

in these terrible times

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

# Blackberry-Picking

By [Seamus Heaney](#)

*for Philip Hobsbaum*

Late August, given heavy rain and sun  
For a full week, the blackberries would ripen.  
At first, just one, a glossy purple clot  
Among others, red, green, hard as a knot.  
You ate that first one and its flesh was sweet  
Like thickened wine: summer's blood was in it  
Leaving stains upon the tongue and lust for  
Picking. Then red ones inked up and that hunger  
Sent us out with milk cans, pea tins, jam-pots  
Where briars scratched and wet grass bleached our boots.  
Round hayfields, cornfields and potato-drills  
We trekked and picked until the cans were full,  
Until the tinkling bottom had been covered  
With green ones, and on top big dark blobs burned  
Like a plate of eyes. Our hands were peppered  
With thorn pricks, our palms sticky as Bluebeard's.

We hoarded the fresh berries in the byre.  
But when the bath was filled we found a fur,  
A rat-grey fungus, glutting on our cache.  
The juice was stinking too. Once off the bush  
The fruit fermented, the sweet flesh would turn sour.  
I always felt like crying. It wasn't fair  
That all the lovely canfuls smelt of rot.  
Each year I hoped they'd keep, knew they would not.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

# Death of a Naturalist

By [Seamus Heaney](#)

All year the flax-dam festered in the heart  
Of the townland; green and heavy headed  
Flax had rotted there, weighted down by huge sods.  
Daily it sweltered in the punishing sun.  
Bubbles gargled delicately, bluebottles  
Wove a strong gauze of sound around the smell.  
There were dragonflies, spotted butterflies,  
But best of all was the warm thick slobber

Of frogspawn that grew like clotted water  
In the shade of the banks. Here, every spring  
I would fill jampotfuls of the jellied  
Specks to range on window sills at home,  
On shelves at school, and wait and watch until  
The fattening dots burst, into nimble  
Swimming tadpoles. Miss Walls would tell us how  
The daddy frog was called a bullfrog  
And how he croaked and how the mammy frog  
Laid hundreds of little eggs and this was  
Frogspawn. You could tell the weather by frogs too  
For they were yellow in the sun and brown  
In rain.

Then one hot day when fields were rank  
With cowdung in the grass the angry frogs  
Invaded the flax-dam; I ducked through hedges  
To a coarse croaking that I had not heard  
Before. The air was thick with a bass chorus.  
Right down the dam gross bellied frogs were cocked  
On sods; their loose necks pulsed like sails. Some hopped:  
The slap and plop were obscene threats. Some sat  
Poised like mud grenades, their blunt heads farting.  
I sickened, turned, and ran. The great slime kings  
Were gathered there for vengeance and I knew  
That if I dipped my hand the spawn would clutch it.

## Digging

By [Seamus Heaney](#)

Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound  
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:  
My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds  
Bends low, comes up twenty years away  
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills  
Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft  
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.  
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep

To scatter new potatoes that we picked,  
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

By God, the old man could handle a spade.  
Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day  
Than any other man on Toner's bog.  
Once I carried him milk in a bottle  
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up  
To drink it, then fell to right away  
Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods  
Over his shoulder, going down and down  
For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap  
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge  
Through living roots awaken in my head.  
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests.  
I'll dig with it.

## **The Grauballe Man**

By [Seamus Heaney](#)

As if he had been poured  
in tar, he lies  
on a pillow of turf  
and seems to weep

the black river of himself.  
The grain of his wrists  
is like bog oak,  
the ball of his heel

like a basalt egg.  
His instep has shrunk  
cold as a swan's foot  
or a wet swamp root.

His hips are the ridge  
and purse of a mussel,  
his spine an eel arrested

under a glisten of mud.

The head lifts,  
the chin is a visor  
raised above the vent  
of his slashed throat

that has tanned and toughened.  
The cured wound  
opens inwards to a dark  
elderberry place.

Who will say 'corpse'  
to his vivid cast?  
Who will say 'body'  
to his opaque repose?

And his rusted hair,  
a mat unlikely  
as a foetus's.  
I first saw his twisted face

in a photograph,  
a head and shoulder  
out of the peat,  
bruised like a forceps baby,

but now he lies  
perfected in my memory,  
down to the red horn  
of his nails,

hung in the scales  
with beauty and atrocity:  
with the Dying Gaul  
too strictly compassed

on his shield,  
with the actual weight  
of each hooded victim,  
slashed and dumped.

## Thine Own

By [Josephine Delphine Henderson Heard](#)

To live and not be Thine Own,  
Like Springtime is when birds are flown;  
Or liberty in prison bars,  
Or evening skies without the stars;  
Like diamonds that are lusterless,  
Or rest when there's no weariness;  
Like lovely flower that have no scent,  
Or music when the sound is spent.

## The Old Liberators

By [Robert Hedin](#)

Of all the people in the mornings at the mall,  
it's the old liberators I like best,  
those veterans of the Bulge, Anzio, or Monte Cassino  
I see lost in Automotive or back in Home Repair,  
bored among the paints and power tools.  
Or the really old ones, the ones who are going fast,  
who keep dozing off in the little orchards  
of shade under the distant skylights.  
All around, from one bright rack to another,  
their wives stride big as generals,  
their handbags bulging like ripe fruit.  
They are almost all gone now,  
and with them they are taking the flak  
and fire storms, the names of the old bombing runs.  
Each day a little more of their memory goes out,  
darkens the way a house darkens,  
its rooms quietly filling with evening,  
until nothing but the wind lifts the lace curtains,  
the wind bearing through the empty rooms  
the rich far off scent of gardens  
where just now, this morning,  
light is falling on the wild philodendrons.

## Invictus

By [William Ernest Henley](#)

Out of the night that covers me,  
    Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be

For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate,  
I am the captain of my soul.

## The Collar

By [George Herbert](#)

I struck the board, and cried, "No more;  
I will abroad!  
What? shall I ever sigh and pine?  
My lines and life are free, free as the road,  
Loose as the wind, as large as store.  
Shall I be still in suit?  
Have I no harvest but a thorn  
To let me blood, and not restore  
What I have lost with cordial fruit?  
Sure there was wine  
Before my sighs did dry it; there was corn  
Before my tears did drown it.  
Is the year only lost to me?  
Have I no bays to crown it,  
No flowers, no garlands gay? All blasted?  
All wasted?  
Not so, my heart; but there is fruit,  
And thou hast hands.  
Recover all thy sigh-blown age  
On double pleasures: leave thy cold dispute  
Of what is fit and not. Forsake thy cage,  
Thy rope of sands,  
Which petty thoughts have made, and made to thee  
Good cable, to enforce and draw,  
And be thy law,

While thou didst wink and wouldst not see.  
    Away! take heed;  
    I will abroad.  
Call in thy death's-head there; tie up thy fears;  
    He that forbears  
    To suit and serve his need  
    Deserves his load."  
But as I raved and grew more fierce and wild  
    At every word,  
Methought I heard one calling, *Child!*  
    And I replied *My Lord.*

## Love (III)

By [George Herbert](#)

Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back  
    Guilty of dust and sin.  
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack  
    From my first entrance in,  
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,  
    If I lacked any thing.

A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:  
    Love said, You shall be he.  
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,  
    I cannot look on thee.  
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,  
    Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame  
    Go where it doth deserve.  
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?  
    My dear, then I will serve.  
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:  
    So I did sit and eat.

## The Pulley

By [George Herbert](#)

When God at first made man,  
Having a glass of blessings standing by,  
“Let us,” said he, “pour on him all we can.  
Let the world’s riches, which dispersèd lie,  
Contract into a span.”

So strength first made a way;  
Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honour, pleasure.  
When almost all was out, God made a stay,  
Perceiving that, alone of all his treasure,  
Rest in the bottom lay.

“For if I should,” said he,  
“Bestow this jewel also on my creature,  
He would adore my gifts instead of me,  
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature;  
So both should losers be.

“Yet let him keep the rest,  
But keep them with repining restlessness;  
Let him be rich and weary, that at least,  
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness  
May toss him to my breast.”

## Let Me Tell You What a Poem Brings

By [Juan Felipe Herrera](#)

*for Charles Fishman*

Before you go further,  
let me tell you what a poem brings,  
first, you must know the secret, there is no poem  
to speak of, it is a way to attain a life without boundaries,  
yes, it is that easy, a poem, imagine me telling you this,  
instead of going day by day against the razors, well,  
the judgments, all the tick-tock bronze, a leather jacket  
sizing you up, the fashion mall, for example, from  
the outside you think you are being entertained,  
when you enter, things change, you get caught by surprise,  
your mouth goes sour, you get thirsty, your legs grow cold  
standing still in the middle of a storm, a poem, of course,  
is always open for business too, except, as you can see,  
it isn't exactly business that pulls your spirit into  
the alarming waters, there you can bathe, you can play,  
you can even join in on the gossip—the mist, that is,  
the mist becomes central to your existence.

***Note to Poetry Out Loud students:*** This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.

# **This Is My Last Report**

By [Juan Felipe Herrera](#)

This is my last report:

I wanted to speak of existence, the ants most of all,  
dressed up in their naughty flame-trousers, the exact jaws,  
their unknowable kindnesses, their abyss of hungers,  
and science, their mercilessness, their prophetic military  
devotions, their geometry of scent, their cocoons  
for the Nomenclature,

I wanted to speak of the Glue Sniffers  
and Glue Smoothers who despise all forms  
unbound, loose in their amber nectars, I wanted  
to point to their noses, hoses and cables and networks,  
their tools, if I can use that word now—and scales and  
scanners and Glue Rectories.

I wanted you to meet my broom mother  
who carved a hole into her womb  
so that I could live—

At every sunset she stands  
under the shadow of the watchtowers  
elongating and denying her breath.

I wanted to look under the rubble fields  
for once, for you (if you approved), flee  
into the bullet-riddled openness and fall flat,  
arched, askew, under the rubble sheets  
and let the rubble fill me

with its sharp plates and ripped dust—  
alphabets incomplete and humid. You,  
listen,

a little closer  
to the chalk dust—this child swinging her left arm,  
a ribbon, agitated by unnamed forces, devoured.

# **The Impossible Replication of Desire**

By [Lee Herrick](#)

How much delight before we collapse  
How much earth in the lungs

How much wine

When we want more  
When the weeds sprawl  
It is not what you think

Think how fast some landscapes change  
the lover, the gardener's grand idea,  
the failing Maple

the boat about to capsize  
the correction  
the hand's reflection

the impossible replication of weight  
versus time  
how it will never mean what you want

## **To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time**

By [Robert Herrick](#)

Gather ye rose-buds while ye may,  
Old Time is still a-flying;  
And this same flower that smiles today  
Tomorrow will be dying.

The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,  
The higher he's a-getting,  
The sooner will his race be run,  
And nearer he's to setting.

That age is best which is the first,  
When youth and blood are warmer;  
But being spent, the worse, and worst  
Times still succeed the former.

Then be not coy, but use your time,  
And while ye may, go marry;  
For having lost but once your prime,  
You may forever tarry.

# After working sixty hours again for what reason

By [Bob Hicok](#)

The best job I had was moving a stone  
from one side of the road to the other.  
This required a permit which required  
a bribe. The bribe took all my salary.  
Yet because I hadn't finished the job  
I had no salary, and to pay the bribe  
I took a job moving the stone  
the other way. Because the official  
wanted his bribe, he gave me a permit  
for the second job. When I pointed out  
that the work would be best completed  
if I did nothing, he complimented  
my brain and wrote a letter  
to my employer suggesting promotion  
on stationery bearing the wings  
of a raptor spread in flight  
over a mountain smaller than the bird.  
My boss, fearing my intelligence,  
paid me to sleep on the sofa  
and take lunch with the official  
who required a bribe to keep anything  
from being done. When I told my parents,  
they wrote my brother to come home  
from university to be slapped  
on the back of the head. Dutifully,  
he arrived and bowed to receive  
his instruction, at which point  
sense entered his body and he asked  
what I could do by way of a job.  
I pointed out there were stones  
everywhere trying not to move,  
all it took was a little gumption  
to be the man who didn't move them.  
It was harder to explain the intricacies  
of not obtaining a permit to not  
do this. Just yesterday he got up  
at dawn and shaved, as if the lack  
of hair on his face has anything  
to do with the appearance of food  
on an empty table.

# Learning to swim

By [Bob Hicok](#)

At forty-eight, to be given water,

which is most of the world, given life  
in water, which is most of me, given ease,

which is most of what I lack, here, where walls  
don't part to my hands, is to be born  
as of three weeks ago. Taking nothing

from you, mother, or you, sky, or you,  
mountain, that you wouldn't take  
if offered by the sea, any sea, or river,

any river, or the pool, beside which  
a woman sits who would save me  
if I needed saving, in a red suit, as if flame

is the color of emergency, as I do,  
need saving, from solid things,  
most of all, their dissolve.

# Dawn

By [Ella Higginson](#)

The soft-toned clock upon the stair chimed three—  
Too sweet for sleep, too early yet to rise.

In restful peace I lay with half-closed eyes,  
Watching the tender hours go dreamily;  
The tide was flowing in; I heard the sea  
Shivering along the sands; while yet the skies  
Were dim, uncertain, as the light that lies

Beneath the fretwork of some wild-rose tree

Within the thicket gray. The chanticleer  
Sent drowsy calls across the slumbrous air;  
In solemn silence sweet it was to hear

My own heart beat . . . Then broad and deep and fair—  
Trembling in its new birth from heaven's womb—  
One crimson shaft of dawn sank thro' my room.

# September Song

By [Geoffrey Hill](#)

*born 19.6.32—deported 24.9.42*

Undesirable you may have been, untouchable  
you were not. Not forgotten  
or passed over at the proper time.

As estimated, you died. Things marched,  
sufficient, to that end.  
Just so much Zyklon and leather, patented  
terror, so many routine cries.

(I have made  
an elegy for myself it  
is true)

September fattens on vines. Roses  
flake from the wall. The smoke  
of harmless fires drifts to my eyes.

This is plenty. This is more than enough.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

# Angrily Standing Outside in the Wind

By [Brenda Hillman](#)

—kept losing self control  
but how could one lose the self  
after reading so much literary theory?  
The shorter "i" stood under the cork trees,  
the taller "I" remained rather passive;  
the brendas were angry at the greed, angry  
that the trees would die, had lost interest  
in the posturing of the privileged,

the gaps between can't & won't...  
Stood outside the gate of permissible  
sound & the wind came souging  
through the doubt debris  
(souging comes from swāgh—to resound...  
echo actually comes from this also—)

we thought of old Hegel across  
the sea—the Weltgeist—and clouds

went by like the bones of a Kleenex...  
it's too late for countries  
but it's not too late for trees...  
& the wind kept soughing  
with its sound sash, wind with  
its sound sash, increasing  
bold wind with its sound sash,  
increasing bold—

## Girl Sleuth

By [Brenda Hillman](#)

A brenda is missing—where is she?  
Summon the seeds & weeds, the desert whooshes. Phone the finch  
with the crowded beak; a little pretenda  
is learning to read  
in the afternoon near the cactus caves. Near oleander & pulpy  
caves with the click-click of the wren & the *shkrrrr* of the thrasher,  
a skinny pretenda is learning  
to read till the missing brenda  
is found. Drip of syllables like olives near the saguaro.  
Nancy Drew will find the secret in raincoats & wednesdays  
& sticks. Nancy whose spine is yellow  
or blue will find the brenda in 1962,  
Nancy who has no mother,  
who takes suggestions from her father & ignores them.

Gleam goes the wren ignoring the thorn. They cannot tell the difference.  
Click of the smart dog's nails on linoleum.  
Nancy bends over the clues,  
of brenda's locket & dress. Word by word  
between syllables a clue. Where has the summer gone, the autumn—  
are they missing too? Maybe Nancy  
will parse the secret & read the book report on Nancy Drew:  
“neat pretty sly cute.” Syllable by syllable  
& still no brenda! Nancy  
puts her hand to her forehead; is the missing  
girl in the iron bird? is the clue to the girl in the locket?

# Saguaro

By [Brenda Hillman](#)

Often visitors there, saddened  
by lack of trees, go out  
to a promontory.

Then, backed by the banded  
sunset, the trail  
of the Conquistadores,

the father puts on the camera,  
the leather albatross,  
and has the children

imitate saguaros. One  
at a time they stand there smiling,  
fingers up like the tines of a fork

while the stately saguaro  
goes on being entered  
by wrens, diseases, and sunlight.

The mother sits on a rock,  
arms folded  
across her breasts. To her

the cactus looks scared,  
its needles  
like hair in cartoons.

With its arms in preacher  
or waltz position,  
it gives the impression

of great effort  
in every direction,  
like the mother.

Thousands of these gray-green  
cacti cross the valley:  
nature repeating itself,

children repeating nature,  
father repeating children  
and mother watching.

Later, the children think  
the cactus was moral,  
had something to teach them,

some survival technique  
or just regular beauty.  
But what else could it do?

The only protection  
against death  
was to love solitude.

## Echo

By [Daryl Hine](#)

Echo that loved hid within a wood  
Would to herself rehearse her weary woe:  
O, she cried, and all the rest unsaid  
Identical came back in sorry echo.

Echo for the fix that she was in  
Invisible, distraught by mocking passion,  
Passionate, ignored, as good as dumb,  
Employed that O unchanged in repetition.

Shun love if you suspect that he shuns you,  
Use with him no reproaches whatsoever.  
Ever you knew, supposing him to know  
No melody from which you might recover-

Cover your ears, dear Echo, do not hear.  
Here is no supplication but your own,  
Only your sighs return upon the air  
Ere their music from the mouth be gone.

## Poor Angels

By [Edward Hirsch](#)

At this hour the soul floats weightlessly  
through the city streets, speechless and invisible,  
astonished by the smoky blend of grays and golds  
seeping out of the air, the dark half-tones

of dusk suddenly filling the urban sky  
while the body sits listlessly by the window  
sullen and heavy, too exhausted to move,  
too weary to stand up or to lie down.

At this hour the soul is like a yellow wing  
slipping through the treetops, a little ecstatic  
cloud hovering over the sidewalks, calling out  
to the approaching night, "Amaze me, amaze me,"

while the body sits glumly by the window  
listening to the clear summons of the dead  
transparent as glass, clairvoyant as crystal.  
Some nights it is almost ready to join them.

Oh, this is a strange, unlikely tethering,  
a furious grafting of the quick and the slow:  
when the soul flies up, the body sinks down  
and all night—locked in the same cramped room—

they go on quarreling, stubbornly threatening  
to leave each other, wordlessly filling the air  
with the sound of a low internal burning.  
How long can this bewildering marriage last?

At midnight the soul dreams of a small fire  
of stars flaming on the other side of the sky,  
but the body stares into an empty night sheen,  
a hollow-eyed darkness. Poor luckless angels,

feverish old loves: don't separate yet.  
Let what rises live with what descends.

## Memory As a Hearing Aid

By [Tony Hoagland](#)

Somewhere, someone is asking a question,  
and I stand squinting at the classroom  
with one hand cupped behind my ear,  
trying to figure out where that voice is coming from.

I might be already an old man,  
attempting to recall the night  
his hearing got misplaced,  
front-row-center at a battle of the bands,

where a lot of leather-clad, second-rate musicians,  
amped up to dinosaur proportions,  
test drove their equipment through our ears.  
Each time the drummer threw a tantrum,

the guitarist whirled and sprayed us with machine-gun riffs,  
as if they wished that they could knock us  
quite literally dead.  
We called that fun in 1970,

when we weren't sure our lives were worth surviving.  
I'm here to tell you that they were,  
and many of us did, despite ourselves,  
though the road from there to here

is paved with dead brain cells,  
parents shocked to silence,  
and squad cars painting the whole neighborhood  
the quaking tint and texture of red jelly.

Friends, we should have postmarks on our foreheads  
to show where we have been;  
we should have pointed ears, or polka-dotted skin  
to show what we were thinking

when we hot-rodged over God's front lawn,  
and Death kept blinking.  
But here I stand, an average-looking man  
staring at a room

where someone blond in braids  
with a beautiful belief in answers  
is still asking questions.

Through the silence in my dead ear,  
I can almost hear the future whisper  
to the past: it says that this is not a test  
and everybody passes.

## Requests for Toy Piano

By [Tony Hoagland](#)

Play the one about the family of the ducks  
where the ducks go down to the river

and one of them thinks the water will be cold  
but then they jump in anyway  
and like it and splash around.

No, I must play the one  
about the nervous man from Palestine in row 14  
with a brown bag in his lap  
in which a gun is hidden in a sandwich.

Play the one about the handsome man and woman  
standing on the steps of her apartment  
and how the darkness and her perfume and the beating of their hearts  
conjoin to make them feel  
like leaping from the edge of chance—

No, I should play the one about  
the hard rectangle of the credit card  
hidden in the man's back pocket  
and how the woman spent an hour  
plucking out her brows, and how her perfume  
was made from the destruction of a hundred flowers.

Then play the one about the flower industry  
in which the migrant workers curse their own infected hands  
from tossing sheaves of roses and carnations  
into the back of the refrigerated trucks.

No, I must play the one about the single yellow daffodil  
standing on my kitchen table  
whose cut stem draws the water upwards  
so the plant is flushed with the conviction

that the water has been sent  
to find and raise it up  
from somewhere so deep inside the earth  
not even flowers can remember.

## **To Be Held**

By [Linda Hogan](#)

To be held  
by the light  
was what I wanted,  
to be a tree drinking the rain,  
no longer parched in this hot land.

To be roots in a tunnel growing  
but also to be sheltering the inborn leaves  
and the green slide of mineral  
down the immense distances  
into infinite comfort  
and the land here, only clay,  
still contains and consumes  
the thirsty need  
the way a tree always shelters the unborn life  
waiting for the healing  
after the storm  
which has been our life.

## In Praise of My Bed

By [Meredith Holmes](#)

At last I can be with you!  
The grinding hours  
since I left your side!  
The labor of being fully human,  
working my opposable thumb,  
talking, and walking upright.  
Now I have unclasped  
unzipped, stepped out of.  
Husked, soft, a be-er only,  
I do nothing, but point  
my bare feet into your  
clean smoothness  
feel your quiet strength  
the whole length of my body.  
I close my eyes, hear myself  
moan, so grateful to be held this way.

## They Come

By [Cathy Park Hong](#)

Stamp the earth rind down,  
shuck our boots & nap on  
rubber cockscomb pad.

Rise up & ride in,  
poles poked through with hide of kid  
flap from blither wind.

Ride into a town of tires stacked,  
a tarred prehistoric castle.

A town of shacks painted kiwi green  
latches guano rimmed.  
Road's a batter of blood & dust.

One serf scurries off cowed & cloaked.  
Linseed-eyed & broad of face.  
Hold, I say.

She says oh gods once nested on our tire hills  
but now that tire factory flakes to tinder too.  
Are you here from the world above?

Now come. Heal my kin.  
Are you here from the world above?

We douse ourselves with flame retardant  
& douse the town to flame.  
Are you here from the world above?

We hear her death in flames  
We hear other deaths in flames  
Along each town we pass

We rave & rove & gore  
the last oil rig hidalgo in his tin gilt throne,  
His ale we drink, his heart we jar.

We are from the world above,  
We sing & jig but like Sisyphus,  
as we eye from afar,

as each child crawls out their gutted hole,  
& rebuild each dead town —  
We can never rest.

## **The Legend**

By [Garrett Hongo](#)

In Chicago, it is snowing softly  
and a man has just done his wash for the week.  
He steps into the twilight of early evening,  
carrying a wrinkled shopping bag

full of neatly folded clothes,  
and, for a moment, enjoys  
the feel of warm laundry and crinkled paper,  
flannellike against his gloveless hands.  
There's a Rembrandt glow on his face,  
a triangle of orange in the hollow of his cheek  
as a last flash of sunset  
blazes the storefronts and lit windows of the street.

He is Asian, Thai or Vietnamese,  
and very skinny, dressed as one of the poor  
in rumpled suit pants and a plaid mackinaw,  
dingy and too large.  
He negotiates the slick of ice  
on the sidewalk by his car,  
opens the Fairlane's back door,  
leans to place the laundry in,  
and turns, for an instant,  
toward the flurry of footsteps  
and cries of pedestrians  
as a boy—that's all he was—  
backs from the corner package store  
shooting a pistol, firing it,  
once, at the dumbfounded man  
who falls forward,  
grabbing at his chest.

A few sounds escape from his mouth,  
a babbling no one understands  
as people surround him  
bewildered at his speech.  
The noises he makes are nothing to them.  
The boy has gone, lost  
in the light array of foot traffic  
dappling the snow with fresh prints.  
Tonight, I read about Descartes'  
grand courage to doubt everything  
except his own miraculous existence  
and I feel so distinct  
from the wounded man lying on the concrete  
I am ashamed.

Let the night sky cover him as he dies.  
Let the weaver girl cross the bridge of heaven  
and take up his cold hands.

IN MEMORY OF JAY KASHIWAMURA

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: Recitation of the dedication at the end of the poem is optional.  
Inclusion or omission of the dedication should not affect your accuracy score.*

## **I Remember, I Remember**

By [Thomas Hood](#)

I remember, I remember,  
The house where I was born,  
The little window where the sun  
Came peeping in at morn;  
He never came a wink too soon,  
Nor brought too long a day,  
But now, I often wish the night  
Had borne my breath away!

I remember, I remember,  
The roses, red and white,  
The vi'lets, and the lily-cups,  
Those flowers made of light!  
The lilacs where the robin built,  
And where my brother set  
The laburnum on his birthday,—  
The tree is living yet!

I remember, I remember,  
Where I was used to swing,  
And thought the air must rush as fresh  
To swallows on the wing;  
My spirit flew in feathers then,  
That is so heavy now,  
And summer pools could hardly cool  
The fever on my brow!

I remember, I remember,  
The fir trees dark and high;  
I used to think their slender tops  
Were close against the sky:  
It was a childish ignorance,  
But now 'tis little joy  
To know I'm farther off from heav'n  
Than when I was a boy.

# Silence

By [Thomas Hood](#)

There is a silence where hath been no sound,  
There is a silence where no sound may be,  
In the cold grave—under the deep deep sea,  
Or in the wide desert where no life is found,  
Which hath been mute, and still must sleep profound;  
No voice is hush'd—no life treads silently,  
But clouds and cloudy shadows wander free,  
That never spoke, over the idle ground:  
But in green ruins, in the desolate walls  
Of antique palaces, where Man hath been,  
Though the dun fox, or wild hyena, calls,  
And owls, that flit continually between,  
Shriek to the echo, and the low winds moan,  
There the true Silence is, self-conscious and alone.

# As Kingishers Catch Fire

By [Gerard Manley Hopkins](#)

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;  
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells  
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's  
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;  
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:  
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;  
Selves — goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,  
Crying *Whát I dó is me: for that I came.*

I say móre: the just man justices;  
Keeps grace: thát keeps all his goings graces;  
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is —  
Christ — for Christ plays in ten thousand places,  
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his  
To the Father through the features of men's faces.

# God's Grandeur

By [Gerard Manley Hopkins](#)

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;  
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil  
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;  
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;  
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
And though the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

## Spring

By [Gerard Manley Hopkins](#)

Nothing is so beautiful as Spring –  
When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush;  
Thrush's eggs look little low heavens, and thrush  
Through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring  
The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing;  
The glassy peartree leaves and blooms, they brush  
The descending blue; that blue is all in a rush  
With richness; the racing lambs too have fair their fling.

What is all this juice and all this joy?  
A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning  
In Eden garden. – Have, get, before it cloy,  
Before it cloud, Christ, lord, and sour with sinning,  
Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy,  
Most, O maid's child, thy choice and worthy the winning.

## Spring and Fall

By [Gerard Manley Hopkins](#)

*to a young child*

Márgarét, áre you gríeving  
Over Goldengrove unleaving?  
Leáves like the things of man, you  
With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?  
Ah! ás the heart grows older  
It will come to such sights colder  
By and by, nor spare a sigh  
Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;

And yet you will weep and know why.  
Now no matter, child, the name:  
Sorrow's springs are the same.  
Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed  
What heart heard of, ghost guessed:  
It is the blight man was born for,  
It is Margaret you mourn for.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## The Windhover

By [Gerard Manley Hopkins](#)

*To Christ our Lord*

I caught this morning morning's minion, king-  
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding  
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding  
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing  
In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,  
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding  
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding  
Stirred for a bird, – the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here  
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion  
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

No wonder of it: sheer plód makes plough down sillion  
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,  
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Ode I. 11

By [Horace](#)

Translated by Burton Raffel

Leucon, no one's allowed to know his fate,  
Not you, not me: don't ask, don't hunt for answers  
In tea leaves or palms. Be patient with whatever comes.  
This could be our last winter, it could be many

More, pounding the Tuscan Sea on these rocks:  
Do what you must, be wise, cut your vines  
And forget about hope. Time goes running, even  
As we talk. Take the present, the future's no one's affair.

## Early Affection

By [George Moses Horton](#)

I lov'd thee from the earliest dawn,  
    When first I saw thy beauty's ray,  
And will, until life's eve comes on,  
    And beauty's blossom fades away;  
And when all things go well with thee,  
With smiles and tears remember me.

I'll love thee when thy morn is past,  
    And wheedling gallantry is o'er,  
When youth is lost in age's blast,  
    And beauty can ascend no more,  
And when life's journey ends with thee,  
O, then look back and think of me.

I'll love thee with a smile or frown,  
    'Mid sorrow's gloom or pleasure's light,  
And when the chain of life runs down,  
    Pursue thy last eternal flight,  
When thou hast spread thy wing to flee,  
Still, still, a moment wait for me.

I'll love thee for those sparkling eyes,  
    To which my fondness was betray'd,  
Bearing the tincture of the skies,  
    To glow when other beauties fade,  
And when they sink too low to see,  
Reflect an azure beam on me.

## George Moses Horton, Myself

By [George Moses Horton](#)

I feel myself in need  
    Of the inspiring strains of ancient lore,  
My heart to lift, my empty mind to feed,  
    And all the world explore.

I know that I am old  
And never can recover what is past,  
But for the future may some light unfold  
And soar from ages blast.

I feel resolved to try,  
My wish to prove, my calling to pursue,  
Or mount up from the earth into the sky,  
To show what Heaven can do.

My genius from a boy,  
Has fluttered like a bird within my heart;  
But could not thus confined her powers employ,  
Impatient to depart.

She like a restless bird,  
Would spread her wing, her power to be unfurl'd,  
And let her songs be loudly heard,  
And dart from world to world.

## **Like Brother We Meet**

By [George Moses Horton](#)

Dedicated to the Federal and Late Confederate Soldiers

Like heart-loving brothers we meet,  
And still the loud thunders of strife,  
The blaze of fraternity kindles most sweet,  
There's nothing more pleasing in life.

The black cloud of faction retreats,  
The poor is no longer depressed,  
See those once discarded resuming their seats,  
The lost strangers soon will find rest.

The soldier no longer shall roam,  
But soon shall land safely ashore,  
Each soon will arrive at his own native home,  
And struggle in warfare no more.

The union of brothers is sweet,  
Whose wives and children do come,  
Their sons and fair daughters with pleasure they greet,  
When long absent fathers come home.

They never shall languish again,  
Nor discord their union shall break,  
When brothers no longer lament and complain,  
Hence never each other forsake.

Hang closely together like friends,  
By peace killing foes never driven,  
The storm of commotion eternally ends,  
And earth will soon turn into Heaven.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## On Liberty and Slavery

By [George Moses Horton](#)

Alas! and am I born for this,  
To wear this slavish chain?  
Deprived of all created bliss,  
Through hardship, toil and pain!

How long have I in bondage lain,  
And languished to be free!  
Alas! and must I still complain—  
Deprived of liberty.

Oh, Heaven! and is there no relief  
This side the silent grave—  
To soothe the pain—to quell the grief  
And anguish of a slave?

Come Liberty, thou cheerful sound,  
Roll through my ravished ears!  
Come, let my grief in joys be drowned,  
And drive away my fears.

Say unto foul oppression, Cease:  
Ye tyrants rage no more,  
And let the joyful trump of peace,  
Now bid the vassal soar.

Soar on the pinions of that dove  
Which long has cooed for thee,  
And breathed her notes from Afric's grove,  
The sound of Liberty.

Oh, Liberty! thou golden prize,  
So often sought by blood—  
We crave thy sacred sun to rise,  
The gift of nature's God!

Bid Slavery hide her haggard face,  
And barbarism fly:  
I scorn to see the sad disgrace  
In which enslaved I lie.

Dear Liberty! upon thy breast,  
I languish to respire;  
And like the Swan unto her nest,  
I'd like to thy smiles retire.

Oh, blest asylum—heavenly balm!  
Unto thy boughs I flee—  
And in thy shades the storm shall calm,  
With songs of Liberty!

## On Summer

By [George Moses Horton](#)

Esteville begins to burn;  
The auburn fields of harvest rise;  
The torrid flames again return,  
And thunders roll along the skies.

Perspiring Cancer lifts his head,  
And roars terrific from on high;  
Whose voice the timid creatures dread;  
From which they strive with awe to fly.

The night-hawk ventures from his cell,  
And starts his note in evening air;  
He feels the heat his bosom swell,  
Which drives away the gloom of fear.

Thou noisy insect, start thy drum;  
Rise lamp-like bugs to light the train;  
And bid sweet Philomela come,  
And sound in front the nightly strain.

The bee begins her ceaseless hum,

And doth with sweet exertions rise;  
And with delight she stores her comb,  
And well her rising stock supplies.

Let sportive children well beware,  
While sprightly frisking o'er the green;  
And carefully avoid the snare,  
Which lurks beneath the smiling scene.

The mistress bird assumes her nest,  
And broods in silence on the tree,  
Her note to cease, her wings at rest,  
She patient waits her young to see.

## Is My Team Ploughing

By [A. E. Housman](#)

“Is my team ploughing,  
That I was used to drive  
And hear the harness jingle  
When I was man alive?”

Ay, the horses trample,  
The harness jingles now;  
No change though you lie under  
The land you used to plough.

“Is football playing  
Along the river shore,  
With lads to chase the leather,  
Now I stand up no more?”

Ay the ball is flying,  
The lads play heart and soul;  
The goal stands up, the keeper  
Stands up to keep the goal.

“Is my girl happy,  
That I thought hard to leave,  
And has she tired of weeping  
As she lies down at eve?”

Ay, she lies down lightly,  
She lies not down to weep:  
Your girl is well contented.

Be still, my lad, and sleep.

“Is my friend hearty,  
Now I am thin and pine,  
And has he found to sleep in  
A better bed than mine?”

Yes, lad, I lie easy,  
I lie as lads would choose;  
I cheer a dead man’s sweetheart,  
Never ask me whose.

## **To an Athlete Dying Young**

By [A. E. Housman](#)

The time you won your town the race  
We chaired you through the market-place;  
Man and boy stood cheering by,  
And home we brought you shoulder-high.

Today, the road all runners come,  
Shoulder-high we bring you home,  
And set you at your threshold down,  
Townsmen of a stiller town.

Smart lad, to slip betimes away  
From fields where glory does not stay,  
And early though the laurel grows  
It withers quicker than the rose.

Eyes the shady night has shut  
Cannot see the record cut,  
And silence sounds no worse than cheers  
After earth has stopped the ears.

Now you will not swell the rout  
Of lads that wore their honours out,  
Runners whom renown outran  
And the name died before the man.

So set, before its echoes fade,  
The fleet foot on the sill of shade,  
And hold to the low lintel up  
The still-defended challenge-cup.

And round that early-laurelled head  
Will flock to gaze the strengthless dead,  
And find unwithered on its curls  
The garland briefer than a girl's.

## **A Shropshire Lad 2: Loveliest of trees, the cherry now**

By [A. E. Housman](#)

Loveliest of trees, the cherry now  
Is hung with bloom along the bough,  
And stands about the woodland ride  
Wearing white for Eastertide.

Now, of my threescore years and ten,  
Twenty will not come again,  
And take from seventy springs a score,  
It only leaves me fifty more.

And since to look at things in bloom  
Fifty springs are little room,  
About the woodlands I will go  
To see the cherry hung with snow.

## **Battle-Hymn of the Republic**

By [Julia Ward Howe](#)

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord:  
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;  
He hath loosed the fatal lightning of his terrible swift sword:  
His truth is marching on.

I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps;  
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps;  
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps.  
His Day is marching on.

I have read a fiery gospel, writ in burnished rows of steel:  
“As ye deal with my contemners, so with you my grace shall deal;  
Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his heel,  
Since God is marching on.”

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;  
He is sifting out the hearts of men before his judgment-seat:  
Oh! be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet!

Our God is marching on.

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,  
With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me:  
As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,  
While God is marching on.

**In**

By [Andrew Hudgins](#)

When we first heard from blocks away  
the fog truck's blustery roar,  
we dropped our toys, leapt from our meals,  
and scrambled out the door

into an evening briefly fuzzy.  
We yearned to be transformed—  
translated past confining flesh  
to disembodied spirit. We swarmed

in thick smoke, taking human form  
before we blurred again,  
turned vague and then invisible,  
in temporary heaven.

Freed of bodies by the fog,  
we laughed, we sang, we shouted.  
We were our voices, nothing else.  
Voice was all we wanted.

The white clouds tumbled down our streets  
pursued by spellbound children  
who chased the most distorting clouds,  
ecstatic in the poison.

## **End of Days Advice from an Ex-zombie**

By [Michael Derrick Hudson](#)

To think I used to be so good at going to pieces  
gobbling my way through the cops

and spooking what's left of the girls. How'd I

get so far, sloughing off one knuckle at a time,

jerking my mossy pelt along  
ruined streets? Those insistent, dreadful thuds  
when we stacked our futile selves  
against locked doors. Our mumbles and groans!  
Such hungry nights! Staggering through the grit  
of looted malls, plastered with tattered  
flags of useless currency, I'd slobbered all over  
the busted glass and merchandise of America...  
But first you'll have to figure out those qualities  
separating what's being alive from  
who's already dead. Most of you will flunk that.  
Next learn how to want one thing over and over,  
night after night. Most of you  
are good at that. Don't get tired. Don't cough  
into your leftovers. Don't think. Always stand  
by your hobgoblin buddies. Clutch  
at whatever's there. Learn to sniff out sundowns.

## **I look at the world**

By [Langston Hughes](#)

I look at the world  
From awakening eyes in a black face—  
And this is what I see:  
This fenced-off narrow space  
Assigned to me.

I look then at the silly walls  
Through dark eyes in a dark face—  
And this is what I know:  
That all these walls oppression builds  
Will have to go!

I look at my own body

With eyes no longer blind—  
And I see that my own hands can make  
The world that's in my mind.  
Then let us hurry, comrades,  
The road to find.

## **I, Too**

By [Langston Hughes](#)

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.  
They send me to eat in the kitchen  
When company comes,  
But I laugh,  
And eat well,  
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,  
I'll be at the table  
When company comes.  
Nobody'll dare  
Say to me,  
"Eat in the kitchen,"  
Then.

Besides,  
They'll see how beautiful I am  
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

## **The Negro Speaks of Rivers**

By [Langston Hughes](#)

I've known rivers:  
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.  
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.  
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and  
I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:  
Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

## Recess

By [Maria Hummel](#)

This is the sound of the bell. It rings,  
full of brass and the end it brings:  
once for the children, once for the child  
who sits alone. His eyes hurt and mild,  
he waits, holding his things.

Time should hold no meaning  
for him yet. You don't learn  
how to play; you forget. But he knows a while  
well, and longs for the clang of the bell.

A bell is a room of nothing.  
No, a dome with a hidden swing —  
a will, a sway, a tone, a peal,  
the beginning of song. The wild  
crowd nears, passes, laughing.  
Here is the sound of the bell.

## Rondeau

By [Leigh Hunt](#)

Jenny kiss'd me when we met,  
Jumping from the chair she sat in;  
Time, you thief, who love to get  
Sweets into your list, put that in!  
Say I'm weary, say I'm sad,  
Say that health and wealth have miss'd me,  
Say I'm growing old, but add,  
Jenny kiss'd me.

# I Close My Eyes

By [David Ignatow](#)

I close my eyes like a good little boy at night in bed,  
as I was told to do by my mother when she lived,  
and before bed I brush my teeth and slip on my pajamas,  
as I was told, and look forward to tomorrow.

I do all things required of me to make me a citizen of sterling worth.  
I keep a job and come home each evening for dinner. I arrive at the  
same time on the same train to give my family a sense of order.

I obey traffic signals. I am cordial to strangers, I answer my  
mail promptly. I keep a balanced checking account. Why can't I  
live forever?

# Self-Employed

By [David Ignatow](#)

*For Harvey Shapiro*

I stand and listen, head bowed,  
to my inner complaint.  
Persons passing by think  
I am searching for a lost coin.  
You're fired, I yell inside  
after an especially bad episode.  
I'm letting you go without notice  
or terminal pay. You just lost  
another chance to make good.  
But then I watch myself standing at the exit,  
depressed and about to leave,  
and wave myself back in wearily,  
for who else could I get in my place  
to do the job in dark, airless conditions?

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

# The Grand Silos of Sacramento

By [Lawson Fusao Inada](#)

From a distance, at night, they seem to be

industries—all lit up but not on the map;  
or, in this scientific age, they could be  
installations for launching rocket ships—  
so solid, and with such security, are they. . .  
Ah, but up close, by the light of day,  
we see, not “pads” but actual paddies—  
for these are simply silos in ricefields,  
structures to hold the harvested grain.  
Still, they're the tallest things around,  
and, by night or day, you'd have to say  
they're ample for what they do: storage.  
And, if you amble around from your car,  
you can lean up against one in the sun,  
feeling warmth on your cheek as you spread  
out your arms, holding on to the whole world  
around you, to the shores of other lands  
where the laborers launched their lives  
to arrive and plant and harvest this grain  
of history—as you hold and look, look  
up, up, up, and whisper: “*Grandfather!*”

## **anthem for my belly after eating too much**

By [Kara Jackson](#)

i look in the mirror, and all the chips i've eaten  
this month have accumulated

like schoolwork at the bottom of my tummy,  
my belly—a country i'm trying to love.  
my mouth is a lover devoted to you, my belly, my belly  
the birds will string a song together  
with wind for you and your army  
of solids, militia of grease.  
americans love excess, but we also love jeans,  
and refuse to make excess comfortable in them.  
i step into a fashionable prison,  
my middle managed and fastened into  
suffering. my gracious gut,  
dutiful dome, i will wear a house for you  
that you can live in, promise walls  
that embrace your growing flesh,  
and watch you reach toward everything possible.

## **the world is about to end and my grandparents are in love**

By [Kara Jackson](#)

still, living like they orbit one another,  
my grandfather, the planet, & grandma, his moon assigned  
by some gravitational pull. they have loved long enough  
for a working man to retire. grandma says she's not tired,

she wears her husband like a coat that survives every season,  
talks about him the way my parents talk about vinyl—  
the subject salvaged by the tent of their tongues.  
grandma returns to her love like a hymn, marks it with a color.

when the world ends will it suck the earth of all its love?  
will i go taking somebody's hand,  
my skin becoming their skin?  
the digital age is taking away our winters,

and i'm afraid the sun is my soulmate,  
that waste waits for a wet kiss,  
carbon calls me pretty, and i think  
death is a good first date.

i hope when the world ends it leaves them be,  
spares grandpa and his game,  
grandma spinning corn into weight,

the two of them reeling into western  
theme songs, the TV louder

than whatever's coming.

## Mighty Pawns

By [Major Jackson](#)

If I told you Earl, the toughest kid  
on my block in North Philadelphia,  
bow-legged and ominous, could beat  
any man or woman in ten moves playing white,  
or that he traveled to Yugoslavia to frustrate the bearded  
masters at the Belgrade Chess Association,  
you'd think I was given to hyperbole,  
and if, at dinnertime, I took you  
into the faint light of his Section 8 home  
reeking of onions, liver, and gravy,  
his six little brothers fighting on a broken love-seat  
for room in front of a cracked flat-screen,  
one whose diaper sags it's a wonder  
it hasn't fallen to his ankles,  
the walls behind doors exposing the sheetrock  
the perfect O of a handle, and the slats  
of stairs missing where Baby-boy gets stuck  
trying to ascend to a dominion foreign to you and me  
with its loud timbales and drums blasting down  
from the closed room of his cousin whose mother  
stands on a corner on the other side of town  
all times of day and night, except when her relief  
check arrives at the beginning of the month,  
you'd get a better picture of Earl's ferocity  
after-school on the board in Mr. Sherman's class,  
but not necessarily when he stands near you  
at a downtown bus-stop in a jacket a size too  
small, hunching his shoulders around his ears,  
as you imagine the checkered squares of his poverty  
and anger, and pray he does not turn his precise gaze  
too long in your direction for fear he blames  
you and proceeds to take your Queen.

## Superfluties

By [Major Jackson](#)

This downpour of bad reasoning, this age-old swarm,  
this buzzing about town, this kick and stomp  
through gardens, this snag on the way to the mall,

this heap and toss of fabric and strewn shoes, this tangled  
beauty, this I came here not knowing, here  
to be torched, this fumbling ecstasy, this ecstasy of fumbling,  
this spray of lips and fingers, this scrape of bone, this raid  
of private grounds, this heaving and rocking, this scream  
and push, this sightless hunger, this tattered perishing,  
this rhythmic teeth knocking, this unbearable  
music, this motionless grip, grimace, and groan.

## **The Animals**

By [Josephine Jacobsen](#)

At night, alone, the animals came and shone.  
The darkness whirled but silent shone the animals:  
The lion the man the calf the eagle saying  
Sanctus which was and is and is to come.

The sleeper watched the people at the waterless wilderness' edge;  
The wilderness was made of granite, of thorn, of death,  
It was the goat which lightened the people praying.  
The goat went out with sin on its sunken head.

On the sleeper's midnight and the smaller after hours  
From above below elsewhere there shone the animals  
Through the circular dark; the cock appeared in light  
Crying three times, for tears for tears for tears.

High in the frozen tree the sparrow sat. At three o'clock  
The luminous thunder of its fall fractured the earth.  
The somber serpent looped its coils to write  
In scales the slow snake-music of the red ripe globe.

To the sleeper, alone, the animals came and shone,  
The darkness whirled but silent shone the animals.  
Just before dawn the dove flew out of the dark  
Flying with green in her beak; the dove also had come.

## **Moon**

By [Kathleen Jamie](#)

Last night, when the moon  
slipped into my attic room  
as an oblong of light,  
I sensed she'd come to commiserate.

It was August. She traveled  
with a small valise  
of darkness, and the first few stars  
returning to the northern sky,

and my room, it seemed,  
had missed her. She pretended  
an interest in the bookcase  
while other objects

stirred, as in a rock pool,  
with unexpected life:  
strings of beads in their green bowl gleamed,  
the paper-crowded desk;

the books, too, appeared inclined  
to open and confess.  
Being sure the moon  
harbored some intention,

I waited; watched for an age  
her cool gaze shift  
first toward a flower sketch  
pinned on the far wall

then glide down to recline  
along the pinewood floor,  
before I'd had enough. *Moon,*  
I said, *We're both scarred now.*

*Are they quite beyond you,  
the simple words of love? Say them.  
You are not my mother;  
with my mother, I waited unto death.*

## Dressing My Daughters

By [Mark Jarman](#)

One girl a full head taller  
Than the other—into their Sunday dresses.  
First, the slip, hardly a piece of fabric,  
Softly stitched and printed with a bud.  
I'm not their mother, and tangle, then untangle  
The whole cloth—on backwards, have to grab it

Round their necks. But they know how to pull  
Arms in, a reflex of being dressed,  
And also, a child's faith. The mass of stuff  
That makes the Sunday frocks collapses  
In my hands and finds its shape, only because  
They understand the drape of it—  
These skinny keys to intricate locks.  
The buttons are a problem  
For a surgeon. How would she connect  
These bony valves and stubborn eyelets?  
The filmy dress revolves in my blind fingers.  
The slots work one by one.  
And when they're put together,  
Not like puppets or those doll-saints  
That bring tears to true believers,  
But living children, somebody's real daughters,  
They do become more real.  
They say, "Stop it!" and "Give it back!"  
And "I don't want to!" They'll kiss  
A doll's hard features, whispering,  
"I'm sorry." I know just why my mother  
Used to worry. Your clothes don't keep  
You close—it's nakedness.  
Clad in my boots and holster,  
I would roam with my six-gun buddies.  
We dealt fake death to one another,  
Fell and rolled in filth and rose,  
Grimy with wounds, then headed home.  
But Sunday ... what was that tired explanation  
Given for wearing clothes that  
Scratched and shone and weighed like a slow hour?  
That we should shine—in gratitude.  
So, I give that explanation, undressing them,  
And wait for the result.  
After a day like Sunday, such a long one,  
When they lie down, half-dead,  
To be undone, they won't help me.  
They cry, "It's not my fault."

## Unholy Sonnet 1

By [Mark Jarman](#)

Dear God, Our Heavenly Father, Gracious Lord,  
Mother Love and Maker, Light Divine,  
Atomic Fingertip, Cosmic Design,

First Letter of the Alphabet, Last Word,  
Mutual Satisfaction, Cash Award,  
Auditor Who Approves Our Bottom Line,  
Examiner Who Says That We Are Fine,  
Oasis That All Sands Are Running Toward.

I can say almost anything about you,  
O Big Idea, and with each epithet,  
Create new reasons to believe or doubt you,  
Black Hole, White Hole, Presidential Jet.  
But what's the anything I must leave out? You  
Solve nothing but the problems that I set.

## **This Most Perfect Hill**

By [Lisa Jarnot](#)

On this most perfect hill  
with these most perfect dogs  
are these most perfect people  
and this most perfect fog

In this most perfect fog  
that is the middle of the sea  
inside the perfect middle of  
the things inside that swing

In this most perfect rhyme  
that takes up what it sees,  
with perfect shelter from the  
rain as perfect as can be,

In this most perfect day  
at the apex of the sun  
runs this most perfect  
frog song that is roiling  
from the mud

In these most perfect habits  
of the waving of the trees,  
through this imperfect language  
rides a perfect brilliancy.

# The Bloody Sire

By [Robinson Jeffers](#)

It is not bad. Let them play.  
Let the guns bark and the bombing-plane  
Speak his prodigious blasphemies.  
It is not bad, it is high time,  
Stark violence is still the sire of all the world's values.

What but the wolf's tooth whittled so fine  
The fleet limbs of the antelope?  
What but fear winged the birds, and hunger  
Jewelled with such eyes the great goshawk's head?  
Violence has been the sire of all the world's values.

Who would remember Helen's face  
Lacking the terrible halo of spears?  
Who formed Christ but Herod and Caesar,  
The cruel and bloody victories of Caesar?  
Violence, the bloody sire of all the world's values.

Never weep, let them play,  
Old violence is not too old to beget new values.

# Football

By [Louis Jenkins](#)

I take the snap from the center, fake to the right, fade back...  
I've got protection. I've got a receiver open downfield...  
What the hell is this? This isn't a football, it's a shoe, a man's  
brown leather oxford. A cousin to a football maybe, the same  
skin, but not the same, a thing made for the earth, not the air.  
I realize that this is a world where anything is possible and I  
understand, also, that one often has to make do with what one  
has. I have eaten pancakes, for instance, with that clear corn  
syrup on them because there was no maple syrup and they  
weren't very good. Well, anyway, this is different. (My man  
downfield is waving his arms.) One has certain responsibilities,  
one has to make choices. This isn't right and I'm not going  
to throw it.

# Blind Boone's Vision

By [Tyehimba Jess](#)

When I got old enough  
I asked my mother,  
to her surprise,  
to tell me what she did  
with my eyes. She balked  
and stalled, sounding  
unsure for the first time  
I could remember.  
It was the tender way  
she held my face  
and kissed where tears  
should have rolled  
that told me I'd asked  
of her the almost impossible—  
to recount my blinding  
tale, to tell what became  
of the rest of me.  
She took me by the hand  
and led me to a small  
sapling that stood not  
much taller than me.  
I could smell the green  
marrow of its promise  
reaching free of the soil  
like a song from Earth's  
royal, dirty mouth.  
Then Mother told me  
how she, newly freed,  
had prayed like a slave  
through the night when  
the surgeon took my eyes  
to save my fevered life,  
then got off her knees  
come morning to take  
the severed parts of me  
for burial—right there  
beneath that small tree.  
They fed the roots,  
climbed through its leaves  
to soak in sunlight . . .  
and so, she told me,  
I *can* see.

When the wind rustles  
up and cools me down,  
when the earth shakes  
with footsteps and when  
the sound of birdcalls  
stirs forests like the black  
and white bustling  
'neath my fingertips  
I am of the light and shade  
of my tree. Now,  
ask me how tall  
that tree of mine  
has grown to be  
after all this time—  
it touches a place  
between heaven and here.  
And I shudder when I hear  
the earth's wind  
in my bones  
through the bones  
of that boxed-up  
swarm of wood,  
bird and bee:  
I let it loose . . .  
and beyond  
me.

## **A Country Boy in Winter**

By [Sarah Orne Jewett](#)

The wind may blow the snow about,  
For all I care, says Jack,  
And I don't mind how cold it grows,  
For then the ice won't crack.  
Old folks may shiver all day long,  
But I shall never freeze;  
What cares a jolly boy like me  
For winter days like these?

Far down the long snow-covered hills  
It is such fun to coast,  
So clear the road! the fastest sled  
There is in school I boast.  
The paint is pretty well worn off,  
But then I take the lead;

A dandy sled's a loiterer,  
And I go in for speed.

When I go home at supper-time,  
Ki! but my cheeks are red!  
They burn and sting like anything;  
I'm cross until I'm fed.  
You ought to see the biscuit go,  
I am so hungry then;  
And old Aunt Polly says that boys  
Eat twice as much as men.

There's always something I can do  
To pass the time away;  
The dark comes quick in winter-time—  
A short and stormy day  
And when I give my mind to it,  
It's just as father says,  
I almost do a man's work now,  
And help him many ways.

I shall be glad when I grow up  
And get all through with school,  
I'll show them by-and-by that I  
Was not meant for a fool.  
I'll take the crops off this old farm,  
I'll do the best I can.  
A jolly boy like me won't be  
A dolt when he's a man.

I like to hear the old horse neigh  
Just as I come in sight,  
The oxen poke me with their horns  
To get their hay at night.  
Somehow the creatures seem like friends,  
And like to see me come.  
Some fellows talk about New York,  
But I shall stay at home.

## Ways of Talking

By [Ha Jin](#)

We used to like talking about grief  
Our journals and letters were packed  
with losses, complaints, and sorrows.

Even if there was no grief  
we wouldn't stop lamenting  
as though longing for the charm  
of a distressed face.

Then we couldn't help expressing grief  
So many things descended without warning:  
labor wasted, loves lost, houses gone,  
marriages broken, friends estranged,  
ambitions worn away by immediate needs.  
Words lined up in our throats  
for a good whining.  
Grief seemed like an endless river—  
the only immortal flow of life.

After losing a land and then giving up a tongue,  
we stopped talking of grief  
Smiles began to brighten our faces.  
We laugh a lot, at our own mess.  
Things become beautiful,  
even hailstones in the strawberry fields.

## Marshlands

By [Emily Pauline Johnson](#)

A thin wet sky, that yellows at the rim,  
And meets with sun-lost lip the marsh's brim.

The pools low lying, dank with moss and mould,  
Glint through their mildews like large cups of gold.

Among the wild rice in the still lagoon,  
In monotone the lizard shrills his tune.

The wild goose, homing, seeks a sheltering,  
Where rushes grow, and oozing lichens cling.

Late cranes with heavy wing, and lazy flight,  
Sail up the silence with the nearing night.

And like a spirit, swathed in some soft veil,  
Steals twilight and its shadows o'er the swale.

Hushed lie the sedges, and the vapours creep,  
Thick, grey and humid, while the marshes sleep.

# Common Dust

By [Georgia Douglas Johnson](#)

And who shall separate the dust  
What later we shall be:  
Whose keen discerning eye will scan  
And solve the mystery?

The high, the low, the rich, the poor,  
The black, the white, the red,  
And all the chromatique between,  
Of whom shall it be said:

Here lies the dust of Africa;  
Here are the sons of Rome;  
Here lies the one unlabelled,  
The world at large his home!

Can one then separate the dust?  
Will mankind lie apart,  
When life has settled back again  
The same as from the start?

# Art vs. Trade

By [James Weldon Johnson](#)

Trade, Trade versus Art,  
Brain, Brain versus Heart;  
Oh, the earthiness of these hard-hearted times,  
When clinking dollars, and jingling dimes,  
Drown all the finer music of the soul.

Life as an Octopus with but this creed,  
That all the world was made to serve his greed;  
Trade has spread out his mighty myriad claw,  
And drawn into his foul polluted maw,  
The brightest and the best,  
Well nigh,  
Has he drained dry,  
The sacred fount of Truth;  
And if, forsooth,  
He has left yet some struggling streams from it to go,  
He has contaminated so their flow,  
That Truth, scarce is it true.

Poor Art with struggling gasp,  
Lies strangled, dying in his mighty grasp;  
He locks his grimy fingers 'bout her snowy throat so tender.  
Is there no power to rescue her, protect, defend her?  
Shall Art be left to perish?  
Shall all the images her shrines cherish  
Be left to this iconoclast, to vulgar Trade?

Oh, that mankind had less of Brain and more of Heart,  
Oh, that the world had less of Trade and more of Art;  
Then would there be less grinding down the poor,  
Then would men learn to love each other more;  
For Trade stalks like a giant through the land,  
Bearing aloft the rich in his high hand,  
While down beneath his mighty ponderous tread,  
He crushes those who cry for daily bread.

## **Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing**

By [James Weldon Johnson](#)

Lift ev'ry voice and sing,  
Till earth and heaven ring,  
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;  
Let our rejoicing rise  
High as the list'ning skies,  
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.  
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,  
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;  
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,  
Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,  
Bitter the chast'ning rod,  
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;  
Yet with a steady beat,  
Have not our weary feet  
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?  
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,  
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,  
Out from the gloomy past,  
Till now we stand at last  
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years,  
God of our silent tears,

Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;  
Thou who has by Thy might,  
Led us into the light,  
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.  
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,  
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;  
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,  
May we forever stand.  
True to our God,  
True to our native land.

## Dragons

By [Devin Johnston](#)

We gathered in a field southwest of town,  
several hundred hauling coolers  
and folding chairs along a gravel road  
dry in August, two ruts of soft dust  
that soaked into our clothes  
and rose in plumes behind us.

By noon we could discern their massive coils  
emerging from a bale of cloud,  
scales scattering crescent dapples  
through walnut fronds,  
the light polarized, each leaf tip in focus.

As their bodies blotted out the sun,  
the forest faded to silverpoint.  
A current of cool air  
extended from the bottomlands  
an intimation of October,  
and the bowl of sky deepened  
its celestial archaeology.

Their tails, like banners of a vast army,  
swept past Orion and his retinue  
to sighs and scattered applause,  
the faint wail of a child crying.  
In half an hour they had passed on  
in search of deep waters.

Before our company dispersed,  
dust whirling in the wind,  
we planned to meet again in seven years

for the next known migration.  
Sunlight flashed on windshields

and caught along the riverbank  
a cloudy, keeled scale  
about the size of a dinner plate,  
cool as *blanc de Chine*  
in the heat of the afternoon.

## **A Celebration of Charis: I. His Excuse for Loving**

By [Ben Jonson](#)

Let it not your wonder move,  
Less your laughter, that I love.  
Though I now write fifty years,  
I have had, and have, my peers;  
Poets, though divine, are men,  
Some have lov'd as old again.  
And it is not always face,  
Clothes, or fortune, gives the grace;  
Or the feature, or the youth.  
But the language and the truth,  
With the ardour and the passion,  
Gives the lover weight and fashion.  
If you then will read the story,  
First prepare you to be sorry  
That you never knew till now  
Either whom to love or how;  
But be glad, as soon with me,  
When you know that this is she  
Of whose beauty it was sung;  
She shall make the old man young,  
Keep the middle age at stay,  
And let nothing high decay,  
Till she be the reason why  
All the world for love may die.

## **A Fit of Rhyme against Rhyme**

By [Ben Jonson](#)

Rhyme, the rack of finest wits,  
That expresseth but by fits  
True conceit,  
Spoiling senses of their treasure,

Cozening judgment with a measure,  
But false weight;  
Wresting words from their true calling,  
Propping verse for fear of falling  
To the ground;  
Jointing syllables, drowning letters,  
Fast'ning vowels as with fetters  
They were bound!  
Soon as lazy thou wert known,  
All good poetry hence was flown,  
And art banish'd.  
For a thousand years together  
All Parnassus' green did wither,  
And wit vanish'd.  
Pegasus did fly away,  
At the wells no Muse did stay,  
But bewail'd  
So to see the fountain dry,  
And Apollo's music die,  
All light failed!  
Starveling rhymes did fill the stage;  
Not a poet in an age  
Worth crowning;  
Not a work deserving bays,  
Not a line deserving praise,  
Pallas frowning;  
Greek was free from rhyme's infection,  
Happy Greek by this protection  
Was not spoiled.  
Whilst the Latin, queen of tongues,  
Is not yet free from rhyme's wrongs,  
But rests foiled.  
Scarce the hill again doth flourish,  
Scarce the world a wit doth nourish  
To restore  
Phoebus to his crown again,  
And the Muses to their brain,  
As before.  
Vulgar languages that want  
Words and sweetness, and be scant  
Of true measure,  
Tyrant rhyme hath so abused,  
That they long since have refused  
Other cæsure.  
He that first invented thee,  
May his joints tormented be,

Cramp'd forever.  
Still may syllables jar with time,  
Still may reason war with rhyme,  
Resting never.  
May his sense when it would meet  
The cold tumor in his feet,  
Grow unsounder;  
And his title be long fool,  
That in rearing such a school  
Was the founder.

## **Song: to Celia [“Come, my Celia, let us prove”]**

By [Ben Jonson](#)

Come, my Celia, let us prove,  
While we can, the sports of love;  
Time will not be ours forever;  
He at length our good will sever.  
Spend not then his gifts in vain.  
Suns that set may rise again;  
But if once we lose this light,  
'Tis with us perpetual night.  
Why should we defer our joys?  
Fame and rumor are but toys.  
Cannot we delude the eyes  
Of a few poor household spies,  
Or his easier ears beguile,  
So removèd by our wile?  
'Tis no sin love's fruit to steal;  
But the sweet thefts to reveal,  
To be taken, to be seen,  
These have crimes accounted been.

## **Song: to Celia [“Drink to me only with thine eyes”]**

By [Ben Jonson](#)

Drink to me only with thine eyes,  
And I will pledge with mine;  
Or leave a kiss but in the cup,  
And I'll not look for wine.  
The thirst that from the soul doth rise  
Doth ask a drink divine;  
But might I of Jove's nectar sup,  
I would not change for thine.

I sent thee late a rosy wreath,  
Not so much honouring thee  
As giving it a hope, that there  
It could not withered be.  
But thou thereon didst only breathe,  
And sent'st it back to me;  
Since when it grows, and smells, I swear,  
Not of itself, but thee.

## **In Memoriam: Martin Luther King, Jr.**

By [June Jordan](#)

*I*

honey people murder mercy U.S.A.  
the milkland turn to monsters teach  
to kill to violate pull down destroy  
the weakly freedom growing fruit  
from being born

America

tomorrow yesterday rip rape  
exacerbate despoil disfigure  
crazy running threat the  
deadly thrall  
appall belief dispel  
the wildlife burn the breast  
the onward tongue  
the outward hand  
deform the normal rainy  
riot sunshine shelter wreck  
of darkness derogate  
delimit blank  
explode deprive  
assassinate and batten up  
like bullets fatten up  
the raving greed  
reactivate a springtime  
terrorizing

death by men by more  
than you or I can

STOP

*II*

They sleep who know a regulated place  
or pulse or tide or changing sky  
according to some universal  
stage direction obvious  
like shorewashed shells

we share an afternoon of mourning  
in between no next predictable  
except for wild reversal hearse rehearsal  
bleach the blacklong lunging  
ritual of fright insanity and more  
deplorable abortion  
more and  
more

## Poem for Haruko

By [June Jordan](#)

I never thought I'd keep a record of my pain  
or happiness  
like candles lighting the entire soft lace  
of the air  
around the full length of your hair/a shower  
organized by God  
in brown and auburn  
undulations luminous like particles  
of flame

But now I do  
retrieve an afternoon of apricots  
and water interspersed with cigarettes  
and sand and rocks  
we walked across:  
                    How easily you held  
my hand  
beside the low tide  
of the world

Now I do  
relive an evening of retreat

a bridge I left behind  
where all the solid heat  
of lust and tender trembling  
lay as cruel and as kind  
as passion spins its infinite  
tergiversations in between the bitter  
and the sweet

Alone and longing for you  
now I do

# Mimesis

By Fady Joudah

My daughter                      wouldn't hurt a spider  
That had nested  
Between her bicycle handles  
For two weeks  
She waited  
Until it left of its own accord

If you tear down the web I said  
It will simply know  
This isn't a place to call home  
And you'd get to go biking

She said that's how others  
Become refugees isn't it?

## Brother, I've seen some

By Kabir

Translated by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra

Brother, I've seen some  
Astonishing sights:  
A lion keeping watch  
Over pasturing cows;  
A mother delivered  
After her son was;  
A guru prostrated  
Before his disciple;  
Fish spawning  
On treetops;

A cat carrying away  
A dog;  
A gunny-sack  
Driving a bullock-cart;  
A buffalo going out to graze,  
Sitting on a horse;  
A tree with its branches in the earth,  
Its roots in the sky;  
A tree with flowering roots.

This verse, says Kabir,  
Is your key to the universe.  
If you can figure it out.

## **I won't come**

By [Kabir](#)

Translated by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra

I won't come  
I won't go  
I won't live  
I won't die

I'll keep uttering  
The name  
And lose myself  
In it

I'm bowl  
And I'm platter  
I'm man  
And I'm woman

I'm grapefruit  
And I'm sweet lime  
I'm Hindu  
And I'm Muslim

I'm fish  
And I'm net  
I'm fisherman  
And I'm time

I'm nothing  
Says Kabir

I'm not among the living  
Or the dead

## **Another One of the World's Liars**

By [Mohja Kahf](#)

I am just another one of the world's liars  
believe me  
I have a few charms  
worn-out peddler's trinkets  
with grand names like beauty  
friendship, truth, passion  
—and this one's a real item, sometimes  
I even buy it myself: love  
Check my record; odds  
are not in your favor  
that I won't sell out  
my goods, bolt by night  
deny you three times  
before the cock has crowed  
Consider this fair warning:  
never fall for my spiel  
If you do  
and end up with a huge bill  
for damage done  
never forgive me

## **Author's Prayer**

By [Ilya Kaminsky](#)

If I speak for the dead, I must leave  
this animal of my body,

I must write the same poem over and over,  
for an empty page is the white flag of their surrender.

If I speak for them, I must walk on the edge  
of myself, I must live as a blind man

who runs through rooms without  
touching the furniture.

Yes, I live. I can cross the streets asking "What year is it?"  
I can dance in my sleep and laugh

in front of the mirror.  
Even sleep is a prayer, Lord,

I will praise your madness, and  
in a language not mine, speak

of music that wakes us, music  
in which we move. For whatever I say

is a kind of petition, and the darkest  
days must I praise.

## **We Lived Happily During the War**

By [Ilya Kaminsky](#)

And when they bombed other people's houses, we

protested  
but not enough, we opposed them but not

enough. I was  
in my bed, around my bed America

was falling: invisible house by invisible house by invisible house.

I took a chair outside and watched the sun.

In the sixth month  
of a disastrous reign in the house of money

in the street of money in the city of money in the country of money,  
our great country of money, we (forgive us)

lived happily during the war.

## **Visitors**

By [Joan Kane](#)

Every door stands an open door:  
our human settlements all temporary.

We share together the incidental shore  
and teach the young to tend the lamp's wick,

weary of anyone small enough to bar our entry.

## All This and More

By [Mary Karr](#)

The Devil's tour of hell did not include  
a factory line where molten lead  
spilled into mouths held wide,

no electric drill spiraling screws  
into hands and feet, nor giant pliers  
to lower you into simmering vats.

Instead, a circle of light  
opened on your stuffed armchair,  
whose chintz orchids did not boil and change,

and the Devil adjusted  
your new spiked antennae  
almost delicately, with claws curled

and lacquered black, before he spread  
his leather wings to leap  
into the acid-green sky.

So your head became a tv hull,  
a gargoyle mirror. Your doppelganger  
sloppy at the mouth

and swollen at the joints  
enacted your days in sinuous  
slow motion, your lines delivered

with a mocking sneer. Sometimes  
the frame froze, reversed, began  
again: the red eyes of a friend

you cursed, your girl child cowered  
behind the drapes, parents alive again  
and puzzled by this new form. That's why

you clawed your way back to this life.

## **“Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art”**

By [John Keats](#)

Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art—  
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night  
And watching, with eternal lids apart,  
Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,  
The moving waters at their priestlike task  
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,  
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask  
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors—  
No—yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,  
Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,  
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,  
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,  
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,  
And so live ever—or else swoon to death.

## **La Belle Dame sans Merci: A Ballad**

By [John Keats](#)

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,  
Alone and palely loitering?  
The sedge has withered from the lake,  
And no birds sing.

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,  
So haggard and so woe-begone?  
The squirrel's granary is full,  
And the harvest's done.

I see a lily on thy brow,  
With anguish moist and fever-dew,  
And on thy cheeks a fading rose  
Fast withereth too.

I met a lady in the meads,  
Full beautiful—a faery's child,  
Her hair was long, her foot was light,  
And her eyes were wild.

I made a garland for her head,  
And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;  
She looked at me as she did love,  
And made sweet moan

I set her on my pacing steed,  
And nothing else saw all day long,  
For sidelong would she bend, and sing  
A faery's song.

She found me roots of relish sweet,  
And honey wild, and manna-dew,  
And sure in language strange she said—  
'I love thee true'.

She took me to her Elfin grot,  
And there she wept and sighed full sore,  
And there I shut her wild wild eyes  
With kisses four.

And there she lullèd me asleep,  
And there I dreamed—Ah! woe betide!—  
The latest dream I ever dreamt  
On the cold hill side.

I saw pale kings and princes too,  
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;  
They cried—'La Belle Dame sans Merci  
Thee hath in thrall!'

I saw their starved lips in the gloam,  
With horrid warning gapèd wide,  
And I awoke and found me here,  
On the cold hill's side.

And this is why I sojourn here,  
Alone and palely loitering,  
Though the sedge is withered from the lake,  
And no birds sing.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud participants and judges: in this poem's third-to-last stanza, recitations that include "Hath thee in thrall!" or "Thee hath in thrall!" are both acceptable.*

## To Autumn

By [John Keats](#)

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,  
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;  
Conspiring with him how to load and bless

With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;  
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,  
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;  
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells  
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,  
And still more, later flowers for the bees,  
Until they think warm days will never cease,  
For summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?  
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find  
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,  
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;  
Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,  
Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook  
Spare the next swath and all its twined flowers:  
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep  
Steady thy laden head across a brook;  
Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,  
Thou watchest the last oozy hours by hours.

Where are the songs of spring? Ay, Where are they?  
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—  
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,  
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;  
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn  
Among the river shallows, borne aloft  
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;  
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;  
Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft  
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;  
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

## **When I have Fears That I May Cease to Be**

By [John Keats](#)

When I have fears that I may cease to be  
Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain,  
Before high-pilèd books, in charactery,  
Hold like rich garners the full ripened grain;  
When I behold, upon the night's starred face,  
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,  
And think that I may never live to trace  
Their shadows with the magic hand of chance;  
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,

That I shall never look upon thee more,  
Never have relish in the faery power  
Of unreflecting love—then on the shore  
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think  
Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.

## Oranges

By [Roisin Kelly](#)

I'll choose for myself next time  
who I'll reach out and take  
as mine, in the way  
I might stand at a fruit stall

having decided  
to ignore the apples  
the mangoes and the kiwis  
but hold my hands above

a pile of oranges  
as if to warm my skin  
before a fire.  
Not only have I chosen

oranges, but I'll also choose  
which orange — I'll test  
a few for firmness  
scrape some rind off

with my fingernail  
so that a citrus scent  
will linger there all day.  
I won't be happy

with the first one I pick  
but will try different ones  
until I know you. How  
will I know you?

You'll feel warm  
between my palms  
and I'll cup you like  
a handful of holy water.

A vision will come to me

of your exotic land: the sun  
you swelled under  
the tree you grew from.

A drift of white blossoms  
from the orange tree  
will settle in my hair  
and I'll know.

This is how I will choose  
you: by feeling you  
smelling you, by slipping  
you into my coat.

Maybe then I'll climb  
the hill, look down  
on the town we live in  
with sunlight on my face

and a miniature sun  
burning a hole in my pocket.  
Thirsty, I'll suck the juice  
from it. From you.

When I walk away  
I'll leave behind a trail  
of lamp-bright rind.

## Sonnet

By [Frances Anne Kemble](#)

Cover me with your everlasting arms,  
Ye guardian giants of this solitude!  
From the ill-sight of men, and from the rude,  
Tumultuous din of yon wild world's alarms!  
Oh, knit your mighty limbs around, above,  
And close me in for ever! let me dwell  
With the wood spirits, in the darkest cell  
That ever with your verdant locks ye wove.  
The air is full of countless voices, joined  
In one eternal hymn; the whispering wind,  
The shuddering leaves, the hidden water springs,  
The work-song of the bees, whose honeyed wings  
Hang in the golden tresses of the lime,  
Or buried lie in purple beds of thyme.

# For Allen Ginsberg

By [X. J. Kennedy](#)

Ginsberg, Ginsberg, burning bright,  
Taunter of the ultra right,  
What blink of the Buddha's eye  
Chose the day for you to die?

Queer pied piper, howling wild,  
Mantra-minded flower child,  
Queen of Maytime, misrule's lord  
Bawling, *Drop out! All aboard!*

Finger-cymbaled, chanting *Om*,  
Foe of fascist, bane of bomb,  
Proper poets' thorn-in-side,  
Turner of a whole time's tide,

Who can fill your sloppy shoes?  
What a catch for Death. We lose  
Glee and sweetness, freaky light,  
Ginsberg, Ginsberg, burning bright.

# Nude Descending a Staircase

By [X. J. Kennedy](#)

Toe after toe, a snowing flesh,  
a gold of lemon, root and rind,  
she sifts in sunlight down the stairs  
with nothing on. Nor on her mind.

We spy beneath the banister  
a constant thresh of thigh on thigh;  
her lips imprint the swinging air  
that parts to let her parts go by.

One-woman waterfall, she wears  
her slow descent like a long cape  
and pausing on the final stair,  
collects her motions into shape.

# Old Men Pitching Horseshoes

By [X. J. Kennedy](#)

Back in a yard where ringers groove a ditch,  
These four in shirtsleeves congregate to pitch  
Dirt-burnished iron. With appraising eye,  
One sizes up a peg, hoists and lets fly—  
A clang resounds as though a smith had struck  
Fire from a forge. His first blow, out of luck,  
Rattles in circles. Hitching up his face,  
He swings, and weight once more inhabits space,  
Tumbles as gently as a new-laid egg.  
Extended iron arms surround their peg  
Like one come home to greet a long-lost brother.  
Shouts from one outpost. Mutters from the other.

Now changing sides, each withered pitcher moves  
As his considered dignity behooves  
Down the worn path of earth where August flies  
And sheaves of air in warm distortions rise,  
To stand ground, fling, kick dust with all the force  
Of shoes still hammered to a living horse.

# Happiness

By [Jane Kenyon](#)

There's just no accounting for happiness,  
or the way it turns up like a prodigal  
who comes back to the dust at your feet  
having squandered a fortune far away.

And how can you not forgive?  
You make a feast in honor of what  
was lost, and take from its place the finest  
garment, which you saved for an occasion  
you could not imagine, and you weep night and day  
to know that you were not abandoned,  
that happiness saved its most extreme form  
for you alone.

No, happiness is the uncle you never  
knew about, who flies a single-engine plane  
onto the grassy landing strip, hitchhikes  
into town, and inquires at every door  
until he finds you asleep midafternoon

as you so often are during the unmerciful  
hours of your despair.

It comes to the monk in his cell.  
It comes to the woman sweeping the street  
with a birch broom, to the child  
whose mother has passed out from drink.  
It comes to the lover, to the dog chewing  
a sock, to the pusher, to the basketmaker,  
and to the clerk stacking cans of carrots  
in the night.

It even comes to the boulder  
in the perpetual shade of pine barrens,  
to rain falling on the open sea,  
to the wineglass, weary of holding wine.

## Let Evening Come

By [Jane Kenyon](#)

Let the light of late afternoon  
shine through chinks in the barn, moving  
up the bales as the sun moves down.

Let the cricket take up chafing  
as a woman takes up her needles  
and her yarn. Let evening come.

Let dew collect on the hoe abandoned  
in long grass. Let the stars appear  
and the moon disclose her silver horn.

Let the fox go back to its sandy den.  
Let the wind die down. Let the shed  
go black inside. Let evening come.

To the bottle in the ditch, to the scoop  
in the oats, to air in the lung  
let evening come.

Let it come, as it will, and don't  
be afraid. God does not leave us  
comfortless, so let evening come.

# Not Here

By [Jane Kenyon](#)

Searching for pillowcases trimmed  
with lace that my mother-in-law  
once made, I open the chest of drawers  
upstairs to find that mice  
have chewed the blue and white linen  
dishtowels to make their nest,  
and bedded themselves  
among embroidered dresser scarves  
and fingertip towels.

Tufts of fibers, droppings like black  
caraway seeds, and the stains of birth  
and afterbirth give off the strong  
unforgettable attar of mouse  
that permeates an old farmhouse  
on humid summer days.

A couple of hickory nuts  
roll around as I lift out  
the linens, while a hail of black  
sunflower shells  
falls on the pillowcases,  
yellow with age, but intact.  
I'll bleach them and hang them in the sun  
to dry. There's almost no one left  
who knows how to crochet lace....

The bright-eyed squatters are not here.  
They've scuttled out to the fields  
for summer, as they scuttled in  
for winter—along the wall, from chair  
to skirted chair, making themselves  
flat and scarce while the cat  
dozed with her paws in the air,  
and we read the mail  
or evening paper, unaware.

# Pastoral Dialogue

By [Anne Killigrew](#)

Remember when you love, from that same hour  
Your peace you put into your lover's power;

From that same hour from him you laws receive,  
And as he shall ordain, you joy, or grieve,  
Hope, fear, laugh, weep; Reason aloof does stand,  
Disabled both to act, and to command.  
Oh cruel fetters! rather wish to feel  
On your soft limbs, the galling weight of steel;  
Rather to bloody wounds oppose your breast.  
No ill, by which the body can be pressed  
You will so sensible a torment find  
As shackles on your captived mind.  
The mind from heaven its high descent did draw,  
And brooks uneasily any other law  
Than what from Reason dictated shall be.  
Reason, a kind of innate deity,  
Which only can adapt to ev'ry soul  
A yoke so fit and light, that the control  
All liberty excels; so sweet a sway,  
The same 'tis to be happy, and obey;  
Commands so wise, and with rewards so dressed,  
That the according soul replies "I'm blessed."

## Slant

By [Suji Kwock Kim](#)

If the angle of an eye is all,  
the slant of hope, the slant of dreaming, according to each life,  
what is the light of this city,  
light of Lady Liberty, possessor of the most famous armpit in the world,  
light of the lovers on Chinese soap operas, throwing BBQ'd ducks at each other  
with that live-it-up-while-you're-young, Woo Me kind  
of love,  
light of the old men sitting on crates outside geegaw shops  
selling dried seahorses & plastic Temples of Heaven,  
light of the Ying 'n' Yang Junk Palace,  
light of the Golden Phoenix Hair Salon, light of Wig-o-ramas,  
light of the suntanners in Central Park turning over like rotisserie chickens sizzling on a spit,  
light of the Pluck U & Gone with the Wings fried-chicken shops,  
the parking-meter-leaners, the Glamazons,  
the oglers wearing fern-wilting quantities of cologne, strutting, trash-talking, glorious:  
the immigrants, the refugees, the peddlars, stockbrokers and janitors, stenographers and  
cooks,  
all of us making and unmaking ourselves,  
hurrying forwards, toward who we'll become, one way only, one life only:  
free in time but not from it,  
here in the city the living make together, and make and unmake over and over

Quick, quick, ask heaven of it, of every mortal relation,  
feeling that is fleeing,  
for what would the heart be without a heaven to set it on?  
I can't help thinking no word will ever be as full of life as this world,  
I can't help thinking of thanks.

## **Saint Francis and the Sow**

By [Galway Kinnell](#)

The bud  
stands for all things,  
even for those things that don't flower,  
for everything flowers, from within, of self-blessing;  
though sometimes it is necessary  
to reteach a thing its loveliness,  
to put a hand on its brow  
of the flower  
and retell it in words and in touch  
it is lovely  
until it flowers again from within, of self-blessing;  
as Saint Francis  
put his hand on the creased forehead  
of the sow, and told her in words and in touch  
blessings of earth on the sow, and the sow  
began remembering all down her thick length,  
from the earthen snout all the way  
through the fodder and slops to the spiritual curl of the tail,  
from the hard spininess spiked out from the spine  
down through the great broken heart  
to the sheer blue milken dreaminess spurting and shuddering  
from the fourteen teats into the fourteen mouths sucking and blowing beneath them:  
the long, perfect loveliness of sow.

## **Drowning in Wheat**

By [John Kinsella](#)

They'd been warned  
on every farm  
that playing  
in the silos  
would lead to death.  
You sink in wheat.  
Slowly. And the more  
you struggle the worse it gets.

‘You’ll see a rat sail past  
your face, nimble on its turf,  
and then you’ll disappear.’  
In there, hard work  
has no reward.  
So it became a kind of test  
to see how far they could sink  
without needing a rope  
to help them out.  
But in the midst of play  
rituals miss a beat—like both  
leaping in to resolve  
an argument  
as to who’d go first  
and forgetting  
to attach the rope.  
Up to the waist  
and afraid to move.  
That even a call for help  
would see the wheat  
trickle down.  
The painful consolidation  
of time. The grains  
in the hourglass  
grotesquely swollen.  
And that acrid  
chemical smell  
of treated wheat  
coaxing them into  
a near-dead sleep.

## **The City of Sleep**

By [Rudyard Kipling](#)

Over the edge of the purple down,  
Where the single lamplight gleams,  
Know ye the road to the Merciful Town  
That is hard by the Sea of Dreams –  
Where the poor may lay their wrongs away,  
And the sick may forget to weep?  
But we – pity us! Oh, pity us!  
We wakeful; ah, pity us! –  
We must go back with Policeman Day –  
Back from the City of Sleep!

Weary they turn from the scroll and crown,  
Fetter and prayer and plough –  
They that go up to the Merciful Town,  
For her gates are closing now.  
It is their right in the Baths of Night  
Body and soul to steep,  
But we – pity us! ah, pity us!  
We wakeful; oh, pity us! –  
We must go back with Policeman Day –  
Back from the City of Sleep!

Over the edge of the purple down,  
Ere the tender dreams begin,  
Look – we may look – at the Merciful Town,  
But we may not enter in!  
Outcasts all, from her guarded wall  
Back to our watch we creep:  
We – pity us! ah, pity us!  
We wakeful; ah, pity us! –  
We that go back with Policeman Day –  
Back from the City of Sleep!

## **Harp Song of the Dane Women**

By [Rudyard Kipling](#)

*“The Knights of the Joyous Venture”—Puck of Pook’s Hill*

What is a woman that you forsake her,  
And the hearth-fire and the home-acre,  
To go with the old grey Widow-maker?

She has no house to lay a guest in—  
But one chill bed for all to rest in,  
That the pale suns and the stray bergs nest in.

She has no strong white arms to fold you,  
But the ten-times-fingering weed to hold you—  
Out on the rocks where the tide has rolled you.

Yet, when the signs of summer thicken,  
And the ice breaks, and the birch-buds quicken,  
Yearly you turn from our side, and sicken—

Sicken again for the shouts and the slaughters.  
You steal away to the lapping waters,

And look at your ship in her winter-quarters.

You forget our mirth, and talk at the tables,  
The kine in the shed and the horse in the stables—  
To pitch her sides and go over her cables.

Then you drive out where the storm-clouds swallow,  
And the sound of your oar-blades, falling hollow,  
Is all we have left through the months to follow.

Ah, what is Woman that you forsake her,  
And the hearth-fire and the home-acre,  
To go with the old grey Widow-maker ?

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Broken Promises

By [David Kirby](#)

I have met them in dark alleys, limping and one-armed;  
I have seen them playing cards under a single light-bulb  
and tried to join in, but they refused me rudely,  
knowing I would only let them win.  
I have seen them in the foyers of theaters,  
coming back late from the interval

long after the others have taken their seats,  
and in deserted shopping malls late at night,  
peering at things they can never buy,  
and I have found them wandering  
in a wood where I too have wandered.

This morning I caught one;  
small and stupid, too slow to get away,  
it was only a promise I had made to myself once  
and then forgot, but it screamed and kicked at me  
and ran to join the others, who looked at me with reproach  
in their long, sad faces.  
When I drew near them, they scurried away,  
even though they will sleep in my yard tonight.  
I hate them for their ingratitude,  
I who have kept countless promises,  
as dead now as Shakespeare's children.  
"You bastards," I scream,

“you have to love me—I gave you life!”

## Through a Glass Eye, Lightly

By [Carolyn Kizer](#)

In the laboratory waiting room  
containing  
one television actor with a teary face  
trying a contact lens;  
two muscular victims of industrial accidents;  
several vain women—I was one of them—  
came Deborah, four, to pick up her glass eye.

It was a long day:  
Deborah waiting for the blood vessels  
painted  
on her iris to dry.  
Her mother said that, holding Deborah  
when she was born,  
“First I inspected her, from toes to navel,  
then stopped at her head ...”  
We wondered why  
the inspection hadn’t gone the other way.  
“Looking into her eye  
was like looking into a volcano:

“Her vacant pupil  
went whirling down, down to the foundation  
of the world ...  
When she was three months old they took it out.  
She giggled when she went under  
the anaesthetic.  
Forty-five minutes later she came back  
happy! ...  
The gas wore off, she found the hole in her face  
(you know, it never bled?),  
stayed happy, even when I went to pieces.  
She’s five, in June.

“Deborah, you get right down  
from there, or I’ll have to slap!”  
Laughing, Deborah climbed into the lap  
of one vain lady, who  
had been discontented with her own beauty.  
Now she held on to Deborah, looked her steadily

in the empty eye.

## Squirrels

By [Nate Klug](#)

Something blurred, warmed  
in the eye's corner, like woodsmoke  
becoming tears;  
but when you turned to look

the stoop was still, the pumpkin  
and tacky mum pot wouldn't talk —  
just a rattle  
at the gutter and a sense

of curtains, somewhere, pulled.  
Five of them later, scarfing the oak's  
black bole,  
laying a dream of snakes.

Needy and reticent  
at once, these squirrels in charred November  
recall, in Virgil,  
what it is to feel:

moods, half-moods,  
swarming, then darting loose; obscure  
hunches that refuse  
to speak, but still expect

in some flash of luck  
to be revealed. The less you try  
to notice them,  
the more they will know of you.

## The Sun Came

By [Etheridge Knight](#)

And if sun comes  
How shall we greet him?  
—*Gwen Brooks*

The sun came, Miss Brooks,—  
After all the night years.

He came spitting fire from his lips.  
And we flipped—We goofed the whole thing.  
It looks like our ears were not equipped  
For the fierce hammering.

And now the Sun has gone, has bled red,  
Weeping behind the hills.  
Again the night shadows form.  
But beneath the placid face a storm rages.  
The rays of Red have pierced the deep, have struck  
The core. We cannot sleep.  
The shadows sing: Malcolm, Malcolm, Malcolm.  
The darkness ain't like before.

The Sun came, Miss Brooks.  
And we goofed the whole thing.  
I think.  
(Though ain't no vision visited my cell.)

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Poem for My Twentieth Birthday

By [Kenneth Koch](#)

Passing the American graveyard, for my birthday  
the crosses stuttering, white on tropical green,  
the years' quick focus of faces I do not remember . . .

The palm trees stalking like deliberate giants  
for my birthday, and all the hot adolescent memories  
seen through a screen of water . . .

For my birthday thrust into the adult and actual:  
expected to perform the action, not to ponder  
the reality beyond the fact,  
the man standing upright in the dream.

## bug's psalm

By [Rodney Koeneke](#)

The bug's psalm: don't get crushed.  
Afterlives feel meaningless  
but spring will come,

push out the nubs  
the kids braid into pallets.  
Take up your pallet  
from lawns noon's hardly touched.  
The small think gods  
just loll on clouds.  
Bugs think gods just crush.

## Camouflaging the Chimera

By [Yusef Komunyakaa](#)

We tied branches to our helmets.  
We painted our faces & rifles  
with mud from a riverbank,

blades of grass hung from the pockets  
of our tiger suits. We wove  
ourselves into the terrain,  
content to be a hummingbird's target.

We hugged bamboo & leaned  
against a breeze off the river,  
slow-dragging with ghosts

from Saigon to Bangkok,  
with women left in doorways  
reaching in from America.  
We aimed at dark-hearted songbirds.

In our way station of shadows  
rock apes tried to blow our cover,  
throwing stones at the sunset. Chameleons

crawled our spines, changing from day  
to night: green to gold,  
gold to black. But we waited  
till the moon touched metal,

till something almost broke  
inside us. VC struggled  
with the hillside, like black silk

wrestling iron through grass.  
We weren't there. The river ran  
through our bones. Small animals took refuge

against our bodies; we held our breath,

ready to spring the L-shaped  
ambush, as a world revolved  
under each man's eyelid.

## Crossing a City Highway

By [Yusef Komunyakaa](#)

The city at 3 a.m. is an ungodly mask  
the approaching day hides behind  
& from, the coyote nosing forth,  
the muscles of something ahead,

& a fiery blaze of eighteen-wheelers  
zoom out of the curved night trees,  
along the rim of absolute chance.  
A question hangs in the oily air.

She knows he will follow her scent  
left in the poisoned grass & buzz  
of chainsaws, if he can unweave  
a circle of traps around the subdivision.

For a breathy moment, she stops  
on the world's edge, & then quick as that  
masters the stars & again slips the noose  
& darts straight between sedans & SUVs.

Don't try to hide from her kind of blues  
or the dead nomads who walked trails  
now paved by wanderlust, an epoch  
somewhere between tamed & wild.

If it were Monday instead of Sunday  
the outcome may be different,  
but she's now in Central Park  
searching for a Seneca village

among painted stones & shrubs,  
where she's never been, & lucky  
she hasn't forgotten how to jig  
& kill her way home.

# Dead Reckoning III

By [Yusef Komunyakaa](#)

They work fingers to bone & borrow  
smudged paper, then make promises  
to family, unmerciful gods, the unborn.  
Some eat a favorite meal three times  
in a row. Others partake only a pinch  
of soil before boarding half-broken boats  
& rubber rafts — half of the young women  
big with life inside them, flesh & blood  
for daydreams of the Arabian nights,  
as makeshift charts & constellations  
work their way through war & rumors  
of war. The smugglers count their loot.  
Hard winds rattle gongs over sea salt  
till the rusty engines die, & cries alert  
mermaid sirens as pirated schooners  
adrift under a mute sky rock to & fro,  
& the fight goes out of the few alive.  
Their loved ones & friends, lost folk  
songs, mountains & valleys, all left  
behind. Searchlights spot the dead  
hugging the living, & draglines raise  
only those who were braver than us.  
The lucky ones stumble out of stupor,  
tried by raging water beneath black  
skies, listening to the albatross talk.

## Kindness

By [Yusef Komunyakaa](#)

*For Carol Rigolot*

When deeds splay before us  
precious as gold & unused chances  
stripped from the whine-bone,  
we know the moment kindheartedness  
walks in. Each praise be  
echoes us back as the years uncount  
themselves, eating salt. Though blood  
first shaped us on the climbing wheel,  
the human mind lit by the savanna's  
ice star & thistle rose,  
your knowing gaze enters a room

& opens the day,  
saying we were made for fun.  
Even the bedazzled brute knows  
when sunlight falls through leaves  
across honed knives on the table.  
If we can see it push shadows  
aside, growing closer, are we less  
broken? A barometer, temperature  
gauge, a ruler in minus fractions  
& pedigrees, a thingmajig,  
a probe with an all-seeing eye,  
what do we need to measure  
kindness, every unheld breath,  
every unkind leapyear?  
Sometimes a sober voice is enough  
to calm the waters & drive away  
the false witnesses, saying, Look,  
here are the broken treaties Beauty  
brought to us earthbound sentinels.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Rock Me, Mercy

By [Yusef Komunyakaa](#)

The river stones are listening  
because we have something to say.  
The trees lean closer today.  
The singing in the electrical woods  
has gone dumb. It looks like rain  
because it is too warm to snow.  
Guardian angels, wherever you're hiding,  
we know you can't be everywhere at once.  
Have you corralled all the pretty wild  
horses? The memory of ants asleep  
in daylilies, roses, holly, & larkspur.  
The magpies gaze at us, still  
waiting. River stones are listening.  
But all we can say now is,  
Mercy, please, rock me.

# Abandoned Farmhouse

By [Ted Kooser](#)

He was a big man, says the size of his shoes  
on a pile of broken dishes by the house;  
a tall man too, says the length of the bed  
in an upstairs room; and a good, God-fearing man,  
says the Bible with a broken back  
on the floor below the window, dusty with sun;  
but not a man for farming, say the fields  
cluttered with boulders and the leaky barn.

A woman lived with him, says the bedroom wall  
papered with lilacs and the kitchen shelves  
covered with oilcloth, and they had a child,  
says the sandbox made from a tractor tire.  
Money was scarce, say the jars of plum preserves  
and canned tomatoes sealed in the cellar hole.  
And the winters cold, say the rags in the window frames.  
It was lonely here, says the narrow country road.

Something went wrong, says the empty house  
in the weed-choked yard. Stones in the fields  
say he was not a farmer; the still-sealed jars  
in the cellar say she left in a nervous haste.  
And the child? Its toys are strewn in the yard  
like branches after a storm—a rubber cow,  
a rusty tractor with a broken plow,  
a doll in overalls. Something went wrong, they say.

# In the Basement of the Goodwill Store

By [Ted Kooser](#)

In musty light, in the thin brown air  
of damp carpet, doll heads and rust,  
beneath long rows of sharp footfalls  
like nails in a lid, an old man stands  
trying on glasses, lifting each pair  
from the box like a glittering fish  
and holding it up to the light  
of a dirty bulb. Near him, a heap  
of enameled pans as white as skulls  
looms in the catacomb shadows,  
and old toilets with dry red throats  
cough up bouquets of curtain rods.

You've seen him somewhere before.  
He's wearing the green leisure suit  
you threw out with the garbage,  
and the Christmas tie you hated,  
and the ventilated wingtip shoes  
you found in your father's closet  
and wore as a joke. And the glasses  
which finally fit him, through which  
he looks to see you looking back—  
two mirrors which flash and glance—  
are those through which one day  
you too will look down over the years,  
when you have grown old and thin  
and no longer particular,  
and the things you once thought  
you were rid of forever  
have taken you back in their arms.

## **So This is Nebraska**

By [Ted Kooser](#)

The gravel road rides with a slow gallop  
over the fields, the telephone lines  
streaming behind, its billow of dust  
full of the sparks of redwing blackbirds.

On either side, those dear old ladies,  
the loosening barns, their little windows  
dulled by cataracts of hay and cobwebs  
hide broken tractors under their skirts.

So this is Nebraska. A Sunday  
afternoon; July. Driving along  
with your hand out squeezing the air,  
a meadowlark waiting on every post.

Behind a shelterbelt of cedars,  
top-deep in hollyhocks, pollen and bees,  
a pickup kicks its fenders off  
and settles back to read the clouds.

You feel like that; you feel like letting  
your tires go flat, like letting the mice  
build a nest in your muffler, like being

no more than a truck in the weeds,

clucking with chickens or sticky with honey  
or holding a skinny old man in your lap  
while he watches the road, waiting  
for someone to wave to. You feel like

waving. You feel like stopping the car  
and dancing around on the road. You wave  
instead and leave your hand out gliding  
larklike over the wheat, over the houses.

## Nurture

By [Maxine Kuman](#)

From a documentary on marsupials I learn  
that a pillowcase makes a fine  
substitute pouch for an orphaned kangaroo.

I am drawn to such dramas of animal rescue.  
They are warm in the throat. I suffer, the critic proclaims,  
from an overabundance of maternal genes.

Bring me your fallen fledgling, your bummer lamb,

lead the abused, the starvelings, into my barn.  
Advise the hunted deer to leap into my corn.

And had there been a wild child—  
*filthy and fierce as a ferret*, he is called  
in one nineteenth-century account—

a wild child to love, it is safe to assume,  
given my fireside inked with paw prints,  
there would have been room.

Think of the language we two, same and not-same,  
might have constructed from sign,  
scratch, grimace, grunt, vowel:

Laughter our first noun, and our long verb, howl.

## End of Summer

By [Stanley Kunitz](#)

An agitation of the air, A perturbation of the light  
Admonished me the unloved year  
Would turn on its hinge that night.

I stood in the disenchanted field  
Amid the stubble and the stones,  
Amazed, while a small worm lisped to me  
The song of my marrow-bones.

Blue poured into summer blue,  
A hawk broke from his cloudless tower,  
The roof of the silo blazed, and I knew  
That part of my life was over.

Already the iron door of the north  
Clangs open: birds, leaves, snows  
Order their populations forth,  
And a cruel wind blows.

## I Dreamed That I Was Old

By [Stanley Kunitz](#)

I dreamed that I was old: in stale declension  
Fallen from my prime, when company  
Was mine, cat-nimbleness, and green invention,  
Before time took my leafy hours away.

My wisdom, ripe with body's ruin, found  
Itself tart recompense for what was lost  
In false exchange: since wisdom in the ground  
Has no apocalypse or pentecost.

I wept for my youth, sweet passionate young thought,  
And cozy women dead that by my side  
Once lay: I wept with bitter longing, not  
Remembering how in my youth I cried.

## The Layers

By [Stanley Kunitz](#)

I have walked through many lives, some of them my own,

and I am not who I was,  
though some principle of being  
abides, from which I struggle  
not to stray.  
When I look behind,  
as I am compelled to look  
before I can gather strength  
to proceed on my journey,  
I see the milestones dwindling  
toward the horizon  
and the slow fires trailing  
from the abandoned camp-sites,  
over which scavenger angels  
wheel on heavy wings.  
Oh, I have made myself a tribe  
out of my true affections,  
and my tribe is scattered!  
How shall the heart be reconciled  
to its feast of losses?  
In a rising wind  
the manic dust of my friends,  
those who fell along the way,  
bitterly stings my face.  
Yet I turn, I turn,  
exulting somewhat,  
with my will intact to go  
wherever I need to go,  
and every stone on the road  
precious to me.  
In my darkest night,  
when the moon was covered  
and I roamed through wreckage,  
a nimbus-clouded voice  
directed me:  
“Live in the layers,  
not on the litter.”  
Though I lack the art  
to decipher it,  
no doubt the next chapter  
in my book of transformations  
is already written.  
I am not done with my changes.

## Found on the Pond Deck

By [Petra Kuppers](#)

The husk of a tiny dragonfly, translucent,  
clings upside down on a yellow spear of grass  
its roots clasp the dry wood of the deck.  
Tiny white fibers everywhere: the planks, breathing,  
expectorate their innards, wood weeps and uncoils  
what it knew when it stood, tall in a wet Redwood forest,  
before the chains of a truckbed, dark and long, bite, here,  
where all trees are twisted into themselves against  
the prevailing winds. On that white-spun deck,  
I remember my watery nature, pour my liquid body  
to wash away the pain of the shorter years,  
to wash away the pain of a hollow embrace,  
the feeling that we all will slide, not into the clear pool,  
but into the murk of a place that should not be settled.

## Summer at North Farm

By [Stephen Kuusisto](#)

*Finnish rural life, ca. 1910*

Fires, always fires after midnight,  
the sun depending in the purple birches  
  
and gleaming like a copper kettle.  
By the solstice they'd burned everything,  
  
the bad-luck sleigh, a twisted rocker,  
things "possessed" and not-quite-right.  
  
The bonfire coils and lurches,  
big as a house, and then it settles.  
  
The dancers come, dressed like rainbows  
(if rainbows could be spun),  
  
and linking hands they turn  
to the melancholy fiddles.  
  
A red bird spreads its wings now  
and in the darker days to come.

# Glitch

By [Nick Laird](#)

More than ample a deadfall of one meter eighty to split  
my temple apart on the herringbone parquet and crash  
the operating system, tripping an automated shutdown

in the casing and halting all external workings of the moist  
robot I inhabit at the moment: I am out cold and when  
my eyes roll in again I sit on the edge of the bed and tell

you just how taken I am with the place I'd been, had been  
compelled to leave, airlifted mid-gesture, mid-sentence, risen  
of a sudden like a bubble or its glisten or a victim snatched

and bundled out, helplessly, from sunlight, the usual day,  
and all particulars of life there fled except the sense that stays  
with me for hours and hours that I was valuable and needed there.

# Silhouettes

By [Kien Lam](#)

A crow perches inside me.

Actually, it is a whale. It is hard to tell  
by touch alone. Nothing I own ever looks  
me properly in the eye. Sometimes

a loud caw at dusk feels  
like the largest mammal on Earth.

A deep breath out the blowhole

into my stomach. One second it swims  
and the next it is a small extension  
of a tree. This is a kind of beginning—

a finger puppet show. The light  
dancing around my hands.

Me dancing alone on a stem.

A persimmon blooms.  
A boy learns a song and plants it  
in an orchard. Inside of me

the large creatures change their shapes  
to fit. A blackbird. An organ.

Animals with no names. I send them off  
into the world daily. Little *sadness*  
takes flight. *Love* is a brave child.

These things take the shape  
of their containers.

I don't have to do anything  
to hold them.

## Thoughtless Cruelty

By [Charles Lamb](#)

There, Robert, you have kill'd that fly — ,  
And should you thousand ages try  
The life you've taken to supply,  
You could not do it.

You surely must have been devoid  
Of thought and sense, to have destroy'd  
A thing which no way you annoy'd —  
You'll one day rue it.

Tw'as but a fly perhaps you'll say,  
That's born in April, dies in May;  
That does but just learn to display  
His wings one minute,

And in the next is vanish'd quite.  
A bird devours it in his flight —  
Or come a cold blast in the night,  
There's no breath in it.

The bird but seeks his proper food —  
And Providence, whose power endu'd  
That fly with life, when it thinks good,  
May justly take it.

But you have no excuses for't —  
A life by Nature made so short,  
Less reason is that you for sport

Should shorter make it.

A fly a little thing you rate —  
But, Robert do not estimate  
A creature's pain by small or great;  
The greatest being

Can have but fibres, nerves, and flesh,  
And these the smallest ones possess,  
Although their frame and structure less  
Escape our seeing.

## Breakfast

By [Mary Lamb](#)

A dinner party, coffee, tea,  
Sandwich, or supper, all may be  
In their way pleasant. But to me  
Not one of these deserves the praise  
That welcomer of new-born days,  
*A breakfast*, merits; ever giving  
Cheerful notice we are living  
Another day refreshed by sleep,  
When its festival we keep.  
Now although I would not slight  
Those kindly words we use 'Good night',  
Yet parting words are words of sorrow,  
And may not vie with sweet 'Good Morrow',  
With which again our friends we greet,  
When in the breakfast-room we meet,  
At the social table round,  
Listening to the lively sound  
Of those notes which never tire,  
Of urn, or kettle on the fire.  
Sleepy Robert never hears  
Or urn, or kettle; he appears  
When all have finished, one by one  
Dropping off, and breakfast done.  
Yet has he too his own pleasure,  
His breakfast hour's his hour of leisure;  
And, left alone, he reads or muses,  
Or else in idle mood he uses  
To sit and watch the venturous fly,  
Where the sugar's piled high,  
Clambering o'er the lumps so white,

Rocky cliffs of sweet delight.

## Envy

By [Mary Lamb](#)

This rose-tree is not made to bear  
The violet blue, nor lily fair,  
Nor the sweet mignonet:  
And if this tree were discontent,  
Or wished to change its natural bent,  
It all in vain would fret.

And should it fret, you would suppose  
It ne'er had seen its own red rose,  
Nor after gentle shower  
Had ever smelled its rose's scent,  
Or it could ne'er be discontent  
With its own pretty flower.

Like such a blind and senseless tree  
As I've imagined this to be,  
All envious persons are:  
With care and culture all may find  
Some pretty flower in their own mind,  
Some talent that is rare.

## The Two Boys

By [Mary Lamb](#)

I saw a boy with eager eye  
Open a book upon a stall,  
And read as he'd devour it all;  
Which when the stall-man did espy,  
Soon to the boy I heard him call,  
'You, Sir, you never buy a book,  
Therefore in one you shall not look.'  
The boy passed slowly on, and with a sigh  
He wished he never had been taught to read,  
Then of the old churl's books he should have had no need.

Of sufferings the poor have many,  
Which never can the rich annoy.  
I soon perceived another boy  
Who looked as if he'd not had any

Food for that day at least, enjoy  
The sight of cold meat in a tavern larder.  
This boy's case, thought I, is surely harder,  
Thus hungry longing, thus without a penny,  
Beholding choice of dainty dressed meat;  
No wonder if he wish he ne'er had learned to eat.

## **The End Game of Bloom**

By [Deborah Landau](#)

Has it turned out we've wasted our time?  
We've wasted our time.

Our magnificent bodies on the dissecting table.  
Our day after tomorrow.  
Our what to do now.

The stink of us so undignified.  
The end game of bloom.

We will lose the sun  
struck and disassembled  
lightly down and crawling like a worm.

This earth it is a banquet and laid on its table we.  
A puncture in the wound room, crude and obvious.

The raving lunatics they are upon us,  
but we are raving too.

## **Revenge**

By [Letitia Elizabeth Landon](#)

Ay, gaze upon her rose-wreathed hair,  
And gaze upon her smile;  
Seem as you drank the very air  
Her breath perfumed the while:

And wake for her the gifted line,  
That wild and witching lay,  
And swear your heart is as a shrine,  
That only owns her sway.

'Tis well: I am revenged at last,—

Mark you that scornful cheek,—  
The eye averted as you pass'd,  
Spoke more than words could speak.

Ay, now by all the bitter tears  
That I have shed for thee,—  
The racking doubts, the burning fears,—  
Avenged they well may be—

By the nights pass'd in sleepless care,  
The days of endless woe;  
All that you taught my heart to bear,  
All that yourself will know.

I would not wish to see you laid  
Within an early tomb;  
I should forget how you betray'd,  
And only weep your doom:

But this is fitting punishment,  
To live and love in vain,—  
Oh my wrung heart, be thou content,  
And feed upon his pain.

Go thou and watch her lightest sigh,—  
Thine own it will not be;  
And bask beneath her sunny eye,—  
It will not turn on thee.

'Tis well: the rack, the chain, the wheel,  
Far better hadst thou proved;  
Ev'n I could almost pity feel,  
For thou art not beloved.

## **The Maid's Lament**

By [Walter Savage Landor](#)

I loved him not; and yet, now he is gone,  
I feel I am alone.  
I check'd him while he spoke; yet, could he speak,  
Alas! I would not check.  
For reasons not to love him once I sought,  
And wearied all my thought  
To vex myself and him: I now would give  
My love could he but live

Who lately lived for me, and, when he found  
    'Twas vain, in holy ground  
He hid his face amid the shades of death.  
    I waste for him my breath  
Who wasted his for me! but mine returns,  
    And this lorn bosom burns  
With stifling heat, heaving it up in sleep,  
    And waking me to weep  
Tears that had melted his soft heart: for years  
    Wept he as bitter tears.  
*Merciful God!* such was his latest prayer,  
    *These may she never share.*  
Quieter is his breath, his breast more cold,  
    Than daisies in the mould,  
Where children spell, athwart the churchyard gate,  
    His name and life's brief date.  
Pray for him, gentle souls, whoe'er you be,  
    And oh! pray too for me!

## The Mower

By [Philip Larkin](#)

The mower stalled, twice; kneeling, I found  
A hedgehog jammed up against the blades,  
Killed. It had been in the long grass.

I had seen it before, and even fed it, once.  
Now I had mauled its unobtrusive world  
Unmendably. Burial was no help:

Next morning I got up and it did not.  
The first day after a death, the new absence  
Is always the same; we should be careful

Of each other, we should be kind  
While there is still time.

## It Isn't Me

By [James Lasdun](#)

*It isn't me*, he'd say,  
stepping out of a landscape  
that offered, he'd thought, the backdrop  
to a plausible existence

until he entered it; *it's just not me*,  
he'd murmur, walking away.

*It's not quite me*, he'd explain,  
apologetic but firm,  
leaving some job they'd found him.  
They found him others: he'd go,  
smiling his smile, putting  
his best foot forward, till again

he'd find himself reluctantly concluding  
that this, too, wasn't him.  
He wanted to get married, make a home,  
unfold a life among his neighbors' lives,  
branching and blossoming like a tree,  
but when it came to it, *it isn't me*

was all he seemed to learn  
from all his diligent forays outward.  
And why it should be so hard  
for someone not so different from themselves,  
to find what they'd found, barely even seeking;  
what gift he'd not been given, what forlorn

charm of his they'd had the luck to lack,  
puzzled them—though not unduly:  
they lived inside their lives so fully  
they couldn't, in the end, believe in him,  
except as some half-legendary figure  
destined, or doomed, to carry on his back

the weight of their own all-but-weightless, stray  
doubts and discomforts. Only sometimes,  
alone in offices or living rooms,  
they'd hear that phrase again: *it isn't me*,  
and wonder, briefly, what they were, and where,  
and feel the strangeness of being there.

## Southern Gothic

By [Rickey Laurentiis](#)

About the dead having available to them  
all breeds of knowledge,  
some pure, others wicked, especially what is  
future, and the history that remains

once the waters recede, revealing the land  
that couldn't reject or contain it, and the land  
that is not new, is indigo, is ancient, lived  
as all the trees that fit and clothe it are lived,  
simple pine, oak, grand magnolia, he said  
they frighten him, that what they hold in their silences  
silences: sometimes a boy will slip  
from his climbing, drown but the myth knows why,  
sometimes a boy will swing with the leaves.

## Dust

By [Dorianne Laux](#)

Someone spoke to me last night,  
told me the truth. Just a few words,  
but I recognized it.  
I knew I should make myself get up,  
write it down, but it was late,  
and I was exhausted from working  
all day in the garden, moving rocks.  
Now, I remember only the flavor —  
not like food, sweet or sharp.  
More like a fine powder, like dust.  
And I wasn't elated or frightened,  
but simply rapt, aware.  
That's how it is sometimes —  
God comes to your window,  
all bright light and black wings,  
and you're just too tired to open it.

## My Darling Turns to Poetry at Night

By [Anthony Lawrence](#)

My darling turns to poetry at night.  
What began as flirtation, an aside  
Between abstract expression and first light

Now finds form as a silent, startled flight  
Of commas on her face — a breath, a word ...  
My darling turns to poetry at night.

When rain inspires the night birds to create  
Rhyme and formal verse, stanzas can be made  
Between abstract expression and first light.

Her heartbeat is a metaphor, a late  
Bloom of red flowers that refuse to fade.  
My darling turns to poetry at night.

I watch her turn. I do not sleep. I wait  
For symbols, for a sign that fear has died  
Between abstract expression and first light.

Her dreams have night vision, and in her sight  
Our bodies leave ghostprints on the bed.  
My darling turns to poetry at night  
Between abstract expression and first light.

## Piano

By [D. H. Lawrence](#)

Softly, in the dusk, a woman is singing to me;  
Taking me back down the vista of years, till I see  
A child sitting under the piano, in the boom of the tingling strings  
And pressing the small, poised feet of a mother who smiles as she sings.

In spite of myself, the insidious mastery of song  
Betrays me back, till the heart of me weeps to belong  
To the old Sunday evenings at home, with winter outside  
And hymns in the cosy parlour, the tinkling piano our guide.

So now it is vain for the singer to burst into clamour  
With the great black piano appassionato. The glamour  
Of childish days is upon me, my manhood is cast  
Down in the flood of remembrance, I weep like a child for the past.

## The New Colossus

By [Emma Lazarus](#)

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,  
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;  
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand  
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame  
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name  
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand  
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command  
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.  
“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she

With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

## **Elegy for Blue**

By [J. T. Ledbetter](#)

Someone must have seen an old dog  
dragging its broken body through  
the wet grass;  
someone should have known it was lost,  
drinking from the old well, then lifting  
its head to the wind off the bottoms,  
and someone might have wanted that dog  
trailing its legs along the ground  
like vines sliding up the creek  
searching for sun;  
but they were not there when the dog  
wandered through Turley's Woods looking  
for food and stopped beneath the thorn trees  
and wrapped its tail around its nose  
until it was covered by falling leaves  
that piled up and up  
until there was no lost dog at all  
to hear the distant voice calling  
through the timber,  
only a tired heart breathing slower,  
and breath, soft as mist, above the leaves.

## **That Everything's Inevitable**

By [Katy Lederer](#)

That everything's inevitable.  
That fate is whatever has already happened.  
The brain, which is an elemental, as sane, as the rest of the processing universe is.  
In this world, I am the surest thing.  
Scrunched-up arms, folded legs, lovely destitute eyes.  
Please insert your spare coins.  
I am filling them up.  
Please insert your spare vision, your vigor, your vim.  
But yet, I am a vatic one.  
As vatic as the Vatican.

In the temper and the tantrum, in the well-kept arboretum  
I am waiting, like an animal,  
For poetry.

## Eating Together

By [Li-Young Lee](#)

In the steamer is the trout  
seasoned with slivers of ginger,  
two sprigs of green onion, and sesame oil.  
We shall eat it with rice for lunch,  
brothers, sister, my mother who will  
taste the sweetest meat of the head,  
holding it between her fingers  
deftly, the way my father did  
weeks ago. Then he lay down  
to sleep like a snow-covered road  
winding through pines older than him,  
without any travelers, and lonely for no one.

## Falling: The Code

By [Li-Young Lee](#)

1.  
Through the night  
the apples  
outside my window  
one by one let go  
their branches and  
drop to the lawn.  
I can't see, but hear  
the stem-snap, the plummet  
through leaves, then  
the final thump against the ground.

Sometimes two  
at once, or one  
right after another.  
During long moments of silence  
I wait  
and wonder about the bruised bodies,  
the terror of diving through air, and  
think I'll go tomorrow  
to find the newly fallen, but they

all look alike lying there  
dewsoaked, disappearing before me.

2.

I lie beneath my window listening  
to the sound of apples dropping in

the yard, a syncopated code I long to know,  
which continues even as I sleep, and dream I know

the meaning of what I hear, each dull  
thud of unseen apple-

body, the earth  
falling to earth

once and forever, over  
and over.

## From Blossoms

By [Li-Young Lee](#)

From blossoms comes  
this brown paper bag of peaches  
we bought from the boy  
at the bend in the road where we turned toward  
signs painted *Peaches*.

From laden boughs, from hands,  
from sweet fellowship in the bins,  
comes nectar at the roadside, succulent  
peaches we devour, dusty skin and all,  
comes the familiar dust of summer, dust we eat.

O, to take what we love inside,  
to carry within us an orchard, to eat  
not only the skin, but the shade,  
not only the sugar, but the days, to hold  
the fruit in our hands, adore it, then bite into  
the round jubilation of peach.

There are days we live  
as if death were nowhere  
in the background; from joy  
to joy to joy, from wing to wing,

from blossom to blossom to  
impossible blossom, to sweet impossible blossom.

## The Gift

By [Li-Young Lee](#)

To pull the metal splinter from my palm  
my father recited a story in a low voice.  
I watched his lovely face and not the blade.  
Before the story ended, he'd removed  
the iron sliver I thought I'd die from.

I can't remember the tale,  
but hear his voice still, a well  
of dark water, a prayer.  
And I recall his hands,  
two measures of tenderness  
he laid against my face,  
the flames of discipline  
he raised above my head.

Had you entered that afternoon  
you would have thought you saw a man  
planting something in a boy's palm,  
a silver tear, a tiny flame.  
Had you followed that boy  
you would have arrived here,  
where I bend over my wife's right hand.

Look how I shave her thumbnail down  
so carefully she feels no pain.  
Watch as I lift the splinter out.  
I was seven when my father  
took my hand like this,  
and I did not hold that shard  
between my fingers and think,  
*Metal that will bury me,*  
christen it Little Assassin,  
Ore Going Deep for My Heart.  
And I did not lift up my wound and cry,  
*Death visited here!*  
I did what a child does  
when he's given something to keep.  
I kissed my father.

# Little Father

By [Li-Young Lee](#)

I buried my father  
in the sky.  
Since then, the birds  
clean and comb him every morning  
and pull the blanket up to his chin  
every night.

I buried my father underground.  
Since then, my ladders  
only climb down,  
and all the earth has become a house  
whose rooms are the hours, whose doors  
stand open at evening, receiving  
guest after guest.  
Sometimes I see past them  
to the tables spread for a wedding feast.

I buried my father in my heart.  
Now he grows in me, my strange son,  
my little root who won't drink milk,  
little pale foot sunk in unheard-of night,  
little clock spring newly wet  
in the fire, little grape, parent to the future  
wine, a son the fruit of his own son,  
little father I ransom with my life.

# Nocturne

By [Li-Young Lee](#)

That scraping of iron on iron when the wind  
rises, what is it? Something the wind won't  
quit with, but drags back and forth.  
Sometimes faint, far, then suddenly, close, just  
beyond the screened door, as if someone there  
squats in the dark honing his wares against  
my threshold. Half steel wire, half metal wing,  
nothing and anything might make this noise  
of saws and rasps, a creaking and groaning  
of bone-growth, or body-death, marriages of rust,  
or ore abraded. Tonight, something bows  
that should not bend. Something stiffens that should  
slide. Something, loose and not right,

rakes or forges itself all night.

## Feasting

By [Joseph O. Legaspi](#)

*Bitaug, Siquijor, Philippines*

Three women dragged the spiky, bulky mass  
onto a bamboo table on the side of an island

road. A raised hunting knife glinted in sunlight,  
then plunged with a breathless gasp, slicing into

the unseen. To a passerby they were a curious  
wall, a swarm of onlookers, barrio children

and younger women, buzzing with a rising  
gleeful cadence as a mother busied herself

with the butchering. Surprisingly, a citrusy,  
sugary scent sweetened the stranger's face

when offered the yellow flesh like thickened  
petals, licorice to the touch, he stood awed

at the monstrous jackfruit, bloodless armadillo  
halved, quartered, sectioned off for feasting.

His tongue tingled ripely. *This country's foreign  
to me*, he continued, *but I'm not foreign to it.*

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Arrhythmia

By [Hailey Leithauser](#)

The heart of a bear is a cloud-shuttered  
mountain. The heart of a mountain's a kiln.  
The white heart of a moth has nineteen white  
chambers. The heart of a swan is a swan.

The heart of a wasp is a prick of plush.  
The heart of a skunk is a mink. The heart

of an owl is part blood and part chalice.  
The fey mouse heart rides a dawdy dust-cart.

The heart of a kestrel hides a house wren  
at nest. The heart of lark is a czar.  
The heart of a scorpion is swidden

and spark. The heart of a shark is a gear.  
*Listen and tell, thrums the grave heart of humans.*  
*Listen well love, for it's pitch dark down here.*

## Fever

By [Hailey Leithauser](#)

The heat so peaked tonight

the moon can't cool

a scum-mucked swimming  
pool, or breeze

emerge to lift the frowsy  
ruff of owls too hot

to hoot, (the mouse and brown  
barn rat astute

enough to know to drop  
and dash) while

on the bunched up,  
corkscrewed sheets of cots

and slumped brass beds,  
the fitful twist

and kink and plead to dream  
a dream of air

as bitter cruel as winter  
gale that scrapes and blows

and gusts the grate  
to luff

the whitened ashes from the coal.

## Mockingbird

By [Hailey Leithauser](#)

No other song  
                    or swoop (part  
            quiver, part swivel and  
            plash) with  
tour de force  
stray the course note  
            liquefactions  
            (its new,  
bawdy air an  
            aria hangs in) en-  
thralls,  
            trills, loops, soars,  
                    startles, out-warbles,  
out-brawns, more  
            juicily,  
            lifts up  
the dawn, outlaws from  
                    sackcloth, the cool  
            sloth of bed sheets,  
                    from pillows  
            and silks  
            and blue-quilted, feminine  
bolsters, fusses  
                    of coverlets;  
                            nips as the switch  
of a juvenile willow, fuzz  
            of a nettle, to  
            window and window  
                    and window and ever  
            toward egress, to  
            flurry, pollen  
and petal shed,  
                    to wet street  
and wet pavement,  
            all sentiment intemperate,  
all sentience  
            ephemeral.

# In California: Morning, Evening, Late January

By [Denise Levertov](#)

Pale, then enkindled,  
light  
advancing,  
emblazoning  
summits of palm and pine,

the dew  
lingering,  
scripture of  
scintillas.

Soon the roar  
of mowers  
cropping the already short  
grass of lawns,

men with long-nozzled  
cylinders of pesticide  
poking at weeds,  
at moss in cracks of cement,

and louder roar  
of helicopters off to spray  
vineyards where *braceros* try  
to hold their breath,

and in the distance, bulldozers, excavators,  
babel of destructive construction.

Banded by deep  
oakshadow, airy  
shadow of eucalyptus,

miner's lettuce,  
tender, untasted,  
and other grass, unmown,  
luxuriant,  
no green more brilliant.

Fragile paradise.

. . . .

At day's end the whole sky,  
vast, unstinting, flooded with transparent  
mauve,  
tint of wisteria,  
cloudless  
over the malls, the industrial parks,  
the homes with the lights going on,  
the homeless arranging their bundles.

. . . .

Who can utter  
the poignance of all that is constantly  
threatened, invaded, expended

and constantly  
nevertheless  
persists in beauty,

tranquil as this young moon  
just risen and slowly  
drinking light  
from the vanished sun.

Who can utter  
the praise of such generosity  
or the shame?

## Pleasures

By [Denise Levertov](#)

I like to find  
what's not found  
at once, but lies

within something of another nature,  
in repose, distinct.  
Gull feathers of glass, hidden

in white pulp: the bones of squid  
which I pull out and lay  
blade by blade on the draining board—

tapered as if for swiftness, to pierce  
the heart, but fragile, substance

belying design.                      Or a fruit, *mamey*,

cased in rough brown peel, the flesh  
rose-amber, and the seed:  
the seed a stone of wood, carved and

polished, walnut-colored, formed  
like a brazilnut, but large,  
large enough to fill  
the hungry palm of a hand.

I like the juicy stem of grass that grows  
within the coarser leaf folded round,  
and the butteryellow glow  
in the narrow flute from which the morning-glory  
opens blue and cool on a hot morning.

## Prisoners

By [Denise Levertov](#)

Though the road turn at last  
to death's ordinary door,  
and we knock there, ready  
to enter and it opens  
easily for us,  
   yet  
all the long journey  
we shall have gone in chains,  
fed on knowledge-apples  
acid and riddled with grubs.

We taste other food that life,  
like a charitable farm-girl,  
holds out to us as we pass—  
but our mouths are puckered,  
a taint of ash on the tongue.

It's not joy that we've lost—  
wildfire, it flares  
in dark or shine as it will.  
What's gone  
is common happiness,  
plain bread we could eat  
with the old apple of knowledge.

That old one—it griped us sometimes,  
but it was firm, tart,  
sometimes delectable ...

The ashen apple of these days  
grew from poisoned soil. We are prisoners  
and must eat  
our ration. All the long road  
in chains, even if, after all,  
we come to  
death's ordinary door, with time  
smiling its ordinary  
long-ago smile.

## **An Anthology of Rain**

By [Phillis Levin](#)

For this you may see no need,  
You may think my aim  
Dead set on something

Devoid of conceivable value:  
An Anthology of Rain,  
A collection of voices

Telling someone somewhere  
What it means to follow a drop  
Traveling to its final place of rest.

But do consider this request  
If you have pressed your nose  
Of any shape against a window,

Odor of metal faint, persistent,  
While a storm cast its cloak  
Over the shoulder of every cloud

In sight. You are free to say  
Whatever crosses your mind  
When you look at the face of time

In the passing of one drop  
Gathering speed, one drop  
Chasing another, racing to reach

A fork in the path, lingering  
Before making a detour to join  
Another, fattening on the way

Until entering a rivulet  
Running to the sill.  
So please accept this invitation:

You are welcome to submit,  
There is no limit to its limit,  
Even the instructions are a breeze

As long as you include  
Nothing about yourself  
Except your name. Your address

Remains unnecessary, for the rain  
Will find you — if you receive it  
It receives you (whether or not

You contribute, a volume  
Is sent). And when you lift  
The collection you may hear,

By opening anywhere, a drop  
And its story reappear  
As air turns to water, water to air.

## Cloud Fishing

By [Phillis Levin](#)

To fish from a cloud in the sky  
You must find a comfortable spot,  
Spend a day looking down  
Patiently, clear-sighted.

Peer at your ceiling:  
Where a light dangles, hook & line  
Could be slipping through.

Under the hull of a boat  
A fish will see things this way,

Looking up while swimming by —

A wavering pole's refraction  
Catching its eye.

What will you catch?  
With what sort of bait?  
Take care or you'll catch yourself,

A fish might say,  
As inescapable skeins of shadow  
Scatter a net  
Over the face of the deep.

## **Lenten Song**

By [Phillis Levin](#)

That the dead are real to us  
Cannot be denied,  
That the living are more real

When they are dead  
Terrifies, that the dead can rise  
As the living do is possible

Is possible to surmise,  
But all the stars cannot come near  
All we meet in an eye.

Flee from me, fear, as soot  
Flies in a breeze, do not burn  
Or settle in my sight,

I've tasted you long enough,  
Let me savor  
Something otherwise.

Who wakes beside me now  
Suits my soul, so I turn to words  
Only to say he changes

Into his robe, rustles a page,  
He raises the lid of the piano  
To release what's born in its cage.

If words come back  
To say they compromise

Or swear again they have died,

There's no news in that, I reply,  
But a music without notes  
These notes comprise, still

As spring beneath us lies,  
Already something otherwise.

## **My Brother the Artist, at Seven**

By [Philip Levine](#)

As a boy he played alone in the fields  
behind our block, six frame houses  
holding six immigrant families,  
the parents speaking only gibberish  
to their neighbors. Without the kids  
they couldn't say "Good morning" and be  
understood. Little wonder  
he learned early to speak to himself,  
to tell no one what truly mattered.  
How much can matter to a kid  
of seven? Everything. The whole world  
can be his. Just after dawn he sneaks  
out to hide in the wild, bleached grasses  
of August and pretends he's grown up,  
someone complete in himself without  
the need for anyone, a warrior  
from the ancient places our fathers  
fled years before, those magic places:  
Kiev, Odessa, the Crimea,  
Port Said, Alexandria, Lisbon,  
the Canaries, Caracas, Galveston.  
In the damp grass he recites the names  
over and over in a hushed voice  
while the sun climbs into the locust tree  
to waken the houses. The husbands leave  
for work, the women return to bed, the kids  
bend to porridge and milk. He advances  
slowly, eyes fixed, an animal or a god,  
while beneath him the earth holds its breath.

# Make a Law So That the Spine Remembers Wings

By [Larry Lewis](#)

So that the truant boy may go steady with the State,  
So that in his spine a memory of wings  
Will make his shoulders tense & bend  
Like a thing already flown  
When the bracelets of another school of love  
Are fastened to his wrists,  
Make a law that doesn't have to wait  
Long until someone comes along to break it.

So that in jail he will have the time to read  
How the king was beheaded & the hawk that rode  
The king's wrist died of a common cold,  
And learn that chivalry persists,  
And what first felt like an insult to the flesh  
Was the blank 'o' of love.  
Put the fun back into punishment.  
Make a law that loves the one who breaks it.

So that no empty court will make a judge recall  
Ice fishing on some overcast bay,  
Shivering in the cold beside his father, it ought  
To be an interesting law,  
The kind of thing that no one can obey,  
A law that whispers "Break me."  
Let the crows roost & caw.  
A good judge is an example to us all.

So that the patrolman can still whistle  
"The Yellow Rose of Texas" through his teeth  
And even show some faint gesture of respect  
While he cuffs the suspect,  
Not ungently, & says things like *ok*,  
*That's it, relax*,  
*It'll go better for you if you don't resist*,  
*Lean back just a little, against me.*

# The Oldest Living Thing in L.A.

By [Larry Lewis](#)

At Wilshire & Santa Monica I saw an opossum  
Trying to cross the street. It was late, the street  
Was brightly lit, the opossum would take

A few steps forward, then back away from the breath  
Of moving traffic. People coming out of the bars  
Would approach, as if to help it somehow.  
It would lift its black lips & show them  
The reddened gums, the long rows of incisors,  
Teeth that went all the way back beyond  
The flames of Troy & Carthage, beyond sheep  
Grazing rock-strewn hills, fragments of ruins  
In the grass at San Vitale. It would back away  
Delicately & smoothly, stepping carefully  
As it always had. It could mangle someone's hand  
In twenty seconds. Mangle it for good. It could  
Sever it completely from the wrist in forty.  
There was nothing to be done for it. Someone  
Or other probably called the LAPD, who then  
Called Animal Control, who woke a driver, who  
Then dressed in mailed gloves, the kind of thing  
Small knights once wore into battle, who gathered  
Together his pole with a noose on the end,  
A light steel net to snare it with, someone who hoped  
The thing would have vanished by the time he got there.

## White Box

By [Frances Leviston](#)

*Of Tribulation, these are They,  
Denoted by the White.  
— Emily Dickinson*

Pained, permanent  
wakefulness

Exposed  
in the split geode

a Santa's grotto  
Jagged milk

quartz crusts  
constitute

every surface —  
a mouth

all teeth  
self-sharpening

like sea urchins' —  
“Uncomfortably beautiful”

toughened glass  
spikes

in the doorways  
of award-

winning offices  
— rough

sleepers from the womb  
condemned

to make of anything succulent  
rock

of porticoes  
iron maidens

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## **In a Dark Room**

By [Cassie Lewis](#)

*'Cause it's alright, alright to see a ghost.  
— The National*

Rock quartz next to a fence with upturned faces.  
On the hill, on the other side  
a storm, or plausibly, you.  
Time keeps its footsteps regular until it is clapped upwards:  
a falcon glides into view.

Dissolving into the pool in a splash of white,  
I saw you. In summer,  
the town goes to the drive-in.  
The edges of the coin keep moving  
as I stare at images through goggles, they  
fog out.

Rooms go to pieces, sometimes, quietly. Curtains  
are no longer red, now they're dusty. The cat  
moves. The room turns ocher  
and shifts, as wind blows through.

O Brecht's sky of streaming blue. It's been days since I opened the book  
my face is watching. Cupboards slam in another part  
of the flat. The room reassembles,  
but it's different now —  
outdated.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## At Carmel Highlands

By [Janet Loxley Lewis](#)

Below the gardens and the darkening pines  
The living water sinks among the stones,  
Sinking yet foaming till the snowy tones  
Merge with the fog drawn landward in dim lines.  
The cloud dissolves among the flowering vines,  
And now the definite mountain-side disowns  
The fluid world, the immeasurable zones.  
Then white oblivion swallows all designs.

But still the rich confusion of the sea,  
Unceasing voice, sombre and solacing,  
Rises through veils of silence past the trees;  
In restless repetition bound, yet free,  
Wave after wave in deluge fresh releasing  
An ancient speech, hushed in tremendous ease.

## Learning to Love America

By [Shirley Geok-Lin Lim](#)

because it has no pure products

because the Pacific Ocean sweeps along the coastline  
because the water of the ocean is cold  
and because land is better than ocean

because I say we rather than they

because I live in California  
I have eaten fresh artichokes  
and jacaranda bloom in April and May

because my senses have caught up with my body  
my breath with the air it swallows  
my hunger with my mouth

because I walk barefoot in my house

because I have nursed my son at my breast  
because he is a strong American boy  
because I have seen his eyes redden when he is asked who he is  
because he answers I don't know

because to have a son is to have a country  
because my son will bury me here  
because countries are in our blood and we bleed them

because it is late and too late to change my mind  
because it is time.

## God of War

By [Sergio Lima](#)

Hummingbird, colibrí,  
Huitzilopochtli beats  
furious wings, pushing  
heart to the brink to  
feed on fermented sunrays  
gathered in a flower's funnel.

Diminutive powerhouse,  
you protect your territory  
from obscured perch in tree,  
charging at trespassers  
with staccato tweets and  
curved, stabbing beak. Your  
confidence rooted in speed,  
the ability to cut through breeze.

Mouse strong,  
snake quick,  
eggs the size

of July acorns  
or foil-wrapped  
Easter candy.

When my steps  
disturb you,  
teotzin,  
I am glad  
you are so small,  
but your rage  
haunts my dreams.

## **The Contract Says: We'd Like the Conversation to be Bilingual**

By [Ada Limón](#)

When you come, bring your brown-  
ness so we can be sure to please

the funders. Will you check this  
box; we're applying for a grant.

Do you have any poems that speak  
to troubled teens? Bilingual is best.

Would you like to come to dinner  
with the patrons and sip Patrón?

Will you tell us the stories that make  
us uncomfortable, but not complicit?

Don't read the one where you  
are just like us. Born to a green house,

garden, don't tell us how you picked  
tomatoes and ate them in the dirt

watching vultures pick apart another  
bird's bones in the road. Tell us the one

about your father stealing hubcaps  
after a colleague said that's what his

kind did. Tell us how he came  
to the meeting wearing a poncho

and tried to sell the man his hubcaps  
back. Don't mention your father

was a teacher, spoke English, loved  
making beer, loved baseball, tell us

again about the poncho, the hubcaps,  
how he stole them, how he did the thing

he was trying to prove he didn't do.

## **How to Triumph Like a Girl**

By [Ada Limón](#)

I like the lady horses best,  
how they make it all look easy,  
like running 40 miles per hour  
is as fun as taking a nap, or grass.  
I like their lady horse swagger,  
after winning. Ears up, girls, ears up!  
But mainly, let's be honest, I like  
that they're ladies. As if this big  
dangerous animal is also a part of me,  
that somewhere inside the delicate  
skin of my body, there pumps  
an 8-pound female horse heart,  
giant with power, heavy with blood.  
Don't you want to believe it?  
Don't you want to lift my shirt and see  
the huge beating genius machine  
that thinks, no, it knows,  
it's going to come in first.

## **What it Looks Like To Us and the Words We Use**

By [Ada Limón](#)

All these great barns out here in the outskirts,  
black creosote boards knee-deep in the bluegrass.  
They look so beautifully abandoned, even in use.  
You say they look like arks after the sea's  
dried up, I say they look like pirate ships,  
and I think of that walk in the valley where  
I said, You don't believe in God? And I said,

No. I believe in this connection we all have  
to nature, to each other, to the universe.  
And she said, Yeah, God. And how we stood there,  
low beasts among the white oaks, Spanish moss,  
and spider webs, obsidian shards stuck in our pockets,  
woodpecker flurry, and I refused to call it so.  
So instead, we looked up at the unruly sky,  
its clouds in simple animal shapes we could name  
though we knew they were really just clouds—  
disorderly, and marvelous, and ours.

## Carnival

By [Rebecca Lindenberg](#)

The mask that burns like a violin, the mask  
that sings only dead languages, that loves  
the destruction of being put on. The mask  
that sighs like a woman even though  
a woman wears it. The mask beaded with  
freshwater pearls, with seeds. The plumed mask,  
the mask with a sutured mouth, a moonface,  
with a healed gash that means *harvest*. A glower  
that hides *wanting*. A grotesque pucker. Here's  
a beaked mask, a braided mask, here's a mask  
without eyes, a mask that looks like a mask  
but isn't—please don't try to unribbon it.  
The mask that snows coins, the mask full of wasps.  
Lace mask to net escaping thoughts. Pass me  
the rouged mask, the one made of sheet music.  
Or the jackal mask, the hide-bound mask  
that renders lovers identical with night.

## Rain of Statues

By [Sarah Lindsay](#)

*From the Mithridatic Wars, first century BC*

Our general was elsewhere, but we drowned.  
While he rested, he shipped us home  
with the bulk of his spoils  
that had weighed his army down.  
The thrashing storm  
that caught us cracked the hulls  
and made us offerings to the sea floor —

a rain of statues, gold, and men.

Released from service,  
done with war,  
the crash and hiss muted,  
we fell through streams of creatures  
whose lives were their purpose.  
We settled with treasure looted  
from temples of rubbled Athenian Greece;  
among us, bronze and marble gods and goddesses  
moored without grace,  
dodged by incurious fish.  
Their power was never meant to buoy us —  
our pleasures were incidental gifts —  
but, shaken by their radiance in our dust,  
we had given them our voices.

Their faces, wings, and limbs  
lie here with our sanded bones  
and motionless devices.  
Little crabs attempt to don rings  
set with agate and amethyst,  
and many an octopus,  
seeking an hour of rest,  
finds shelter in our brain-cases.  
So we are still of use.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Abraham Lincoln Walks at Midnight

By [Vachel Lindsay](#)

*(In Springfield, Illinois)*

It is portentous, and a thing of state  
That here at midnight, in our little town  
A mourning figure walks, and will not rest,  
Near the old court-house pacing up and down.

Or by his homestead, or in shadowed yards  
He lingers where his children used to play,  
Or through the market, on the well-worn stones  
He stalks until the dawn-stars burn away.

A bronzed, lank man! His suit of ancient black,  
A famous high top-hat and plain worn shawl  
Make him the quaint great figure that men love,  
The prairie-lawyer, master of us all.

He cannot sleep upon his hillside now.  
He is among us:—as in times before!  
And we who toss and lie awake for long  
Breathe deep, and start, to see him pass the door.

His head is bowed. He thinks on men and kings.  
Yea, when the sick world cries, how can he sleep?  
Too many peasants fight, they know not why,  
Too many homesteads in black terror weep.

The sins of all the war-lords burn his heart.  
He sees the dreadnaughts scouring every main.  
He carries on his shawl-wrapped shoulders now  
The bitterness, the folly and the pain.

He cannot rest until a spirit-dawn  
Shall come;—the shining hope of Europe free;  
The league of sober folk, the Workers' Earth,  
Bringing long peace to Cornland, Alp and Sea.

It breaks his heart that kings must murder still,  
That all his hours of travail here for men  
Seem yet in vain. And who will bring white peace  
That he may sleep upon his hill again?

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Lincoln

By [Vachel Lindsay](#)

Would I might rouse the Lincoln in you all,  
That which is gendered in the wilderness  
From lonely prairies and God's tenderness.  
Imperial soul, star of a weedy stream,  
Born where the ghosts of buffaloes still dream,  
Whose spirit hoof-beats storm above his grave,  
Above that breast of earth and prairie-fire—  
Fire that freed the slave.

# The Traveller-Heart

By [Vachel Lindsay](#)

*(To a Man who maintained that the Mausoleum is the Stateliest Possible Manner of Interment)*

I would be one with the dark, dark earth:—  
Follow the plough with a yokel tread.  
I would be part of the Indian corn,  
Walking the rows with the plumes o'erhead.

I would be one with the lavish earth,  
Eating the bee-stung apples red:  
Walking where lambs walk on the hills;  
By oak-grove paths to the pools be led.

I would be one with the dark-bright night  
When sparkling skies and the lightning wed—  
Walking on with the vicious wind  
By roads whence even the dogs have fled.

I would be one with the sacred earth  
On to the end, till I sleep with the dead.  
Terror shall put no spears through me.  
Peace shall jewel my shroud instead.

I shall be one with all pit-black things  
Finding their lowering threat unsaid:  
Stars for my pillow there in the gloom,—  
Oak-roots arching about my head!

Stars, like daisies, shall rise through the earth,  
Acorns fall round my breast that bled.  
Children shall weave there a flowery chain,  
Squirrels on acorn-hearts be fed:—

Fruit of the traveller-heart of me,  
Fruit of my harvest-songs long sped:  
Sweet with the life of my sunburned days  
When the sheaves were ripe, and the apples red.

# Ghost Dance

By [Sara Littlecrow-Russell](#)

Two hundred seventy

Ghost Dancers died dreaming  
That humanity would drown  
In a flood of White sins.

Then the renewed earth  
Would reclaim city and town,  
Leaving only Ghost Dancers  
And those who lived by nature's laws.

History books say the threat is gone.  
The Ghost Dance died with the ancestors—  
Wovoka and his sacred dream  
Were destroyed.

Each time it rains,  
I go out to the sidewalk,  
Where the tree roots  
Have broken the concrete  
Listening to the water's whispering:

"It is coming soon."

## **Punta del Este Pantoum**

By [Chip Livingston](#)

Accept my need and let me call you brother,  
Slate blue oyster, wet sand crustacean,  
In your hurrying to burrow, wait. Hover.  
Parse opening's disaster to creation's

Slate, to another blue-eyed monstrous sand crustacean,  
Water-bearer. Hear the ocean behind me,  
Pursued, asking to be opened, asking Creation  
To heed the tides that uncover you nightly.

Water-bearer, wear the water beside me,  
Hide your burying shadow from the shorebirds,  
But heed the tides that uncover you nightly.  
Gems in sandcastles, stick-written words,

Hidden from the shadows of shorebirds,  
Washed over by water. Waters revelatory  
Gems, sand, castles, sticks, words—  
Assured of erasure, voluntary erosion.

Watched over with warrior resolution,  
Crab armor, claws, and nautilus heart,  
Assured of a savior, reconstruct your evolution,  
Clamor to hear, water scarab, what the tampered heart hears.

A scarab's armor is light enough to fly.  
In your hurry to burrow, wait. Hover.  
Hear the clamor of the crustacean's heart.  
Heed this call of creation. Call me brother.

## Invisible Children

By [Mariana Llanos](#)

Invisible children fall  
through the cracks of the system  
like Alice in the rabbit hole.  
But these children won't find  
an eat-me cake or a drink-me bottle.  
They won't wake up on the lap  
of a loving sister.  
They'll open their eyes on the hand  
of a monster called Negligence  
who'll poke them with its sharp teeth  
and bait them with its heartless laughter,  
like a wild thing in a wild rumpus.  
But the children won't awake  
to the smell of a warm supper,  
nor will they find a purple crayon  
to draw an escape door or a window.  
Instead they'll make a mirror  
of a murky puddle on the city street  
which won't tell them they're beautiful  
but it'll show their scars, as invisible to others  
as these children are.

## Y2K

By [Therese Lloyd](#)

When I was "in despair" (the dark days  
when I actually used such terms)  
I noticed the behavior of animals —  
        sleep when tired, eat when hungry  
That made a lot of sense to me  
and yet I felt different

I felt my humanness too much  
No fly ever wonders whether it should make  
lots and lots of maggots  
It gives birth on a mound of cat food  
or inside the rubbish bin  
As far as I know  
it's not worried about overpopulation  
or what sort of environment its kids  
will grow up in  
My humanness sees me at an art gallery  
watching others  
watching walls  
My humanness gives me dark thoughts  
of cruel behavior  
You are in the States  
a visa glitch and there you remain  
Like Star Trek, I talk to you on a screen  
your face half a second out of sync  
with your speech  
I'm in the future  
my Tuesday is already over  
and I want to tell you all about it  
to prove my superiority  
That lovely conceit of time  
that saw people travel from all over the world  
to be in Gisborne  
for the first sunrise  
of the new millennium  
Remember  
how we all thought the sewer pipes would burst  
and the criminals would escape  
or something like that  
Y2K packs sent to every household  
because no one knew for certain  
what the numbers 2000 really meant  
Somewhere, people, important people  
cowered in bunkers  
fearing the worst

## **Dead Men Walking**

By [William Logan](#)

What did they desire, the dead who had returned?  
The sons who had inherited their estates  
pretended not to know them. The iron gates

were welded shut, but soon the dead had learned

to hire lawyers practiced in the laws  
that bound the afterlife to lesser gods.  
The angels thundered on like piston rods,  
denying their gold wings to either cause.

The city streetlamps flared like learned ghosts.  
The moon turned red. Beneath a scrim of clouds,  
Spanish moss draped the myrtle trees like shrouds—  
in politics the guests became the hosts.

Those days made angels of the better sort.  
The cases languished in a lower court.

## Talent

By [Layli Long Soldier](#)

my first try I made a hit it dropped from morning gray the smallest shadow both wings slipped  
inward mid-flight the man barked *Now* I shot again and again a third time with each arrow  
through the target I thought was it luck or was it skill luck or skill as the last one fell

its awkward shape made me run there pulsing on the ground I was astounded by its size a  
gangly white goose throbbed heaved its head my eyes dropped blood flowers opened in the  
snow of its neck behind my shoulder stepping down from a yellow bus

child made their way across the field I shot once more to end it quickly close range its death  
did I do this to spare the bird from suffering or to spare the children the sight my motives in  
humid cold yes my knuckles in the cold steamed bright red

because on my stomach in grass in rubber boots pockets and vests I slid along with that hunter I  
did as he directed from quiver my draw my black lashes in steely eyed release it felt good there  
it felt strong my breath in autumn was an animal there I thought did I really do this      did *I*  
really yet what difference is muscle is an arrow powered upward or any flight to center when I  
did not hear it though I clearly mouthed *poor thing poor thing poor thing*

## The Arrow and the Song

By [Henry Wadsworth Longfellow](#)

I shot an arrow into the air,  
It fell to earth, I knew not where;  
For, so swiftly it flew, the sight  
Could not follow it in its flight.

I breathed a song into the air,  
It fell to earth, I knew not where;  
For who has sight so keen and strong,  
That it can follow the flight of song?

Long, long afterward, in an oak  
I found the arrow, still unbroke;  
And the song, from beginning to end,  
I found again in the heart of a friend.

## **The Children's Hour**

By [Henry Wadsworth Longfellow](#)

Between the dark and the daylight,  
When the night is beginning to lower,  
Comes a pause in the day's occupations,  
That is known as the Children's Hour.

I hear in the chamber above me  
The patter of little feet,  
The sound of a door that is opened,  
And voices soft and sweet.

From my study I see in the lamplight,  
Descending the broad hall stair,  
Grave Alice, and laughing Allegra,  
And Edith with golden hair.

A whisper, and then a silence:  
Yet I know by their merry eyes  
They are plotting and planning together  
To take me by surprise.

A sudden rush from the stairway,  
A sudden raid from the hall!  
By three doors left unguarded  
They enter my castle wall!

They climb up into my turret  
O'er the arms and back of my chair;  
If I try to escape, they surround me;  
They seem to be everywhere.

They almost devour me with kisses,  
Their arms about me entwine,

Till I think of the Bishop of Bingen  
In his Mouse-Tower on the Rhine!

Do you think, O blue-eyed banditti,  
Because you have scaled the wall,  
Such an old mustache as I am  
Is not a match for you all!

I have you fast in my fortress,  
And will not let you depart,  
But put you down into the dungeon  
In the round-tower of my heart.

And there will I keep you forever,  
Yes, forever and a day,  
Till the walls shall crumble to ruin,  
And moulder in dust away!

## **The Cross of Snow**

By [Henry Wadsworth Longfellow](#)

In the long, sleepless watches of the night,  
A gentle face — the face of one long dead —  
Looks at me from the wall, where round its head  
The night-lamp casts a halo of pale light.  
Here in this room she died; and soul more white  
Never through martyrdom of fire was led  
To its repose; nor can in books be read  
The legend of a life more benedight.  
There is a mountain in the distant West  
That, sun-defying, in its deep ravines  
Displays a cross of snow upon its side.  
Such is the cross I wear upon my breast  
These eighteen years, through all the changing scenes  
And seasons, changeless since the day she died.

## **The Light of Stars**

By [Henry Wadsworth Longfellow](#)

The night is come, but not too soon;  
And sinking silently,  
All silently, the little moon  
Drops down behind the sky.

There is no light in earth or heaven  
But the cold light of stars;  
And the first watch of night is given  
To the red planet Mars.

Is it the tender star of love?  
The star of love and dreams?  
O no! from that blue tent above,  
A hero's armor gleams.

And earnest thoughts within me rise,  
When I behold afar,  
Suspended in the evening skies,  
The shield of that red star.

O star of strength! I see thee stand  
And smile upon my pain;  
Thou beckonest with thy mailed hand,  
And I am strong again.

Within my breast there is no light  
But the cold light of stars;  
I give the first watch of the night  
To the red planet Mars.

The star of the unconquered will,  
He rises in my breast,  
Serene, and resolute, and still,  
And calm, and self-possessed.

And thou, too, whosoe'er thou art,  
That readest this brief psalm,  
As one by one thy hopes depart,  
Be resolute and calm.

O fear not in a world like this,  
And thou shalt know ere long,  
Know how sublime a thing it is  
To suffer and be strong.

## **Mezzo Cammin**

By [Henry Wadsworth Longfellow](#)

Half of my life is gone, and I have let  
The years slip from me and have not fulfilled

The aspiration of my youth, to build  
Some tower of song with lofty parapet.  
Not indolence, nor pleasure, nor the fret  
Of restless passions that would not be stilled,  
But sorrow, and a care that almost killed,  
Kept me from what I may accomplish yet;  
Though, half-way up the hill, I see the Past  
Lying beneath me with its sounds and sights,—  
A city in the twilight dim and vast,  
With smoking roofs, soft bells, and gleaming lights,—  
And hear above me on the autumnal blast  
The cataract of Death far thundering from the heights.

## **The Tide Rises, the Tide Falls**

By [Henry Wadsworth Longfellow](#)

The tide rises, the tide falls,  
The twilight darkens, the curlew calls;  
Along the sea-sands damp and brown  
The traveller hastens toward the town,  
And the tide rises, the tide falls.

Darkness settles on roofs and walls,  
But the sea, the sea in the darkness calls;  
The little waves, with their soft, white hands,  
Efface the footprints in the sands,  
And the tide rises, the tide falls.

The morning breaks; the steeds in their stalls  
Stamp and neigh, as the hostler calls;  
The day returns, but nevermore  
Returns the traveller to the shore,  
And the tide rises, the tide falls.

## **Father Son and Holy Ghost**

By [Audre Lorde](#)

I have not ever seen my father's grave.

Not that his judgment eyes  
have been forgotten  
nor his great hands' print  
on our evening doorknobs  
one half turn each night

and he would come  
drabbled with the world's business  
massive and silent  
as the whole day's wish  
ready to redefine  
each of our shapes  
but now the evening doorknobs  
wait and do not recognize us  
as we pass.

Each week a different woman  
regular as his one quick glass  
each evening  
pulls up the grass his stillness grows  
calling it weed.  
Each week a different woman  
has my mother's face  
and he  
who time has changeless  
must be amazed  
who knew and loved  
but one.

My father died in silence  
loving creation  
and well-defined response  
he lived still judgments  
on familiar things  
and died knowing  
a January 15th that year me.

Lest I go into dust  
I have not ever seen my father's grave.

## **A Litany for Survival**

By [Audre Lorde](#)

For those of us who live at the shoreline  
standing upon the constant edges of decision  
crucial and alone  
for those of us who cannot indulge  
the passing dreams of choice  
who love in doorways coming and going  
in the hours between dawns  
looking inward and outward

at once before and after  
seeking a now that can breed  
futures  
like bread in our children's mouths  
so their dreams will not reflect  
the death of ours;

For those of us  
who were imprinted with fear  
like a faint line in the center of our foreheads  
learning to be afraid with our mother's milk  
for by this weapon  
this illusion of some safety to be found  
the heavy-footed hoped to silence us  
For all of us  
this instant and this triumph  
We were never meant to survive.

And when the sun rises we are afraid  
it might not remain  
when the sun sets we are afraid  
it might not rise in the morning  
when our stomachs are full we are afraid  
of indigestion  
when our stomachs are empty we are afraid  
we may never eat again  
when we are loved we are afraid  
love will vanish  
when we are alone we are afraid  
love will never return  
and when we speak we are afraid  
our words will not be heard  
nor welcomed  
but when we are silent  
we are still afraid

So it is better to speak  
remembering  
we were never meant to survive.

## **Movement Song**

By [Audre Lorde](#)

I have studied the tight curls on the back of your neck  
moving away from me

beyond anger or failure  
your face in the evening schools of longing  
through mornings of wish and ripen  
we were always saying goodbye  
in the blood in the bone over coffee  
before dashing for elevators going  
in opposite directions  
without goodbyes.

Do not remember me as a bridge nor a roof  
as the maker of legends  
nor as a trap  
door to that world  
where black and white clericals  
hang on the edge of beauty in five oclock elevators  
twitching their shoulders to avoid other flesh  
and now  
there is someone to speak for them  
moving away from me into tomorrows  
morning of wish and ripen  
your goodbye is a promise of lightning  
in the last angels hand  
unwelcome and warning  
the sands have run out against us  
we were rewarded by journeys  
away from each other  
into desire  
into mornings alone  
where excuse and endurance mingle  
conceiving decision.  
Do not remember me  
as disaster  
nor as the keeper of secrets  
I am a fellow rider in the cattle cars  
watching  
you move slowly out of my bed  
saying we cannot waste time  
only ourselves.

## **Who Said It Was Simple**

By [Audre Lorde](#)

There are so many roots to the tree of anger  
that sometimes the branches shatter  
before they bear.

Sitting in Nedicks  
the women rally before they march  
discussing the problematic girls  
they hire to make them free.  
An almost white counterman passes  
a waiting brother to serve them first  
and the ladies neither notice nor reject  
the slighter pleasures of their slavery.  
But I who am bound by my mirror  
as well as my bed  
see causes in colour  
as well as sex

and sit here wondering  
which me will survive  
all these liberations.

## To Althea, from Prison

By [Richard Lovelace](#)

When Love with unconfined wings  
Hovers within my Gates,  
And my divine *Althea* brings  
To whisper at the Grates;  
When I lie tangled in her hair,  
And fettered to her eye,  
The Gods that wanton in the Air,  
Know no such Liberty.

When flowing Cups run swiftly round  
With no allaying *Thames*,  
Our careless heads with Roses bound,  
Our hearts with Loyal Flames;  
When thirsty grief in Wine we steep,  
When Healths and draughts go free,  
Fishes that tinkle in the Deep  
Know no such Liberty.

When (like committed linnets) I  
With shriller throat shall sing  
The sweetness, Mercy, Majesty,  
And glories of my King;  
When I shall voice aloud how good  
He is, how Great should be,

Enlargèd Winds, that curl the Flood,  
Know no such Liberty.

Stone Walls do not a Prison make,  
Nor Iron bars a Cage;  
Minds innocent and quiet take  
That for an Hermitage.  
If I have freedom in my Love,  
And in my soul am free,  
Angels alone that soar above,  
Enjoy such Liberty.

## **To Lucasta, Going to the Wars**

By [Richard Lovelace](#)

Tell me not (Sweet) I am unkind,  
That from the nunnery  
Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind  
To war and arms I fly.

True, a new mistress now I chase,  
The first foe in the field;  
And with a stronger faith embrace  
A sword, a horse, a shield.

Yet this inconstancy is such  
As you too shall adore;  
I could not love thee (Dear) so much,  
Lov'd I not Honour more.

## **Two Gates**

By [Denise Low](#)

I look through glass and see a young woman  
of twenty, washing dishes, and the window  
turns into a painting. She is myself thirty years ago.  
She holds the same blue bowls and brass teapot  
I still own. I see her outline against lamplight;  
she knows only her side of the pane. The porch  
where I stand is empty. Sunlight fades. I hear  
water run in the sink as she lowers her head,  
blind to the future. She does not imagine I exist.

I step forward for a better look and she dissolves

into lumber and paint. A gate I passed through  
to the next life loses shape. Once more I stand  
squared into the present, among maple trees  
and scissor-tailed birds, in a garden, almost  
a mother to that faint, distant woman.

## **Walking with My Delaware Grandfather**

By [Denise Low](#)

Walking home I feel a presence following  
and realize he is always there

that Native man with coal-black-hair who is  
my grandfather. In my first memories

he is present, mostly wordless,  
resident in the house where I was born.

My mother shows him the cleft in my chin  
identical to his. I am swaddled

and blinking in the kitchen light. So  
we are introduced. We never part.

Sometimes I forget he lodges in my house still  
the bone-house where my heart beats.

I carry his mother's framework  
a sturdy structure. I learn his birthright.

I hear his mother's teachings through  
what my mother said of her:

She kept a pot of stew on the stove  
all day for anyone to eat.

She never went to church but said  
you could be a good person anyway.

She fed hoboes during the '30s,  
her back porch a regular stop-over.

Every person has rights no matter  
what color. Be respectful.

This son of hers, my grandfather,  
still walks the streets with me.

Some twist of blood and heat still spark  
across the time bridge. Here, listen:

Air draws through these lungs made from his.  
His blood still pulses through this hand.

## A Fixed Idea

By [Amy Lowell](#)

What torture lurks within a single thought  
When grown too constant; and however kind,  
However welcome still, the weary mind  
Aches with its presence. Dull remembrance taught  
Remembers on unceasingly; unsought  
The old delight is with us but to find  
That all recurring joy is pain refined,  
Become a habit, and we struggle, caught.  
You lie upon my heart as on a nest,  
Folded in peace, for you can never know  
How crushed I am with having you at rest  
Heavy upon my life. I love you so  
You bind my freedom from its rightful quest.  
In mercy lift your drooping wings and go.

## Interlude

By [Amy Lowell](#)

When I have baked white cakes  
And grated green almonds to spread upon them;  
When I have picked the green crowns from the strawberries  
And piled them, cone-pointed, in a blue and yellow platter;  
When I have smoothed the seam of the linen I have been working;  
What then?  
To-morrow it will be the same:  
Cakes and strawberries,  
And needles in and out of cloth.  
If the sun is beautiful on bricks and pewter,  
How much more beautiful is the moon,  
Slanting down the gauffered branches of a plum-tree;  
The moon,  
Wavering across a bed of tulips;

The moon,  
Still,  
Upon your face.  
You shine, Beloved,  
You and the moon.  
But which is the reflection?  
The clock is striking eleven.  
I think, when we have shut and barred the door,  
The night will be dark  
Outside.

## Nuit Blanche

By [Amy Lowell](#)

I want no horns to rouse me up to-night,  
And trumpets make too clamorous a ring  
To fit my mood, it is so weary white  
I have no wish for doing any thing.

A music coaxed from humming strings would please;  
Not plucked, but drawn in creeping cadences  
Across a sunset wall where some Marquise  
Picks a pale rose amid strange silences.

Ghostly and vaporous her gown sweeps by  
The twilight dusking wall, I hear her feet  
Delaying on the gravel, and a sigh,  
Briefly permitted, touches the air like sleet

And it is dark, I hear her feet no more.  
A red moon leers beyond the lily-tank.  
A drunken moon ogling a sycamore,  
Running long fingers down its shining flank.

A lurching moon, as nimble as a clown,  
Cuddling the flowers and trees which burn like glass.  
Red, kissing lips, I feel you on my gown—  
Kiss me, red lips, and then pass—pass.

Music, you are pitiless to-night.  
And I so old, so cold, so languorously white.

# September, 1918

By [Amy Lowell](#)

This afternoon was the colour of water falling through sunlight;  
The trees glittered with the tumbling of leaves;  
The sidewalks shone like alleys of dropped maple leaves,  
And the houses ran along them laughing out of square, open windows.  
Under a tree in the park,  
Two little boys, lying flat on their faces,  
Were carefully gathering red berries  
To put in a pasteboard box.  
Some day there will be no war,  
Then I shall take out this afternoon  
And turn it in my fingers,  
And remark the sweet taste of it upon my palate,  
And note the crisp variety of its flights of leaves.  
To-day I can only gather it  
And put it into my lunch-box,  
For I have time for nothing  
But the endeavour to balance myself  
Upon a broken world.

## Epilogue

By [Robert Lowell](#)

Those blessed structures, plot and rhyme—  
why are they no help to me now  
I want to make  
something imagined, not recalled?  
I hear the noise of my own voice:  
*The painter's vision is not a lens,  
it trembles to caress the light.*  
But sometimes everything I write  
with the threadbare art of my eye  
seems a snapshot,  
lurid, rapid, garish, grouped,  
heightened from life,  
yet paralyzed by fact.  
All's misalliance.  
Yet why not say what happened?  
Pray for the grace of accuracy  
Vermeer gave to the sun's illumination  
stealing like the tide across a map  
to his girl solid with yearning.  
We are poor passing facts,

warned by that to give  
each figure in the photograph  
his living name.

## July in Washington

By [Robert Lowell](#)

The stiff spokes of this wheel  
touch the sore spots of the earth.

On the Potomac, swan-white  
power launches keep breasting the sulphurous wave.

Otters slide and dive and slick back their hair,  
raccoons clean their meat in the creek.

On the circles, green statues ride like South American  
liberators above the breeding vegetation—

prongs and spearheads of some equatorial  
backland that will inherit the globe.

The elect, the elected . . . they come here bright as dimes,  
and die dishevelled and soft.

We cannot name their names, or number their dates—  
circle on circle, like rings on a tree—

but we wish the river had another shore,  
some further range of delectable mountains,

distant hills powdered blue as a girl's eyelid.  
It seems the least little shove would land us there,

that only the slightest repugnance of our bodies  
we no longer control could drag us back.

## Skunk Hour

By [Robert Lowell](#)

*(For Elizabeth Bishop)*

Nautilus Island's hermit  
heiress still lives through winter in her Spartan cottage;

her sheep still graze above the sea.  
Her son's a bishop. Her farmer  
is first selectman in our village;  
she's in her dotage.

Thirsting for  
the hierarchic privacy  
of Queen Victoria's century,  
she buys up all  
the eyesores facing her shore,  
and lets them fall.

The season's ill—  
we've lost our summer millionaire,  
who seemed to leap from an L. L. Bean  
catalogue. His nine-knot yawl  
was auctioned off to lobstermen.  
A red fox stain covers Blue Hill.

And now our fairy  
decorator brightens his shop for fall;  
his fishnet's filled with orange cork,  
orange, his cobbler's bench and awl;  
there is no money in his work,  
he'd rather marry.

One dark night,  
my Tudor Ford climbed the hill's skull;  
I watched for love-cars . Lights turned down,  
they lay together, hull to hull,  
where the graveyard shelves on the town. . . .  
My mind's not right.

A car radio bleats,  
"Love, O careless Love. . . ." I hear  
my ill-spirit sob in each blood cell,  
as if my hand were at its throat. . . .  
I myself am hell;  
nobody's here—

only skunks, that search  
in the moonlight for a bite to eat.  
They march on their soles up Main Street:  
white stripes, moonstruck eyes' red fire  
under the chalk-dry and spar spire  
of the Trinitarian Church.

I stand on top  
of our back steps and breathe the rich air—  
a mother skunk with her column of kittens swills the garbage pail  
She jabs her wedge-head in a cup  
of sour cream, drops her ostrich tail,  
and will not scare.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Lunar Baedeker

By [Mina Loy](#)

A silver Lucifer  
serves  
cocaine in cornucopia

To some somnambulists  
of adolescent thighs  
draped  
in satirical draperies

Peris in livery  
prepare  
Lethe  
for posthumous parvenues

Delirious Avenues  
lit  
with the chandelier souls  
of infusoria  
from Pharoah's tombstones

lead  
to mercurial doomsdays  
Odious oasis  
in furrowed phosphorous

the eye-white sky-light  
white-light district  
of lunar lusts

Stellectric signs  
“Wing shows on Starway”

“Zodiac carrousel”

Cyclones  
of ecstatic dust  
and ashes whirl  
crusaders  
from hallucinatory citadels  
of shattered glass  
into evacuate craters

A flock of dreams  
browse on Necropolis

From the shores  
of oval oceans  
in the oxidized Orient

Onyx-eyed Odalisques  
and ornithologists  
observe  
the flight  
of Eros obsolete

And “Immortality”  
mildews ...  
in the museums of the moon

“Nocturnal cyclops”  
“Crystal concubine”

Pocked with personification  
the fossil virgin of the skies  
waxes and wanes

## **It's the Little Towns I Like**

By [Thomas Lux](#)

It's the little towns I like  
with their little mills making ratchets  
and stanchions, elastic web,  
spindles, you  
name it. I like them in New England,  
America, particularly-providing  
bad jobs good enough to live on, to live in  
families even: kindergarten,

church suppers, beach umbrellas ... The towns  
are real, so fragile in their loneliness  
a flood could come along  
(and floods have) and cut them in two,  
in half. There is no mayor,  
the town council's not prepared  
for this, three of the four policemen  
are stranded on their roofs ... and it doesn't stop  
raining. The mountain  
is so thick with water parts of it just slide  
down on the heifers—soggy, suicidal—  
in the pastures below. It rains, it rains  
in these towns and, because  
there's no other way, your father gets in a rowboat  
so he can go to work.

## **Ode to the Electric Fish that Eat Only the Tails of Other Electric Fish,**

By [Thomas Lux](#)

hich regenerate their tails  
and also eat only the tails of other electric eels,  
presumably smaller, who, in turn, eat ...  
Without consulting an ichthyologist — eels  
are fish — I defer to biology's genius.  
I know little of their numbers  
and habitat, other than they are river dwellers.  
Guess which river. I have only a note,  
a note taken in reading  
or fever — I can't tell, from my handwriting, which. All  
I know is it seems  
sensible, sustainable: no fish dies,  
nobody ever gets so hungry he bites off more  
than a tail; the sting, the trauma  
keeps the bitten fish lean and alert.  
The need to hide while regrowing a tail teaches guile.  
They'll eat smaller tails for a while.  
These eels, these eels themselves are odes!

## **Tarantulas on the Lifebuoy**

By [Thomas Lux](#)

For some semitropical reason  
when the rains fall

relentlessly they fall

into swimming pools, these otherwise  
bright and scary  
arachnids. They can swim  
a little, but not for long

and they can't climb the ladder out.  
They usually drown—but  
if you want their favor,  
if you believe there is justice,  
a reward for not loving

the death of ugly  
and even dangerous (the eel, hog snake,  
rats) creatures, if

you believe these things, then  
you would leave a lifebuoy  
or two in your swimming pool at night.

And in the morning  
you would haul ashore  
the huddled, hairy survivors

and escort them  
back to the bush, and know,  
be assured that at least these saved,  
as individuals, would not turn up

again someday  
in your hat, drawer,  
or the tangled underworld

of your socks, and that even—  
when your belief in justice  
merges with your belief in dreams—  
they may tell the others

in a sign language  
four times as subtle  
and complicated as man's

that you are good,  
that you love them,  
that you would save them again.

# Himself

By [Thomas P. Lynch](#)

He'll have been the last of his kind here then.  
The flagstones, dry-stone walls, the slumping thatch,  
out-offices and cow cabins, the patch  
of haggard he sowed spuds and onions in—  
all of it a century out of fashion—  
all giving way to the quiet rising damp  
of hush and vacancy once he is gone.  
Those long contemplations at the fire, cats  
curling at the door, the dog's lame waltzing,  
the kettle, the candle and the lamp—  
all still, all quenched, all darkened—  
the votives and rosaries and novenas,  
the pope and Kennedy and Sacred Heart,  
the bucket, the basket, the latch and lock,  
the tractor that took him into town and back  
for the pension cheque and messages and pub,  
the chair, the bedstead and the chamber pot,  
everything will amount to nothing much.  
Everything will slowly disappear.  
And some grandniece, a sister's daughter's daughter,  
one blue August in ten or fifteen years  
will marry well and will inherit it:  
the cottage ruins, the brown abandoned land.  
They'll come to see it in a hired car.  
The kindly Liverpoolian she's wed,  
in concert with a local auctioneer,  
will post a sign to offer Site for Sale.  
The acres that he labored in will merge  
with a neighbor's growing pasturage  
and all the decades of him will begin to blur,  
easing, as the far fields of his holding did,  
up the hill, over the cliff, into the sea.

# The Larger

By [Joanie Mackowski](#)

I don't know how it happened, but I fell—  
and I was immense, one dislocated arm  
wedged between two buildings. I felt some ribs  
had broken, perhaps a broken neck, too;  
I couldn't speak. My dress caught bunched  
about my thighs, and where my glasses shattered

there'd spread something like a seacoast, or maybe  
it was a port. Where my hair tangled with power lines  
I felt a hot puddle of blood.

I must have passed out,  
but when I woke, a crew of about fifty  
was building a winding stairway beside my breast  
and buttressing a platform on my sternum.  
I heard, as through cotton, the noise of hammers,  
circular saws, laughter, and some radio  
droning songs about love. Out the corner  
of one eye (I could open one eye a bit) I saw  
my pocketbook, its contents scattered, my lipstick's  
toppled silo glinting out of reach.  
And then, waving a tiny flashlight, a man  
entered my ear. I felt his boots sloshing  
the blood trickling there. He never came out.  
So some went looking, with flares, dogs, dynamite  
even: they burst my middle ear and found  
my skull, its cavern crammed with dark matter  
like a cross between a fungus and a cloud.  
They never found his body, though. And they never  
found or tried to find an explanation,  
I think, for me; they didn't seem to need one.  
Even now my legs subdue that dangerous  
sea, the water bright enough to cut  
the skin, where a lighthouse, perched on the tip  
of my great toe, each eight seconds rolls  
another flawless pearl across the waves.  
It keeps most ships from wrecking against my feet.  
On clear days, people stand beside the light;  
they watch the waves' blue heads slip up and down  
and scan for landmarks on the facing shore.

## Ars Poetica

By [Archibald MacLeish](#)

A poem should be palpable and mute  
As a globed fruit,

Dumb  
As old medallions to the thumb,

Silent as the sleeve-worn stone  
Of casement ledges where the moss has grown—

A poem should be wordless  
As the flight of birds.

\*

A poem should be motionless in time  
As the moon climbs,

Leaving, as the moon releases  
Twig by twig the night-entangled trees,

Leaving, as the moon behind the winter leaves,  
Memory by memory the mind—

A poem should be motionless in time  
As the moon climbs.

\*

A poem should be equal to:  
Not true.

For all the history of grief  
An empty doorway and a maple leaf.

For love  
The leaning grasses and two lights above the sea—

A poem should not mean  
But be.

## Immortal Autumn

By [Archibald MacLeish](#)

I speak this poem now with grave and level voice  
In praise of autumn, of the far-horn-winding fall.

I praise the flower-barren fields, the clouds, the tall  
Unanswering branches where the wind makes sullen noise.

I praise the fall: it is the human season.

Now

No more the foreign sun does meddle at our earth,  
Enforce the green and bring the fallow land to birth,  
Nor winter yet weigh all with silence the pine bough,

But now in autumn with the black and outcast crows  
Share we the spacious world: the whispering year is gone:  
There is more room to live now: the once secret dawn  
Comes late by daylight and the dark unguarded goes.

Between the mutinous brave burning of the leaves  
And winter's covering of our hearts with his deep snow  
We are alone: there are no evening birds: we know  
The naked moon: the tame stars circle at our eaves.

It is the human season. On this sterile air  
Do words outcarry breath: the sound goes on and on.  
I hear a dead man's cry from autumn long since gone.

I cry to you beyond upon this bitter air.

## **You, Andrew Marvell**

By [Archibald MacLeish](#)

And here face down beneath the sun  
And here upon earth's noonward height  
To feel the always coming on  
The always rising of the night:

To feel creep up the curving east  
The earthy chill of dusk and slow  
Upon those under lands the vast  
And ever climbing shadow grow

And strange at Ecbatan the trees  
Take leaf by leaf the evening strange  
The flooding dark about their knees  
The mountains over Persia change

And now at Kermanshah the gate  
Dark empty and the withered grass  
And through the twilight now the late  
Few travelers in the westward pass

And Baghdad darken and the bridge  
Across the silent river gone  
And through Arabia the edge  
Of evening widen and steal on

And deepen on Palmyra's street  
The wheel rut in the ruined stone  
And Lebanon fade out and Crete  
High through the clouds and overblown

And over Sicily the air  
Still flashing with the landward gulls  
And loom and slowly disappear  
The sails above the shadowy hulls

And Spain go under and the shore  
Of Africa the gilded sand  
And evening vanish and no more  
The low pale light across that land

Nor now the long light on the sea:

And here face downward in the sun  
To feel how swift how secretly  
The shadow of the night comes on ...

## Entirely

By [Louis MacNeice](#)

If we could get the hang of it entirely  
It would take too long;  
All we know is the splash of words in passing  
And falling twigs of song,  
And when we try to eavesdrop on the great  
Presences it is rarely  
That by a stroke of luck we can appropriate  
Even a phrase entirely.

If we could find our happiness entirely  
In somebody else's arms  
We should not fear the spears of the spring nor the city's  
Yammering fire alarms  
But, as it is, the spears each year go through  
Our flesh and almost hourly  
Bell or siren banishes the blue  
Eyes of Love entirely.

And if the world were black or white entirely  
And all the charts were plain  
Instead of a mad weir of tigerish waters,

A prism of delight and pain,  
We might be surer where we wished to go  
Or again we might be merely  
Bored but in brute reality there is no  
Road that is right entirely.

## Meeting Point

By [Louis MacNeice](#)

Time was away and somewhere else,  
There were two glasses and two chairs  
And two people with the one pulse  
(Somebody stopped the moving stairs):  
Time was away and somewhere else.

And they were neither up nor down;  
The stream's music did not stop  
Flowing through heather, limpid brown,  
Although they sat in a coffee shop  
And they were neither up nor down.

The bell was silent in the air  
Holding its inverted poise—  
Between the clang and clang a flower,  
A brazen calyx of no noise:  
The bell was silent in the air.

The camels crossed the miles of sand  
That stretched around the cups and plates;  
The desert was their own, they planned  
To portion out the stars and dates:  
The camels crossed the miles of sand.

Time was away and somewhere else.  
The waiter did not come, the clock  
Forgot them and the radio waltz  
Came out like water from a rock:  
Time was away and somewhere else.

Her fingers flicked away the ash  
That bloomed again in tropic trees:  
Not caring if the markets crash  
When they had forests such as these,  
Her fingers flicked away the ash.

God or whatever means the Good  
Be praised that time can stop like this,  
That what the heart has understood  
Can verify in the body's peace  
God or whatever means the Good.

Time was away and she was here  
And life no longer what it was,  
The bell was silent in the air  
And all the room one glow because  
Time was away and she was here.

## **Snow**

By [Louis MacNeice](#)

The room was suddenly rich and the great bay-window was  
Spawning snow and pink roses against it  
Soundlessly collateral and incompatible:  
World is suddener than we fancy it.

World is crazier and more of it than we think,  
Incorrigibly plural. I peel and portion  
A tangerine and spit the pips and feel  
The drunkenness of things being various.

And the fire flames with a bubbling sound for world  
Is more spiteful and gay than one supposes—  
On the tongue on the eyes on the ears in the palms of one's hands—  
There is more than glass between the snow and the huge roses.

## **What pleasure a question,**

By [Angie Macri](#)

not an answer. She leaned  
into the apple tree, which then  
was evergreen, to the snake's  
hands, sweet flesh, no need  
to be ashamed. We share

and share alike, the peel  
not loose like night on day,  
but tight. She took the snake's  
hands, diamondbacked,  
and opened its question.

It was the first time she had  
something to give, what  
the man couldn't take, the first time  
the man said please:  
please let me have a bite.

He found the iron ore  
and brought it home.  
He found the coal under  
the forest and lit it on fire  
to watch it go

so the snake couldn't catch her  
if she fell and she couldn't  
hold anything but its tongue.  
Never let the fire go out or else,  
he warned, and she held on.

## The Dream Play

By [Derek Mahon](#)

*What night-rule now about this haunted grove?*

The spirits have dispersed, the woods  
faded to grey from midnight blue  
leaving a powdery residue,  
night music fainter, frivolous gods  
withdrawing, cries of yin and yang,  
discords of the bionic young;  
cobweb and insects, hares and deer,  
wild strawberries and eglantine,  
dawn silence of the biosphere,  
amid the branches a torn wing  
— what is this enchanted place?  
Not the strict groves of academe  
but an old thicket of lost time  
too cool for school, recovered space  
where the brain yields to nose and ear,  
folk remedy and herbal cure,  
old narratives of heart and hand,  
and a dazed donkey, starry eyed,  
with pearls and honeysuckle crowned,  
beside her naked nibs is laid.  
Wild viruses, Elysian fields —

our own planet lit by the fire  
of molten substance, constant flux,  
hot ice and acrobatic sex,  
the electric moth-touch of desire  
and a new vision, a new regime  
where the white blaze of physics yields  
to yellow moonlight, dance and dream  
induced by what mind-altering drug  
or rough-cast magic realism;  
till morning bright with ant and bug  
shines in a mist of glistening gism,  
shifting identities, mutant forms,  
angels evolved from snails and worms.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## The Mortician in San Francisco

By [Randall Mann](#)

This may sound queer,  
but in 1985 I held the delicate hands  
of Dan White:  
I prepared him for burial; by then, Harvey Milk  
was made monument—no, myth—by the years  
since he was shot.

I remember when Harvey was shot:  
twenty, and I knew I was queer.  
Those were the years,  
Levi's and leather jackets holding hands  
on Castro Street, cheering for Harvey Milk—  
elected on the same day as Dan White.

I often wonder about Supervisor White,  
who fatally shot  
Mayor Moscone and Supervisor Milk,  
who was one of us, a Castro queer.  
May 21, 1979: a jury hands  
down the sentence, seven years—

in truth, five years—  
for ex-cop, ex-fireman Dan White,  
for the blood on his hands;  
when he confessed that he had shot

the mayor and the queer,  
a few men in blue cheered. And Harvey Milk?

Why cry over spilled milk,  
some wondered, semi-privately, for years—  
it meant “one less queer.”  
The jurors turned to White.  
If just the mayor had been shot,  
Dan might have had trouble on his hands—

but the twelve who held his life in their hands  
maybe didn't mind the death of Harvey Milk;  
maybe, the second murder offered him a shot  
at serving only a few years.  
In the end, he committed suicide, this Dan White.  
And he was made presentable by a queer.

## Here's an Ocean Tale

By [Kwoya Fagin Maples](#)

My brother still bites his nails to the quick,  
but lately he's been allowing them to grow.  
So much hurt is forgotten with the horizon  
as backdrop. It comes down to simple math.

The beach belongs to none of us, regardless  
of color, or money. We all come to sit  
at the feet of the surf, watch waves  
drag the sand and crush shells for hours.

My brother's feet are coated in sparkly powder  
that leaves a sticky residue when dry.  
He's twenty-three, still unaware of his value.  
It is too easy, reader, for me to call him

beautiful, standing against the sky  
in cherrywood skin and almond  
eyes in the sun, so instead I tell him  
he is handsome. I remind him

of a day when I brought him to the beach  
as a boy. He'd wandered, trailing a tourist,  
a white man pointing toward his hotel—  
all for a promised shark tooth.

I yelled for him, pulled him to me,  
drove us home. Folly Beach. He was six.  
He almost went.

## A History Without Suffering

By [E. A. Markham](#)

In this poem there is no suffering.  
It spans hundreds of years and records  
no deaths, connecting when it can,  
those moments where people are healthy

and happy, content to be alive. A Chapter,  
maybe a Volume, shorn of violence  
consists of an adult reading aimlessly.  
This line is the length of a full life

smuggled in while no one was plotting  
against a neighbour, except in jest.  
Then, after a gap, comes Nellie. She  
is in a drought-fisted field

with a hoe. This is her twelfth year  
on the land, and today her back  
doesn't hurt. Catechisms of self-pity  
and of murder have declared a day's truce

in the Civil War within her. So today,  
we can bring Nellie, content with herself,  
with the world, into our History.  
For a day. In the next generation

we find a suitable subject camping  
near the border of a divided country:  
for a while no one knows how near. For these  
few lines she is ours. But how about

the lovers? you ask, the freshly-washed  
body close to yours; sounds, smells, tastes;  
anticipation of the young, the edited memory  
of the rest of us? How about thoughts

higher than their thinkers?...Yes, yes.  
Give them half a line and a mass of footnotes:  
they have their own privileged history,

like inherited income beside our husbandry.

We bring our History up to date  
in a city like London: someone's just paid  
the mortgage, is free of guilt  
and not dying of cancer; and going

past the news-stand, doesn't see a headline  
advertising torture. This is all  
recommended reading, but in small doses.  
It shows you can avoid suffering, if you try.

## **The Passionate Shepherd to His Love**

By [Christopher Marlowe](#)

Come live with me and be my love,  
And we will all the pleasures prove,  
That Valleys, groves, hills, and fields,  
Woods, or steepy mountain yields.

And we will sit upon the Rocks,  
Seeing the Shepherds feed their flocks,  
By shallow Rivers to whose falls  
Melodious birds sing Madrigals.

And I will make thee beds of Roses  
And a thousand fragrant posies,  
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle  
Embroidered all with leaves of Myrtle;

A gown made of the finest wool  
Which from our pretty Lambs we pull;  
Fair lined slippers for the cold,  
With buckles of the purest gold;

A belt of straw and Ivy buds,  
With Coral clasps and Amber studs:  
And if these pleasures may thee move,  
Come live with me, and be my love.

The Shepherds' Swains shall dance and sing  
For thy delight each May-morning:  
If these delights thy mind may move,  
Then live with me, and be my love.

# Harold's Chicken Shack #86

By [Nate Marshall](#)

*we're trying to eliminate the shack.*

— *Kristen Pierce, Harold's CEO & daughter of founder Harold Pierce*

when i went to summer camp the white kids had a tendency  
to shorten names of important institutions. make Northwestern  
University into *NU*. international relations into *IR*. everybody  
started calling me *Nate*. before this i imagined myself

*Nathaniel A.* maybe even *N. Armstead* to big up my granddad.  
i wrote my whole name on everything. eventually i started  
unintentionally introducing myself as *Nate*. it never occurred  
to me that they could escape the knowing of my name's  
real length. as a shorty

most the kids in my neighborhood couldn't say my name.  
*Mick-daniel, Nick-thaniel, MacDonnel* shot across the courts  
like wild heaves toward the basket. the subconscious visual  
of a chicken shack seems a poor fit for national expansion.

Harold's Chicken is easier, sounds like Columbus's flag stuck  
into a cup of cole slaw. shack sounds too much like home  
of poor people, like haven for weary  
like building our own.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

# The Only Mexican

By [David Tomas Martinez](#)

The only Mexican that ever was Mexican, fought in the revolution  
and drank nightly, and like all machos, crawled into work crudo,

letting his breath twirl, then clap and sing before sandpaper  
juiced the metal. The only Mexican to never sit in a Catholic pew

was born on Halloween, and ate his lunch wrapped in foil against  
the fence with the other Mexicans. They fixed old Fords where my

grandfather worked for years, him and the welder Juan wagered  
each year on who would return first to the Yucatan. Neither did.

When my aunts leave, my dad paces the living room and then rests,  
like a jaguar who once drank rain off the leaves of Cecropia trees,

but now caged, bends his paw on a speaker to watch crowds pass.  
He asks me to watch grandpa, which means, for the day; in town

for two weeks, I have tried my best to avoid this. Many times he will swear,  
and many times grandpa will ask to get in and out of bed, want a sweater,

he will ask the time, he will use the toilet, frequently ask for beer,  
about dinner, when the Padres play, por que no novelas, about bed.

He will ask about his house, grandma, to sit outside, he will question  
while answering, he will smirk, he will invent languages while tucked in bed.

He will bump the table, tap the couch, he will lose his slipper, wedging it in  
the wheel of his chair, like a small child trapped in a well, everyone will care.

He will cry without tears—a broken carburetor of sobs. When I speak  
Spanish, he shakes his head, and reminds me, he is the only Mexican.

## **Flood: Years of Solitude**

By [Dionisio D. Martínez](#)

To the one who sets a second place at the table anyway.

To the one at the back of the empty bus.

To the ones who name each piece of stained glass projected on a white wall.

To anyone convinced that a monologue is a conversation with the past.

To the one who loses with the deck he marked.

To those who are destined to inherit the meek.

To us.

## **Hysteria**

By [Dionisio D. Martínez](#)

*For Ana Menendez*

It only takes one night with the wind on its knees

to imagine Carl Sandburg unfolding  
a map of Chicago, puzzled, then walking the wrong way.

The lines on his face are hard to read. I alternate  
between the tv, where a plastic surgeon is claiming  
that every facial expression causes wrinkles, and

the newspaper. I picture the surgeon reading the lines  
on Sandburg's face, lines that would've made more sense  
if the poet had been, say, a tree growing

in a wind orchard. Maybe he simply smiled too much.  
I'm reading about the All-Star game, thinking  
that maybe Sandburg saw the White Sox of 1919.

. . .

I love American newspapers, the way each section  
is folded independently and believes it owns  
the world. There's this brief item in the inter-

national pages: the Chinese government has posted  
signs in Tiananmen Square, forbidding laughter.  
I'm sure the plastic surgeon would approve, he'd say

the Chinese will look young much longer, their faces  
unnaturally smooth, but what I see (although  
no photograph accompanies the story) is laughter

bursting inside them. I go back to the sports section  
and a closeup of a rookie in mid-swing, his face  
keeping all the wrong emotions in check.

. . .

When I read I bite my lower lip, a habit  
the plastic surgeon would probably call  
cosmetic heresy because it accelerates the aging

process. I think of Carl Sandburg and the White Sox;  
I think of wind in Tiananmen Square, how a country  
deprived of laughter ages invisibly; I think

of the Great Walls of North America, each of them  
a grip on some outfield like a rookie's hands  
around a bat when the wind is against him; I bite

my lower lip again; I want to learn  
to think in American, to believe that a headline  
is a fact and all stories are suspect.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Rest before you sleep

By [Dionisio D. Martínez](#)

*Requiem after Fauré, for my father*

Rest before you sleep      You'll be walking for hours  
then      as usual      away from home      your shoes  
in your hand      your feet not yet used to the road  
Perhaps they need to feel the gravel  
to know where they're headed

A woman I knew      who lived mostly in the woods  
mentioned the danger in presuming to know  
what an animal thinks      The fox      for example  
stopping by her open tent and looking in

I suppose she would've felt this way about your feet  
She would've said how could anyone know  
what a pair of tired feet need along the way

I would've asked her how she knew the feet  
were tired      Such discourse produces nothing  
but anything less would be silence  
and that would be intolerable  
I wish I knew why I was telling you this

It's easier to read the mind of a fox than to guess  
what a man's about to say when he returns  
from the woods      head full of roots      veins  
more like branches      shoes in one hand      feet  
blistered      and none of this necessarily  
an indication of how the feet feel      what miles  
uphill and back have done to the soles  
and to the small bones that propel a man

It's safe now      I think      to speak for the fox  
who is only as cunning as we say it is

We're the only creatures that claim to be anything  
then build a house of facts around the claim

I've come for vindication      No point in trying  
to disguise it as a lesser wish      Wake up      stop  
while you still know where you are      Put away  
your elusive country      Give your sleep a rest

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## It Is Not

By [Valerie Martínez](#)

We have the body of a woman, an arch over the ground, but there is no danger. Her hair falls, spine bowed, but no one is with her. The desert, yes, with its cacti, bursage, sidewinders. She is not in danger. If we notice, there are the tracks of animals moving east toward the sunrise. And the light is about to touch a woman's body without possession. Here, there are no girl's bones in the earth, marked with violence. A cholla blooms, just two feet away. It blooms.

There is a man, like her father, who wakes to a note saying *I have gone, for a day, to the desert*. Now he knows she is in danger. He will try to anticipate what happens to a young woman, how it will happen, how he will deal with the terrible. In him, he feels he knows this somehow. He knows because there are men he knows who are capable. This place she has gone to, where? But it doesn't matter. There is, first of all, the heat which scorches, snakes with their coils and open mouths, men who go there with the very thing in mind. The very thing.

It is the desert on its own. Miles. Beyond what anyone can see. Not peaceful nor vengeful. It does not bow down; it is not danger. I cannot speak of it without easing or troubling myself. It is not panorama nor theatre. I do not know. It is conception—the gifts or burdens I bear, whether arch, a prayer, or danger. They can happen, yes, we conceive them. This very woman I know. The man does sit tortured. The desert, created, merely embodies its place. And watch us lay our visions, O god, upon it.

# The Definition of Love

By [Andrew Marvell](#)

My love is of a birth as rare  
As 'tis for object strange and high;  
It was begotten by Despair  
Upon Impossibility.

Magnanimous Despair alone  
Could show me so divine a thing  
Where feeble Hope could ne'er have flown,  
But vainly flapp'd its tinsel wing.

And yet I quickly might arrive  
Where my extended soul is fixt,  
But Fate does iron wedges drive,  
And always crowds itself betwixt.

For Fate with jealous eye does see  
Two perfect loves, nor lets them close;  
Their union would her ruin be,  
And her tyrannic pow'r depose.

And therefore her decrees of steel  
Us as the distant poles have plac'd,  
(Though love's whole world on us doth wheel)  
Not by themselves to be embrac'd;

Unless the giddy heaven fall,  
And earth some new convulsion tear;  
And, us to join, the world should all  
Be cramp'd into a planisphere.

As lines, so loves oblique may well  
Themselves in every angle greet;  
But ours so truly parallel,  
Though infinite, can never meet.

Therefore the love which us doth bind,  
But Fate so enviously debars,  
Is the conjunction of the mind,  
And opposition of the stars.

# The Fair Singer

By [Andrew Marvell](#)

To make a final conquest of all me,  
Love did compose so sweet an enemy,  
In whom both beauties to my death agree,  
Joining themselves in fatal harmony;  
That while she with her eyes my heart does bind,  
She with her voice might captivate my mind.

I could have fled from one but singly fair,  
My disentangled soul itself might save,  
Breaking the curled trammels of her hair.  
But how should I avoid to be her slave,  
Whose subtle art invisibly can wreath  
My fetters of the very air I breathe?

It had been easy fighting in some plain,  
Where victory might hang in equal choice,  
But all resistance against her is vain,  
Who has th'advantage both of eyes and voice,  
And all my forces needs must be undone,  
She having gained both the wind and sun.

# On a Drop of Dew

By [Andrew Marvell](#)

See how the orient dew,  
Shed from the bosom of the morn  
    Into the blowing roses,  
Yet careless of its mansion new,  
For the clear region where 'twas born  
    Round in itself incloses:  
    And in its little globe's extent,  
Frames as it can its native element.  
How it the purple flow'r does slight,  
    Scarce touching where it lies,  
But gazing back upon the skies,  
    Shines with a mournful light,  
    Like its own tear,  
Because so long divided from the sphere.  
Restless it rolls and unsecure,  
    Trembling lest it grow impure,  
Till the warm sun pity its pain,  
And to the skies exhale it back again.

So the soul, that drop, that ray  
Of the clear fountain of eternal day,  
Could it within the human flow'r be seen,  
Remembering still its former height,  
Shuns the sweet leaves and blossoms green,  
And recollecting its own light,  
Does, in its pure and circling thoughts, express  
The greater heaven in an heaven less.  
In how coy a figure wound,  
Every way it turns away:  
So the world excluding round,  
Yet receiving in the day,  
Dark beneath, but bright above,  
Here disdaining, there in love.  
How loose and easy hence to go,  
How girt and ready to ascend,  
Moving but on a point below,  
It all about does upwards bend.  
Such did the manna's sacred dew distill,  
White and entire, though congealed and chill,  
Congealed on earth : but does, dissolving, run  
Into the glories of th' almighty sun.

## Song of the Powers

By [David Mason](#)

Mine, said the stone,  
mine is the hour.  
I crush the scissors,  
such is my power.  
Stronger than wishes,  
my power, alone.

Mine, said the paper,  
mine are the words  
that smother the stone  
with imagined birds,  
reams of them, flown  
from the mind of the shaper.

Mine, said the scissors,  
mine all the knives  
gashing through paper's  
ethereal lives;  
nothing's so proper

as tattering wishes.

As stone crushes scissors,  
as paper snuffs stone  
and scissors cut paper,  
all end alone.

So heap up your paper  
and scissor your wishes  
and uproot the stone  
from the top of the hill.

They all end alone  
as you will, you will.

## **The Story of Ferdinand the Bull**

By [Matt Mason](#)

Dad would come home after too long at work  
and I'd sit on his lap to hear  
the story of Ferdinand the Bull; every night,  
me handing him the red book until I knew  
every word, couldn't read,  
just recite along with drawings  
of a gentle bull, frustrated matadors,  
the all-important bee, and flowers—  
flowers in meadows and flowers  
thrown by the Spanish ladies.  
Its lesson, really,  
about not being what you're born into  
but what you're born to be,  
even if that means  
not caring about the capes they wave in your face  
or the spears they cut into your shoulders.  
And Dad, wonderful Dad, came home  
after too long at work  
and read to me  
the same story every night  
until I knew every word, couldn't read,

just recite.

## **Anne Rutledge**

By [Edgar Lee Masters](#)

Out of me unworthy and unknown  
The vibrations of deathless music;

“With malice toward none, with charity for all.”  
Out of me the forgiveness of millions toward millions,  
And the beneficent face of a nation  
Shining with justice and truth.  
I am Anne Rutledge who sleep beneath these weeds,  
Beloved in life of Abraham Lincoln,  
Wedded to him, not through union,  
But through separation.  
Bloom forever, O Republic,  
From the dust of my bosom!

## Lucinda Matlock

By [Edgar Lee Masters](#)

I went to the dances at Chandlerville,  
And played snap-out at Winchester.  
One time we changed partners,  
Driving home in the moonlight of middle June,  
And then I found Davis.  
We were married and lived together for seventy years,  
Enjoying, working, raising the twelve children,  
Eight of whom we lost  
Ere I had reached the age of sixty.  
I spun, I wove, I kept the house, I nursed the sick,  
I made the garden, and for holiday  
Rambled over the fields where sang the larks,  
And by Spoon River gathering many a shell,  
And many a flower and medicinal weed —  
Shouting to the wooded hills, singing to the green valleys.  
At ninety-six I had lived enough, that is all,  
And passed to a sweet repose.  
What is this I hear of sorrow and weariness,  
Anger, discontent and drooping hopes?  
Degenerate sons and daughters,  
Life is too strong for you —  
It takes life to love Life.

## Mrs. Kessler

By [Edgar Lee Masters](#)

Mr. Kessler, you know, was in the army,  
And he drew six dollars a month as a pension,  
And stood on the corner talking politics,  
Or sat at home reading Grant's *Memoirs*;

And I supported the family by washing,  
Learning the secrets of all the people  
From their curtains, counterpanes, shirts and skirts.  
For things that are new grow old at length,  
They're replaced with better or none at all:  
People are prospering or falling back.  
And rents and patches widen with time;  
No thread or needle can pace decay,  
And there are stains that baffle soap,  
And there are colors that run in spite of you,  
Blamed though you are for spoiling a dress.  
Handkerchiefs, napery, have their secrets  
The laundress, Life, knows all about it.  
And I, who went to all the funerals  
Held in Spoon River, swear I never  
Saw a dead face without thinking it looked  
Like something washed and ironed.

## Unfunky UFO

By [Adrian Matejka](#)

The first space shuttle launch got delayed until Sunday, so we had to watch the shuttle's return to Earth in class instead—PS113's paunchy black & white rolled in, the antennae on top adjusted sideways & down for better reception. That same day, Garrett stole my new pencil box. That same day, Cynthia peed her jeans instead of going to the bathroom & letting Garrett steal her pencil box. Both of us too upset to answer questions about space flight, so we got sent to the back of the class. I smelled like the kind of shame that starts a fight on a Tuesday afternoon. Cynthia smelled like pee & everyday Jordache. The shuttle made its slick way back to Earth, peeling clouds from the monochromatic sky & we all—even the astronomically marginal—were winners. American, because a few days before, a failed songwriter put a bullet in the president in the name of Jodie Foster. The shuttle looked like a bullet, only with wings & a cockpit, & when it finally landed, the class broke into applause & the teacher snatched a thinning American flag from the corner, waved it back & forth in honor of our wounded president & those astronauts.

# Mingus at the Showplace

By [William Matthews](#)

I was miserable, of course, for I was seventeen,  
and so I swung into action and wrote a poem,

and it was miserable, for that was how I thought  
poetry worked: you digested experience and shat

literature. It was 1960 at The Showplace, long since  
defunct, on West 4th St., and I sat at the bar,

casting beer money from a thin reel of ones,  
the kid in the city, big ears like a puppy.

And I knew Mingus was a genius. I knew two  
other things, but they were wrong, as it happened.

So I made him look at the poem.  
“There’s a lot of that going around,” he said,

and Sweet Baby Jesus he was right. He laughed  
amiably. He didn’t look as if he thought

bad poems were dangerous, the way some poets do.  
If they were baseball executives they’d plot

to destroy sandlots everywhere so that the game  
could be saved from children. Of course later

that night he fired his pianist in mid-number  
and flurried him from the stand.

“We’ve suffered a diminuendo in personnel,”  
he explained, and the band played on.

# Onions

By [William Matthews](#)

How easily happiness begins by  
dicing onions. A lump of sweet butter  
slithers and swirls across the floor  
of the sauté pan, especially if its  
errant path crosses a tiny slick  
of olive oil. Then a tumble of onions.

This could mean soup or risotto  
or chutney (from the Sanskrit  
*chatni*, to lick). Slowly the onions  
go limp and then nacreous  
and then what cookbooks call clear,  
though if they were eyes you could see

clearly the cataracts in them.  
It's true it can make you weep  
to peel them, to unfurl and to tease  
from the taut ball first the brittle,  
caramel-colored and decrepit  
papery outside layer, the least

recent the reticent onion  
wrapped around its growing body,  
for there's nothing to an onion  
but skin, and it's true you can go on  
weeping as you go on in, through  
the moist middle skins, the sweetest

and thickest, and you can go on  
in to the core, to the bud-like,  
acid, fibrous skins densely  
clustered there, stalky and in-  
complete, and these are the most  
pungent, like the nuggets of nightmare

and rage and murmury animal  
comfort that infant humans secrete.  
This is the best domestic perfume.  
You sit down to eat with a rumor  
of onions still on your twice-washed  
hands and lift to your mouth a hint

of a story about loam and usual  
endurance. It's there when you clean up  
and rinse the wine glasses and make  
a joke, and you leave the minutest  
whiff of it on the light switch,  
later, when you climb the stairs.

# Respiration

By [Jamaal May](#)

A lot of it lives in the trachea, you know.  
But not so much that you won't need more muscle:  
the diaphragm, a fist clenching at the bottom.  
Inhale. So many of us are breathless,  
you know, like me  
kneeling to collect the pottery shards  
of a house plant my elbow has nudged  
into oblivion. What if I sigh,  
and the black earth beneath me scatters  
like insects running from my breath?  
Am I a god then? Am I insane  
because I worry about the disassembling of earth  
regularly? I walk more softly now

into gardens or up the steps of old houses  
with impatiens stuffed in their window boxes.  
When it's you standing there with a letter  
or voice or face full of solemn news,  
will you hold your breath before you knock?

# There Are Birds Here

By [Jamaal May](#)

*For Detroit*

There are birds here,  
so many birds here  
is what I was trying to say  
when they said those birds were metaphors  
for what is trapped  
between buildings  
and buildings. No.  
The birds are here  
to root around for bread  
the girl's hands tear  
and toss like confetti. No,  
I don't mean the bread is torn like cotton,  
I said confetti, and no  
not the confetti  
a tank can make of a building.  
I mean the confetti  
a boy can't stop smiling about

and no his smile isn't much  
like a skeleton at all. And no  
his neighborhood is not like a war zone.  
I am trying to say  
his neighborhood  
is as tattered and feathered  
as anything else,  
as shadow pierced by sun  
and light parted  
by shadow-dance as anything else,  
but they won't stop saying  
how lovely the ruins,  
how ruined the lovely  
children must be in that birdless city.

## Ice

By [Gail Mazur](#)

In the warming house, children lace their skates,  
bending, choked, over their thick jackets.

A Franklin stove keeps the place so cozy  
it's hard to imagine why anyone would leave,

clumping across the frozen beach to the river.  
December's always the same at Ware's Cove,

the first sheer ice, black, then white  
and deep until the city sends trucks of men

with wooden barriers to put up the boys'  
hockey rink. An hour of skating after school,

of trying wobbly figure-8's, an hour  
of distances moved backwards without falling,

then—twilight, the warming house steamy  
with girls pulling on boots, their chafed legs

aching. Outside, the hockey players keep  
playing, slamming the round black puck

until it's dark, until supper. At night,  
a shy girl comes to the cove with her father.

Although there isn't music, they glide  
arm in arm onto the blurred surface together,

braced like dancers. She thinks she'll never  
be so happy, for who else will find her graceful,

find her perfect, skate with her  
in circles outside the emptied rink forever?

## The Art Room

By [Shara McCallum](#)

for my sisters

Because we did not have threads  
of turquoise, silver, and gold,  
we could not sew a sun nor sky.  
And our hands became balls of fire.  
And our arms spread open like wings.

Because we had no chalk or pastels,  
no toad, forest, or morning-grass slats  
of paper, we had no colour  
for creatures. So we squatted  
and sprang, squatted and sprang.

Four young girls, plaits heavy  
on our backs, our feet were beating  
drums, drawing rhythms from the floor;  
our mouths became woodwinds;  
our tongues touched teeth and were reeds.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## What the Oracle Said

By [Shara McCallum](#)

You will leave your home:  
nothing will hold you.  
You will wear dresses of gold; skins  
of silver, copper, and bronze.  
The sky above you will shift in meaning  
each time you think you understand.

You will spend a lifetime chipping away layers  
of flesh. The shadow of your scales  
will always remain. You will be marked  
by sulphur and salt.  
You will bathe endlessly in clear streams and fail  
to rid yourself of that scent.  
Your feet will never be your own.  
Stone will be your path.  
Storms will follow in your wake,  
destroying all those who take you in.  
You will desert your children  
kill your lovers and devour their flesh.  
You will love no one  
but the wind and ache of your bones.  
Neither will love you in return.  
With age, your hair will grow matted and dull,  
your skin will gape and hang in long folds,  
your eyes will cease to shine.  
But nothing will be enough.  
The sea will never take you back.

## **A January Dandelion**

By [George Marion McClellan](#)

All Nashville is a chill. And everywhere  
Like desert sand, when the winds blow,  
There is each moment sifted through the air,  
A powdered blast of January snow.  
O! thoughtless Dandelion, to be misled  
By a few warm days to leave thy natural bed,  
Was folly growth and blooming over soon.  
And yet, thou blasted yellow-coated gem,  
Full many a heart has but a common boon  
With thee, now freezing on thy slender stem.  
When the heart has bloomed by the touch of love's warm breath  
Then left and chilling snow is sifted in,  
It still may beat but there is blast and death  
To all that blooming life that might have been.

## **The Mystery of the Hunt**

By [Michael McClure](#)

It's the mystery of the hunt that intrigues me,  
That drives us like lemmings, but cautiously—

The search for a bright square cloud—the scent of lemon verbena—  
Or to learn rules for the game the sea otters  
Play in the surf.

It is these small things—and the secret behind them  
That fill the heart.  
The pattern, the spirit, the fiery demon  
That link them together  
And pull their freedom into our senses,

The smell of a shrub, a cloud, the action of animals  
—The rising, the exuberance, when the mystery is unveiled.  
It is these small things

That when brought into vision become an inferno.

## **In Flanders Fields**

By [John McCrae](#)

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie,  
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.

## **The Pilgrims**

By [John McCrae](#)

An uphill path, sun-gleams between the showers,  
Where every beam that broke the leaden sky  
Lit other hills with fairer ways than ours;

Some clustered graves where half our memories lie;  
And one grim Shadow creeping ever nigh:  
And this was Life.

Wherein we did another's burden seek,  
The tired feet we helped upon the road,  
The hand we gave the weary and the weak,  
The miles we lightened one another's load,  
When, faint to falling, onward yet we strode:  
This too was Life.

Till, at the upland, as we turned to go  
Amid fair meadows, dusky in the night,  
The mists fell back upon the road below;  
Broke on our tired eyes the western light;  
The very graves were for a moment bright:  
And this was Death.

## **We're Human Beings**

By [Jill McDonough](#)

*That's why we're here*, said Julio Lugo  
to the *Globe*. Sox fans booed  
poor Lugo, booed his at-bat after  
he dropped the ball in the pivotal fifth.

*That ball, I got to it, I just  
couldn't come up with it.*

Lugo wants you to know  
he is fast: a slower player  
wouldn't even get close  
enough to get booed. Lugo  
wants you to know he's only  
human: *We're human beings.*  
*That's why we're here. If not,*

*I would have wings.  
I'd be beside God right now.  
I'd be an angel.*

*But I'm not an angel.  
I'm a human being that lives right here.*

Next day, all

is forgiven. Lugo's home run, Lugo's  
sweet comment to the press.

I wanted to make a poster like the ones that say  
*It's my birthday!* or *First Time at Fenway!* or, pathetic, *ESPN*.  
Posterboard, permanent marker to say *Lugo: me, too*.  
*I'm a human being that lives right here*, decided  
it's too esoteric, too ephemeral a reference, but it's true:  
Oh, Lugo, Julio Lugo, I'm here with you.

## He Mele Aloha no ka Niu

By [Brandy Nālani McDougall](#)

I'm so tired of pretending  
each gesture is meaningless,

that the clattering of niu leaves  
and the guttural call of birds

overhead say nothing.  
There are reasons why

the lichen and moss kākau  
the niu's bark, why

this tree has worn  
an ahu of ua and lā

since birth. Scars were carved  
into its trunk to record

the mo'olelo of its being  
by the passage of insects

becoming one to move  
the earth, speck by speck.

Try to tell them to let go  
of the niu rings marking

each passing year, to abandon  
their only home and move on.

I can't pretend there is  
no memory held

in the dried coconut hat,  
the star ornament, the midribs

bent and dangling away  
from their roots, no thought

behind the kāwelewele  
that continues to hold us

steady. There was a time  
before they were bent

under their need to make  
an honest living, when

each frond was bound  
by its life to another

like a long, erect fin  
skimming the surface

of a sea of grass and sand.  
Eventually, it knew it would rise

higher, its flower would emerge  
gold, then darken in the sun,

that its fruit would fall, only  
to ripen before its brown fronds

bent naturally under the weight  
of such memory, back toward

the trunk to drop to the sand,  
back to its beginnings, again.

Let this be enough to feed us,  
to remember: ka wailewa

i loko, that our own bodies  
are buoyant when they bend

and fall, and that the ocean  
shall carry us and weave us

back into the sand's fabric,  
that the mo'opuna taste our sweet.

## **Born Like the Pines**

By [James Ephraim McGirt](#)

Born like the pines to sing,  
The harp and song in m' breast,  
Though far and near,  
There's none to hear,  
I'll sing as th' winds request.

To tell the trend of m' lay,  
Is not for th' harp or me;  
I'm only to know,  
From the winds that blow,  
What th' theme of m' song shall be.

Born like the pines to sing,  
The harp and th' song in m' breast,  
As th' winds sweep by,  
I'll laugh or cry,  
In th' winds I cannot rest.

## **Nothing to Do**

By [James Ephraim McGirt](#)

The fields are white;  
The laborers are few;  
Yet say the idle:  
There's nothing to do.

Jails are crowded;  
In Sunday-schools few;  
We still complain:  
There's nothing to do.

Drunkards are dying—  
Your sons, it is true;  
Mothers' arms folded  
With nothing to do.

Heathens are dying;  
Their blood falls on you;

How can you people  
Find nothing to do?

## **Pentatina for Five Vowels**

By [Campbell McGrath](#)

Today is a trumpet to set the hounds baying.  
The past is a fox the hunters are flaying.  
Nothing unspoken goes without saying.  
Love's a casino where lovers risk playing.  
The future's a marker our hearts are prepaying.

The future's a promise there's no guaranteeing.  
Today is a fire the field mice are fleeing.  
Love is a marriage of feeling and being.  
The past is a mirror for wishful sightseeing.  
Nothing goes missing without absenteeing.

Nothing gets cloven except by dividing.  
The future is chosen by atoms colliding.  
The past's an elision forever eliding.  
Today is a fog bank in which I am hiding.  
Love is a burn forever debriding.

Love's an ascent forever plateauing.  
Nothing is granted except by bestowing.  
Today is an anthem the cuckoos are crowing.  
The future's a convolute river onflowing.  
The past is a lawn the neighbor is mowing.

The past is an answer not worth pursuing,  
Nothing gets done except by the doing.  
The future's a climax forever ensuing.  
Love is only won by wooing.  
Today is a truce between reaping and rueing.

## **Ode for the American Dead in Asia**

By [Thomas McGrath](#)

1.

God love you now, if no one else will ever,  
Corpse in the paddy, or dead on a high hill  
In the fine and ruinous summer of a war

You never wanted. All your false flags were  
Of bravery and ignorance, like grade school maps:  
Colors of countries you would never see—  
Until that weekend in eternity  
When, laughing, well armed, perfectly ready to kill  
The world and your brother, the safe commanders sent  
You into your future. Oh, dead on a hill,  
Dead in a paddy, leeched and tumbled to  
A tomb of footnotes. We mourn a changeling: you:  
Handselled to poverty and drummed to war  
By distinguished masters whom you never knew.

2.

The bee that spins his metal from the sun,  
The shy mole drifting like a miner ghost  
Through midnight earth—all happy creatures run  
As strict as trains on rails the circuits of  
Blind instinct. Happy in your summer follies,  
You mined a culture that was mined for war:  
The state to mold you, church to bless, and always  
The elders to confirm you in your ignorance.  
No scholar put your thinking cap on nor  
Warned that in dead seas fishes died in schools  
Before inventing legs to walk the land.  
The rulers stuck a tennis racket in your hand,  
An Ark against the flood. In time of change  
Courage is not enough: the blind mole dies,  
And you on your hill, who did not know the rules.

3.

Wet in the windy counties of the dawn  
The lone crow skirls his draggled passage home:  
And God (whose sparrows fall aslant his gaze,  
Like grace or confetti) blinks and he is gone,  
And you are gone. Your scarecrow valor grows  
And rusts like early lilac while the rose  
Blooms in Dakota and the stock exchange  
Flowers. Roses, rents, all things conspire  
To crown your death with wreaths of living fire.  
And the public mourners come: the politic tear  
Is cast in the Forum. But, in another year,  
We will mourn you, whose fossil courage fills  
The limestone histories: brave: ignorant: amazed:  
Dead in the rice paddies, dead on the nameless hills.

# In Praise of Pain

By [Heather McHugh](#)

A brilliance takes up residence in flaws—  
a brilliance all the unchipped faces of design  
refuse. The wine collects its starlets  
at a lip's fault, sunlight where the nicked  
glass angles, and affection where the eye  
is least correctable, where arrows of  
unquivered light are lodged, where someone  
else's eyes have come to be concerned.

For beauty's sake, assault and drive and burn  
the devil from the simply perfect sun.  
Demand a birthmark on the skin of love,  
a tremble in the touch, in come a cry,  
and let the silverware of nights be flecked,  
the moon pocked to distribute more or less  
indwelling alloys of its dim and shine  
by nip and tuck, by chance's dance of laws.

The brightness drawn and quartered on a sheet,  
the moment cracked upon a bed, will last  
as if you soldered them with moon and flux.  
And break the bottle of the eye to see  
what lights are spun of accident and glass.

# After the Winter

By [Claude McKay](#)

Some day, when trees have shed their leaves  
And against the morning's white  
The shivering birds beneath the eaves  
Have sheltered for the night,  
We'll turn our faces southward, love,  
Toward the summer isle  
Where bamboos spire the shafted grove  
And wide-mouthed orchids smile.

And we will seek the quiet hill  
Where towers the cotton tree,  
And leaps the laughing crystal rill,  
And works the droning bee.  
And we will build a cottage there  
Beside an open glade,

With black-ribbed blue-bells blowing near,  
And ferns that never fade.

## If We Must Die

By [Claude McKay](#)

If we must die, let it not be like hogs  
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,  
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,  
Making their mock at our accursèd lot.  
If we must die, O let us nobly die,  
So that our precious blood may not be shed  
In vain; then even the monsters we defy  
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!  
O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!  
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,  
And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!  
What though before us lies the open grave?  
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,  
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

## Lions

By [Sandra McPherson](#)

Lions don't need your help. In the Serengeti,  
For instance, one thousand like the very rich

Hold sway over more than Connecticut. The mane  
Of the lion, like the hooked jaw of the male salmon,

Acts as a shield for defense and is the gift  
Of sexual selection. His eyes are fathomless amber.

The lion is the most social of the big cats.  
Pride members are affectionate among themselves.

They rub cheeks when they meet. They rest  
And hunt together. And cubs suckle indiscriminately.

But strangers or members of a neighboring pride are not  
Usually accepted. If a pride male meets a strange female

He may greet her in a friendly fashion  
And even mate with her

But the pride females will drive her off.  
Male lions, usually depicted as indolent freeloaders

Who let the lionesses do all the hunting, are not mere  
Parasites. They maintain the integrity of the territory.

Lions eat communally but completely lack table manners.  
Indeed, lions give the impression that their evolution

Toward a social existence is incomplete—that cooperation  
In achieving a task does not yet include

The equal division of the spoils.  
More bad news: lions are not good parents.

But prowess, that they have. Their courage comes  
From being built, like an automobile,

For power. A visible lion is usually a safe lion,  
But one should never feel safe

Because almost always there is something one can't see.  
Given protection and power

A lion does not need to be clever.  
Now, lions are not the most likable kind of animal

Unless you are a certain type of person,  
That is, not necessarily leonine in the sense of manly

Or ferocious, but one who wouldn't mind resting twenty  
Of twenty-four hours a day and who is not beyond

Stealing someone else's kill  
About half the time.

Lions are not my favorite kind of animal,  
Gazelles seem nicer,

A zebra has his own sort of appealing pathos,  
Especially when he is sure prey for the lion.

Lions have little to offer the spirit.  
If we made of ourselves parks and placed the lion

In the constituent he most resembled  
He would be in our blood.

## Here

By [Joshua Mehigan](#)

Nothing has changed. They have a welcome sign,  
a hill with cows and a white house on top,  
a mall and grocery store where people shop,  
a diner where some people go to dine.  
It is the same no matter where you go,  
and downtown you will find no big surprises.  
Each fall the dew point falls until it rises.  
White snow, green buds, green lawn, red leaves, white snow.

This is all right. This is their hope. And yet,  
though what you see is never what you get,  
it does feel somehow changed from what it was.  
Is it the people? Houses? Fields? The weather?  
Is it the streets? Is it these things together?  
Nothing here ever changes, till it does.

## The Hill

By [Joshua Mehigan](#)

On the crowded hill bordering the mill,  
across the shallow stream, nearer than they seem,  
they wait and will be waiting.

Rain. The small smilax is the same to the fly  
as the big bush of lilacs exploding nearby.  
The rain may be abating.

On the quiet hill beside the droning mill,  
across the dirty stream, nearer than they seem,  
they wait and will be waiting.

The glass-eyed cicada drones in the linden draped like a tent  
above three polished stones. Aphids swarm at the scent  
of the yellow petals.

A bird comes to prod a clump of wet fur.  
The ferns idiotically nod when she takes it away with her.  
Something somewhere settles.

On the crowded hill bordering the mill  
is our best cemetery, pretty, but not very.  
All are welcome here.

Sun finds a bare teak box on the tidy green plot.  
It finds lichen-crusting blocks fringed with forget-me-not.  
Angels preen everywhere.

On the crowded hill bordering the mill  
is our best cemetery, pretty, but not very.  
All are welcome here.

## Future Memories

By [Mario Meléndez](#)

Translated By Eloisa Amezcua

My sister woke me very early  
that morning and told me  
“Get up, you have to come see this  
the ocean’s filled with stars”  
Delighted by the revelation  
I dressed quickly and thought  
*If the ocean’s filled with stars  
I must take the first flight  
and collect all of the fish from the sky*

## The Maldivian Shark

By [Herman Melville](#)

About the Shark, phlegmatic one,  
Pale sort of the Maldivian sea,  
The sleek little pilot-fish, azure and slim,  
How alert in attendance be.  
From his saw-pit of mouth, from his charnel of maw  
They have nothing of harm to dread,  
But liquidly glide on his ghastly flank  
Or before his Gorgonian head;  
Or lurk in the port of serrated teeth  
In white triple tiers of glittering gates,  
And there find a haven when peril’s abroad,  
An asylum in jaws of the Fates!  
They are friends; and friendly they guide him to prey,

Yet never partake of the treat—  
Eyes and brains to the dotard lethargic and dull,  
Pale ravener of horrible meat.

## **Shiloh: A Requiem (April, 1862)**

By [Herman Melville](#)

Skimming lightly, wheeling still,  
The swallows fly low  
Over the field in clouded days,  
The forest-field of Shiloh—  
Over the field where April rain  
Solaced the parched ones stretched in pain  
Through the pause of night  
That followed the Sunday fight  
Around the church of Shiloh—  
The church so lone, the log-built one,  
That echoed to many a parting groan  
And natural prayer  
Of dying foemen mingled there—  
Foemen at morn, but friends at eve—  
Fame or country least their care:  
(What like a bullet can undeceive!)  
But now they lie low,  
While over them the swallows skim,  
And all is hushed at Shiloh.

## **At Cross Purposes**

By [Samuel Menashe](#)

**1**

Is this writing mine  
Whose name is this  
Did I underline  
What I was to miss?

**2**

An upheaval of leaves  
Enlightens the tree  
Rooted it receives  
Gusts on a spree

**3**

Beauty makes me sad

Makes me grieve  
I see what I must leave

4

Scaffold, gallows  
Do whose will  
Who hallows wood  
To build, kill

5

Blind man, anvil  
No hammer strikes  
Your eyes are spikes

## Infelix

By [Adah Isaacs Menken](#)

Where is the promise of my years;  
Once written on my brow?  
Ere errors, agonies and fears  
Brought with them all that speaks in tears,  
Ere I had sunk beneath my peers;  
Where sleeps that promise now?

Naught lingers to redeem those hours,  
Still, still to memory sweet!  
The flowers that bloomed in sunny bowers  
Are withered all; and Evil towers  
Supreme above her sister powers  
Of Sorrow and Deceit.

I look along the columned years,  
And see Life's riven fane,  
Just where it fell, amid the jeers  
Of scornful lips, whose mocking sneers,  
For ever hiss within mine ears  
To break the sleep of pain.

I can but own my life is vain  
A desert void of peace;  
I missed the goal I sought to gain,  
I missed the measure of the strain  
That lulls Fame's fever in the brain,  
And bids Earth's tumult cease.

Myself! alas for theme so poor  
A theme but rich in Fear;  
I stand a wreck on Error's shore,  
A spectre not within the door,  
A houseless shadow evermore,  
An exile lingering here.

## Dirge in Woods

By [George Meredith](#)

A wind sways the pines,  
And below  
Not a breath of wild air;  
Still as the mosses that glow  
On the flooring and over the lines  
Of the roots here and there.  
The pine-tree drops its dead;  
They are quiet, as under the sea.  
Overhead, overhead  
Rushes life in a race,  
As the clouds the clouds chase;  
And we go,  
And we drop like the fruits of the tree,  
Even we,  
Even so.

## Catch a Little Rhyme

By [Eve Merriam](#)

Once upon a time  
I caught a little rhyme

I set it on the floor  
but it ran right out the door

I chased it on my bicycle  
but it melted to an icicle

I scooped it up in my hat  
but it turned into a cat

I caught it by the tail  
but it stretched into a whale

I followed it in a boat  
but it changed into a goat

When I fed it tin and paper  
it became a tall skyscraper

Then it grew into a kite  
and flew far out of sight ...

## Good People

By [W.S. Merwin](#)

From the kindness of my parents  
I suppose it was that I held  
that belief about suffering

imagining that if only  
it could come to the attention  
of any person with normal  
feelings certainly anyone  
literate who might have gone

to college they would comprehend  
pain when it went on before them  
and would do something about it  
whenever they saw it happen  
in the time of pain the present  
they would try to stop the bleeding  
for example with their own hands

but it escapes their attention  
or there may be reasons for it  
the victims under the blankets  
the meat counters the maimed children  
the animals the animals  
staring from the end of the world

## The Night of the Shirts

By [W.S. Merwin](#)

Oh pile of white shirts who is coming  
to breathe in your shapes to carry your numbers  
to appear  
what hearts

are moving toward their garments here  
their days  
what troubles beating between arms

you look upward through  
each other saying nothing has happened  
and it has gone away and is sleeping  
having told the same story  
and we exist from within  
eyes of the gods

you lie on your backs  
and the wounds are not made  
the blood has not heard  
the boat has not turned to stone  
and the dark wires to the bulb  
are full of the voice of the unborn

## **The River of Bees**

By [W.S. Merwin](#)

In a dream I returned to the river of bees  
Five orange trees by the bridge and  
Beside two mills my house  
Into whose courtyard a blindman followed  
The goats and stood singing  
Of what was older

Soon it will be fifteen years

He was old he will have fallen into his eyes

I took my eyes  
A long way to the calendars  
Room after room asking how shall I live

One of the ends is made of streets  
One man processions carry through it  
Empty bottles their  
Image of hope  
It was offered to me by name

Once once and once  
In the same city I was born  
Asking what shall I say

He will have fallen into his mouth  
Men think they are better than grass

I return to his voice rising like a forkful of hay

He was old he is not real nothing is real  
Nor the noise of death drawing water

We are the echo of the future

On the door it says what to do to survive  
But we were not born to survive  
Only to live

## **To Luck**

By [W.S. Merwin](#)

In the cards and at the bend in the road  
we never saw you  
in the womb and in the crossfire  
in the numbers  
whatever you had your hand in  
which was everything  
we were told never to put  
our faith in you  
to bow to you humbly after all  
because in the end there was nothing  
else we could do  
but not to believe in you

still we might coax you with pebbles  
kept warm in the hand  
or coins or the relics  
of vanished animals  
observances rituals  
not binding upon you  
who make no promises  
we might do such things only  
not to neglect you  
and risk your disfavor  
oh you who are never the same  
who are secret as the day when it comes  
you whom we explain  
as often as we can

without understanding

## Vixen

By [W.S. Merwin](#)

Comet of stillness princess of what is over  
high note held without trembling without voice without sound  
aura of complete darkness keeper of the kept secrets  
of the destroyed stories the escaped dreams the sentences  
never caught in words warden of where the river went  
touch of its surface sibyl of the extinguished  
window onto the hidden place and the other time  
at the foot of the wall by the road patient without waiting  
in the full moonlight of autumn at the hour when I was born  
you no longer go out like a flame at the sight of me  
you are still warmer than the moonlight gleaming on you  
even now you are unharmed even now perfect  
as you have always been now when your light paws are running  
on the breathless night on the bridge with one end I remember you  
when I have heard you the soles of my feet have made answer  
when I have seen you I have waked and slipped from the calendars  
from the creeds of difference and the contradictions  
that were my life and all the crumbling fabrications  
as long as it lasted until something that we were  
had ended when you are no longer anything  
let me catch sight of you again going over the wall  
and before the garden is extinct and the woods are figures  
guttering on a screen let my words find their own  
places in the silence after the animals

## Advection Blues

By [Michael Metivier](#)

The mower alone  
saw from the median  
the cloud come over  
the mountain down to trawl  
the valley like a whale  
and the swifts like water  
passing through her white baleen.

The mower alone patrolling  
the hawk with the hawks  
saw from the median

the cloud come over  
the mountain to swallow  
where the sky had been  
and where the town had been  
pinned by steeples  
and hummed electric hubris.

For everyone else  
on either side of the narrow  
the cloud was only a minute  
of a single verse  
because the highway treats the blues  
as all the same as if Bentonia  
were Sunflower County  
but the land between the lanes  
even while under the blades  
sees the power in every cloud  
and hears each song spiral out  
of an old familiar tune just so  
to devour our hearts.

## Not for That City

By [Charlotte Mew](#)

Not for that city of the level sun,  
    Its golden streets and glittering gates ablaze—  
    The shadeless, sleepless city of white days,  
White nights, or nights and days that are as one—  
We weary, when all is said, all thought, all done.  
    We strain our eyes beyond this dusk to see  
    What, from the threshold of eternity  
We shall step into. No, I think we shun  
The splendour of that everlasting glare,  
    The clamour of that never-ending song.  
    And if for anything we greatly long,  
It is for some remote and quiet stair  
    Which winds to silence and a space for sleep  
    Too sound for waking and for dreams too deep.

## Desert

By [Josephine Miles](#)

When with the skin you do acknowledge drought,

The dry in the voice, the lightness of feet, the fine  
Flake of the heat at every level line;

When with the hand you learn to touch without  
Surprise the spine for the leaf, the prickled petal,  
The stone scorched in the shine, and the wood brittle;

Then where the pipe drips and the fronds sprout  
And the foot-square forest of clover blooms in sand,  
You will lean and watch, but never touch with your hand.

*September 1934*

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: Recitation of the dedication at the end of the poem is optional.  
Inclusion or omission of the dedication should not affect your accuracy score.*

## On Inhabiting an Orange

By [Josephine Miles](#)

All our roads go nowhere.  
Maps are curled  
To keep the pavement definitely  
On the world.

All our footsteps, set to make  
Metric advance,  
Lapse into arcs in deference  
To circumstance.

All our journeys nearing Space  
Skirt it with care,  
Shying at the distances  
Present in air.

Blithely travel-stained and worn,  
Erect and sure,  
All our travels go forth,  
Making down the roads of Earth  
Endless detour.

# Mansplaining

By [Jennifer Militello](#)

Dear sir, your air of authority  
leaves me lost. Eases me from  
a place of ease. Contracts with  
my contradictions to take from me  
a place. Autopilots my autobiography.  
Frightens my fright. Sighs with  
my breath. Wins at my race.  
Your certainty has me curtailed.  
Your nerve has me nervous. Your  
childhood has me childlike and  
your nastiness nests in my belfry  
like a hawk. You are beyond  
and above my slice of sky, peach  
as a pie, bourbon as its pit. You are  
spit and vinegar while I sour  
in my bowl. You bowl me over  
while I tread lightly on  
my feet. You walk on water  
while I sink. You witness me,  
fisherman, boat on the lake,  
while I struggle and burble and brittle  
and drop. You wink at me and  
I must relate. I close my eyes  
to erase you and you are written  
in my lids. A litmus test. A form  
of lair. God with three days  
of facial growth and an old bouquet  
for a face. Soap and water for  
a brain. I have no handsome  
answer. I have no pillar of salt  
or shoulder to look over. I have  
no feather to weigh. I have no  
bubble to burst. I am less  
to myself, a character in a drama,  
a drumbeat, a benevolence, a  
blight. All parts of me say shoot  
on sight. Aim for an artery  
or organ. Good night.

# Dirge Without Music

By [Edna St. Vincent Millay](#)

I am not resigned to the shutting away of loving hearts in the hard ground.  
So it is, and so it will be, for so it has been, time out of mind:  
Into the darkness they go, the wise and the lovely. Crowned  
With lilies and with laurel they go; but I am not resigned.

Lovers and thinkers, into the earth with you.  
Be one with the dull, the indiscriminate dust.  
A fragment of what you felt, of what you knew,  
A formula, a phrase remains,—but the best is lost.

The answers quick and keen, the honest look, the laughter, the love,—  
They are gone. They are gone to feed the roses. Elegant and curled  
Is the blossom. Fragrant is the blossom. I know. But I do not approve.  
More precious was the light in your eyes than all the roses in the world.

Down, down, down into the darkness of the grave  
Gently they go, the beautiful, the tender, the kind;  
Quietly they go, the intelligent, the witty, the brave.  
I know. But I do not approve. And I am not resigned.

# Ebb

By [Edna St. Vincent Millay](#)

I know what my heart is like  
    Since your love died:  
It is like a hollow ledge  
Holding a little pool  
    Left there by the tide,  
    A little tepid pool,  
Drying inward from the edge.

# “I think I should have loved you presently”

By [Edna St. Vincent Millay](#)

I think I should have loved you presently,  
And given in earnest words I flung in jest;  
And lifted honest eyes for you to see,  
And caught your hand against my cheek and breast;  
And all my pretty follies flung aside  
That won you to me, and beneath your gaze,  
Naked of reticence and shorn of pride,

Spread like a chart my little wicked ways.  
I, that had been to you, had you remained,  
But one more waking from a recurrent dream,  
Cherish no less the certain stakes I gained,  
And walk your memory's halls, austere, supreme,  
A ghost in marble of a girl you knew  
Who would have loved you in a day or two.

## Recuerdo

By [Edna St. Vincent Millay](#)

We were very tired, we were very merry—  
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.  
It was bare and bright, and smelled like a stable—  
But we looked into a fire, we leaned across a table,  
We lay on a hill-top underneath the moon;  
And the whistles kept blowing, and the dawn came soon.

We were very tired, we were very merry—  
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry;  
And you ate an apple, and I ate a pear,  
From a dozen of each we had bought somewhere;  
And the sky went wan, and the wind came cold,  
And the sun rose dripping, a bucketful of gold.

We were very tired, we were very merry,  
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.  
We hailed, "Good morrow, mother!" to a shawl-covered head,  
And bought a morning paper, which neither of us read;  
And she wept, "God bless you!" for the apples and pears,  
And we gave her all our money but our subway fares.

## "Time does not bring relief; you all have lied"

By [Edna St. Vincent Millay](#)

Time does not bring relief; you all have lied  
Who told me time would ease me of my pain!  
I miss him in the weeping of the rain;  
I want him at the shrinking of the tide;  
The old snows melt from every mountain-side,  
And last year's leaves are smoke in every lane;  
But last year's bitter loving must remain  
Heaped on my heart, and my old thoughts abide.  
There are a hundred places where I fear

To go,—so with his memory they brim.  
And entering with relief some quiet place  
Where never fell his foot or shone his face  
I say, “There is no memory of him here!”  
And so stand stricken, so remembering him.

## **“What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why”**

By [Edna St. Vincent Millay](#)

What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why,  
I have forgotten, and what arms have lain  
Under my head till morning; but the rain  
Is full of ghosts tonight, that tap and sigh  
Upon the glass and listen for reply,  
And in my heart there stirs a quiet pain  
For unremembered lads that not again  
Will turn to me at midnight with a cry.

Thus in the winter stands the lonely tree,  
Nor knows what birds have vanished one by one,  
Yet knows its boughs more silent than before:  
I cannot say what loves have come and gone,  
I only know that summer sang in me  
A little while, that in me sings no more.

## **New wings**

By [Alice Miller](#)

Looking out at a man's name on a battered wingtip  
in strong winds; was it planned that when  
the cheap wing bends, the name stays steady?  
What if it didn't matter how much  
you trod over the body of your mother, what happened  
when you were younger, how you tried forgetting  
and forgot to forgive. Something has to hold you: numbers, columns,  
cards to swipe, books to shelve,

pints to pour. A life filled with fixed wings, with hard grasps,  
with the grateful. What's worth keeping?  
Not the sad boy who blamed you for all the ways he was broken.  
Not the man's name on the wing, but  
why not the battered wing itself. Why not the woman thinking.  
Why not the river below, its lips wet, footprints animal.  
What forked tongues come when clouds crack open,

when this sky's watched you sleep all day,  
and now lets down its darkness. There's all night to stay awake.

## **May You Always be the Darling of Fortune**

By [Jane Miller](#)

March 10th and the snow flees like eloping brides  
into rain. The imperceptible change begins  
out of an old rage and glistens, chaste, with its new  
craving, spring. May your desire always overcome

your need; your story that you have to tell,  
enchanted, mutable, may it fill the world  
you believe: a sunny view, flowers lunging  
from the sill, the quilt, the chair, all things

fill with you and empty and fill. And hurry, because  
now as I tire of my studied abandon, counting  
the days, I'm sad. Yet I trust your absence, in everything  
wholly evident: the rain in the white basin, and I

vigilant.

## **On Shakespeare. 1630**

By [John Milton](#)

What needs my Shakespeare for his honoured bones,  
The labor of an age in piled stones,  
Or that his hallowed relics should be hid  
Under a star-ypointing pyramid?  
Dear son of Memory, great heir of fame,  
What need'st thou such weak witness of thy name?  
Thou in our wonder and astonishment  
Hast built thyself a live-long monument.  
For whilst to th' shame of slow-endeavouring art,  
Thy easy numbers flow, and that each heart  
Hath from the leaves of thy unvalued book  
Those Delphic lines with deep impression took,  
Then thou, our fancy of itself bereaving,  
Dost make us marble with too much conceiving;  
And so sepulchred in such pomp dost lie,  
That kings for such a tomb would wish to die.

## Sonnet 19: When I consider how my light is spent

By [John Milton](#)

When I consider how my light is spent,  
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,  
And that one Talent which is death to hide  
Lodged with me useless, though my Soul more bent  
To serve therewith my Maker, and present  
My true account, lest he returning chide;  
“Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?”  
I fondly ask. But patience, to prevent  
That murmur, soon replies, “God doth not need  
Either man’s work or his own gifts; who best  
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state  
Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed  
And post o’er Land and Ocean without rest:  
They also serve who only stand and wait.”

## Sonnet 23: Methought I saw my late espoused saint

By [John Milton](#)

Methought I saw my late espoused saint  
Brought to me, like Alcestis, from the grave,  
Whom Jove's great son to her glad husband gave,  
Rescu'd from death by force, though pale and faint.  
Mine, as whom wash'd from spot of child-bed taint  
Purification in the old Law did save,  
And such as yet once more I trust to have  
Full sight of her in Heaven without restraint,  
Came vested all in white, pure as her mind;  
Her face was veil'd, yet to my fancied sight  
Love, sweetness, goodness, in her person shin'd  
So clear as in no face with more delight.  
But Oh! as to embrace me she inclin'd,  
I wak'd, she fled, and day brought back my night.

## The Bear

By [Susan Mitchell](#)

Tonight the bear  
comes to the orchard and, balancing  
on her hind legs, dances under the apple trees,  
hanging onto their boughs,  
dragging their branches down to earth.

Look again. It is not the bear  
but some afterimage of her  
like the car I once saw in the driveway  
after the last guest had gone.  
Snow pulls the apple boughs to the ground.  
Whatever moves in the orchard—  
heavy, lumbering—is clear as wind.

The bear is long gone.  
Drunk on apples,  
she banged over the trash cans that fall night,  
then skidded downstream. By now  
she must be logged in for the winter.  
Unless she is choosy.  
I imagine her as very choosy,  
sniffing at the huge logs, pawing them, trying  
each one on for size,  
but always coming out again.

Until tonight.  
Tonight sap freezes under her skin.  
Her breath leaves white apples in the air.  
As she walks she dozes,  
listening to the sound of axes chopping wood.  
Somewhere she can never catch up to  
trees are falling. Chips pile up like snow  
When she does find it finally,  
the log draws her in as easily as a forest,  
and for a while she continues to see,  
just ahead of her, the moon  
trapped like a salmon in the ice.

## **The Delight Song of Tsoai-talee**

By [N. Scott Momaday](#)

I am a feather on the bright sky  
I am the blue horse that runs in the plain  
I am the fish that rolls, shining, in the water  
I am the shadow that follows a child  
I am the evening light, the lustre of meadows  
I am an eagle playing with the wind  
I am a cluster of bright beads  
I am the farthest star  
I am the cold of dawn  
I am the roaring of the rain

I am the glitter on the crust of the snow  
I am the long track of the moon in a lake  
I am a flame of four colors  
I am a deer standing away in the dusk  
I am a field of sumac and the pomme blanche  
I am an angle of geese in the winter sky  
I am the hunger of a young wolf  
I am the whole dream of these things

You see, I am alive, I am alive  
I stand in good relation to the earth  
I stand in good relation to the gods  
I stand in good relation to all that is beautiful  
I stand in good relation to the daughter of Tsen-tainte  
You see, I am alive, I am alive

## To Fashion

By [Elizabeth Moody](#)

Gay Fashion thou Goddess so pleasing,  
    However imperious thy sway;  
Like a mistress capricious and teasing,  
    Thy slaves tho' they murmur obey.

The simple, the wise, and the witty,  
    The learned, the dunce, and the fool,  
The crooked, straight, ugly, and pretty,  
    Wear the badge of thy whimsical school.

Tho' thy shape be so fickle and changing,  
    That a Proteus thou art to the view;  
And our taste so for ever deranging,  
    We know not which form to pursue.

Yet wave but thy frolicksome banners,  
    And hosts of adherents we see;  
Arts, morals, religion, and manners,  
    Yield implicit obedience to thee.

More despotic than beauty thy power,  
    More than virtue thy rule o'er the mind:  
Tho' transient thy reign as a flower,  
    That scatters its leaves to the wind.

Ah! while folly thou dealest such measure,

No matter how fleeting thy day!  
Be Wisdom, dear goddess, thy pleasure!  
Then lasting as time be thy stay.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Vote

By [Kamilah Aisha Moon](#)

It was hers.  
She had this choice  
behind curtained bliss,  
Dad's chest full on the other side  
as her tapered hand  
pulled the lever.

No matter how wide  
the final margin,  
a lone ballot  
never counted so much.

## A Graveyard

By [Marianne Moore](#)

Man, looking into the sea—  
taking the view from those who have as much right to it as you have it to yourself—  
it is human nature to stand in the middle of a thing  
but you cannot stand in the middle of this:  
the sea has nothing to give but a well excavated grave.  
The firs stand in a procession—each with an emerald turkey-foot at the top—  
reserved as their contours, saying nothing;  
repression, however, is not the most obvious characteristic of the sea;  
the sea is a collector, quick to return a rapacious look.  
There are others besides you who have worn that look—  
whose expression is no longer a protest; the fish no longer investigate them  
for their bones have not lasted;  
men lower nets, unconscious of the fact that they are desecrating a grave,  
and row quickly away—the blades of the oars  
moving together like the feet of water-spiders as if there were no such thing as death.  
The wrinkles progress upon themselves in a phalanx—beautiful under networks of foam,  
and fade breathlessly while the sea rustles in and out of the seaweed;  
the birds swim through the air at top speed, emitting cat-calls as heretofore—  
the tortoise-shell scourges about the feet of the cliffs, in motion beneath them  
and the ocean, under the pulsation of light-houses and noise of bell-buoys,  
advances as usual, looking as if it were not that ocean in which dropped things are bound to  
sink—

in which if they turn and twist, it is neither with volition nor consciousness.

## **The Time I've Lost in Wooing**

By [Thomas Moore](#)

The time I've lost in wooing,  
In watching and pursuing  
The light, that lies  
In woman's eyes,  
Has been my heart's undoing.  
Though Wisdom oft has sought me,  
I scorn'd the lore she brought me,  
My only books  
Were woman's looks,  
And folly's all they've taught me.

Her smile when Beauty granted,  
I hung with gaze enchanted,  
Like him the Sprite,  
Whom maids by night  
Oft meet in glen that's haunted.  
Like him, too, Beauty won me,  
But while her eyes were on me,  
If once their ray  
Was turn'd away,  
Oh! winds could not outrun me.

And are those follies going?  
And is my proud heart growing  
Too cold or wise  
For brilliant eyes  
Again to set it glowing?  
No, vain, alas! th' endeavour  
From bonds so sweet to sever;  
Poor Wisdom's chance  
Against a glance  
Is now as weak as ever.

## **Curandera**

By [Pat Mora](#)

They think she lives alone  
on the edge of town in a two-room house  
where she moved when her husband died

at thirty-five of a gunshot wound  
in the bed of another woman. The *curandera*  
and house have aged together to the rhythm  
of the desert.

She wakes early, lights candles before  
her sacred statues, brews tea of *yerbabuena*.  
She moves down her porch steps, rubs  
cool morning sand into her hands, into her arms.  
Like a large black bird, she feeds on  
the desert, gathering herbs for her basket.

Her days are slow, days of grinding  
dried snake into powder, of crushing  
wild bees to mix with white wine.  
And the townspeople come, hoping  
to be touched by her ointments,  
her hands, her prayers, her eyes.  
She listens to their stories, and she listens  
to the desert, always, to the desert.

By sunset she is tired. The wind  
strokes the strands of long gray hair,  
the smell of drying plants drifts  
into her blood, the sun seeps  
into her bones. She dozes  
on her back porch. Rocking, rocking.

## Yellowtail

By [Mary Morris](#)

The war was over.  
We sutured the wounded,

buried the dead, sat at the bar  
with the enemy, near the blue

throat of the sea. A sushi chef  
slivered salmon into orchids,

etched clouds from oysters,  
as they rose snowing pearls.

From shrimp and seaweed  
he shaped hummingbirds,

which hovered above  
our heads.

With the world's smallest blade  
he carved from yellowfin,

miniature flanks of horses.  
They cantered around our hands.

## History of sleep

By [Rusty Morrison](#)

*(a myth of consequences)*

The ivy across our back fence tangles gray  
into a green evening light.

How a second emptiness  
un-punctuates the first.

Disloyal,  
we attempt to construct.

An ache will tighten  
but not form.

Making impossible  
even this upsurge of crows across our sightline.

The Mayans invented zero so as not to ignore even the gods  
who *wouldn't* carry their burdens.

Too slippery as prayer, too effortless  
as longing.

Our problem was preparation. Premeditation  
neutered any rage potential.

Years later, the spine of our backyard  
appears to have always been crooked.

White jasmine, dove-calm in the lattice, is not  
a finely crafted lure.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Scale

By [Helen Mort](#)

My weight is  
four whippets,

two Chinese gymnasts,  
half a shot-putter.

It can be measured  
in bags of sugar, jam jars,

enough feathers for sixty pillows,  
or a flock of dead birds

but some days it's more  
than the house, the span

of Blair Athol Road.  
I'm the Crooked Spire

warping itself,  
doubled up over town.

I measure myself against  
the sky in its winter coat,

peat traces in water, air  
locked in the radiators at night,

against my own held breath,  
or your unfinished sentences,

your hand on my back  
like a passenger

touching the dashboard  
when a driver brakes,

as if they could slow things down.  
I measure myself against

love — heavier, lighter  
than both of us.

## The Angelfish Greet Odysseus

By [Eisder Mosquera](#)

Angelfish perturb  
the area  
around pink gauze,  
are the details  
of a threaded  
diamond string  
and its fake  
catachrestic applause.  
Like that of the angelheaded  
beast spreading  
its wings, as if to swim  
under the light  
of the glowworm  
and hyacinth,  
the fish are oratory  
and not.  
The pulchritude  
of bombazine  
on a shattering  
geoidal mid-afternoon,  
dribbling from  
sea rock to splint,  
the wing tips  
are hardly bleak  
accoutrements,  
their own swinging  
by the bay of a chest  
and a previous rock.  
Here we are stranded,  
pelagic with clot,  
and the fish  
burble with oratory  
and I kind of like them  
a lot.

# A Blind Fisherman

By [Stanley Moss](#)

I teach my friend, a fisherman gone blind, to cast  
true left, right or center and how far  
between lily pads and the fallen cedar.  
Darkness is precious, how long will darkness last?  
Our bait, worms, have no professors, they live  
in darkness, can be taught fear of light.  
Cut into threes even sixes they live  
separate lives, recoil from light.  
He tells me, "I am seldom blind  
when I dream, morning is anthracite,  
I play blind man's bluff,  
I cannot find myself,  
my shoe, the sink,  
tell time, but that's spilled milk and ink,  
the lost and found I cannot find.  
I can tell the difference between a mollusk and a whelk,  
a grieving liar and a lemon rind."  
Laughing, he says, "I still hope the worm will turn,  
*pink, lank, and warm*, dined  
out on apples of good fortune.  
Books have a faintly legible smell.  
Divorced from the sun, I am a kind  
of bachelor henpecked by the night.  
Sometimes I use my darkness well—  
in the overcast and sunlight of my mind.  
I can still wink, sing, my eyes are songs."  
Darkness is precious, how long will darkness last?  
He could not fish, he could not walk, he fell  
in his own feces. He wept. He died where he fell.  
*The power of beauty to right all wrongs*  
is hard for me to sell.

# War Ballad

By [Stanley Moss](#)

*(after the Russian)*

The piano has crawled into the quarry. Hauled  
In last night for firewood, sprawled  
With frozen barrels, crates and sticks,  
The piano is waiting for the axe.

Legless, a black box, still polished;  
It lies on its belly like a lizard,  
Droning, heaving, hardly fashioned  
For the quarry's primordial art.

Blood red: his frozen fingers cleft,  
Two on the right hand, five on the left,  
He goes down on his knees to reach the keyboard,  
To strike the lizard's chord.

Seven fingers pick out rhymes and rhythm,  
The frozen skin, steaming, peels off them,  
As from a boiled potato. Their schemes,  
Their beauty, ivory and anthracite,  
Flicker and flash like the great Northern Lights.

Everything played before is a great lie.  
The reflections of flaming chandeliers—  
Deceit, the white columns, the grand tiers  
In warm concert halls—wild lies.

But the steel of the piano howls in me,  
I lie in the quarry and I am deft  
As the lizard. I accept the gift.  
I'll be a song for Russia, I'll be  
an étude, warmth and bread for everybody.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Virtuosi

By [Lisel Mueller](#)

In memory of my parents

People whose lives have been shaped  
by history—and it is always tragic—  
do not want to talk about it,  
would rather dance, give parties  
on thrift-shop china. You feel  
wonderful in their homes,  
two leaky rooms, nests  
they stowed inside their hearts  
on the road into exile.  
They know how to fix potato peelings

and apple cores so you smack your lips.

The words *start over again*  
hold no terror for them.  
Obediently they rise  
and go with only a rucksack  
or tote bag. If they weep,  
it's when you're not looking.

To tame their nightmares, they choose  
the most dazzling occupations,  
swallow the flames in the sunset sky,  
jump through burning hoops  
in their elegant tiger suits.  
Cover your eyes: there's one  
walking on a thread  
thirty feet above us—  
shivering points of light  
leap across her body,  
and she works without a net.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## When I Am Asked

By [Lisel Mueller](#)

When I am asked  
how I began writing poems,  
I talk about the indifference of nature.

It was soon after my mother died,  
a brilliant June day,  
everything blooming.

I sat on a gray stone bench  
in a lovingly planted garden,  
but the day lilies were as deaf  
as the ears of drunken sleepers  
and the roses curved inward.  
Nothing was black or broken  
and not a leaf fell  
and the sun blared endless commercials  
for summer holidays.

I sat on a gray stone bench  
ringed with the ingenue faces  
of pink and white impatiens  
and placed my grief  
in the mouth of language,  
the only thing that would grieve with me.

## Hedgehog

By [Paul Muldoon](#)

The snail moves like a  
Hovercraft, held up by a  
Rubber cushion of itself,  
Sharing its secret

With the hedgehog. The hedgehog  
Shares its secret with no one.  
We say, Hedgehog, come out  
Of yourself and we will love you.

We mean no harm. We want  
Only to listen to what  
You have to say. We want  
Your answers to our questions.

The hedgehog gives nothing  
Away, keeping itself to itself.  
We wonder what a hedgehog  
Has to hide, why it so distrusts.

We forget the god  
Under this crown of thorns.  
We forget that never again  
Will a god trust in the world.

## The Loaf

By [Paul Muldoon](#)

When I put my finger to the hole they've cut for a dimmer switch  
in a wall of plaster stiffened with horsehair  
it seems I've scratched a two-hundred-year-old itch

*with a pink and a pink and a pinkie-pick.*

When I put my ear to the hole I'm suddenly aware  
of spades and shovels turning up the gain  
all the way from Raritan to the Delaware

*with a clink and a clink and a clinky-click.*

When I put my nose to the hole I smell the floodplain  
of the canal after a hurricane  
and the spots of green grass where thousands of Irish have lain

*with a stink and a stink and a stinky-stick.*

When I put my eye to the hole I see one holding horse dung to the rain  
in the hope, indeed, indeed,  
of washing out a few whole ears of grain

*with a wink and a wink and a winkie-wick.*

And when I do at last succeed  
in putting my mouth to the horsehair-fringed niche  
I can taste the small loaf of bread he baked from that whole seed

*with a link and a link and a linky-lick.*

## **We Are Not Responsible**

By [Harryette Mullen](#)

We are not responsible for your lost or stolen relatives.  
We cannot guarantee your safety if you disobey our instructions.  
We do not endorse the causes or claims of people begging for handouts.  
We reserve the right to refuse service to anyone.

Your ticket does not guarantee that we will honor your reservations.  
In order to facilitate our procedures, please limit your carrying on.  
Before taking off, please extinguish all smoldering resentments.

If you cannot understand English, you will be moved out of the way.  
In the event of a loss, you'd better look out for yourself.  
Your insurance was cancelled because we can no longer handle  
your frightful claims. Our handlers lost your luggage and we  
are unable to find the key to your legal case.

You were detained for interrogation because you fit the profile.  
You are not presumed to be innocent if the police  
have reason to suspect you are carrying a concealed wallet.

It's not our fault you were born wearing a gang color.  
It is not our obligation to inform you of your rights.

Step aside, please, while our officer inspects your bad attitude.  
You have no rights we are bound to respect.  
Please remain calm, or we can't be held responsible  
for what happens to you.

## **Disenchantment Bay**

By [Timothy Murphy](#)

Touch and go. Our Cessna bumped the sand,  
  
    thumped its tundra tires,  
    lifted as if on wires,  
banked over ice and rocked its wings to land.

We pitched our camp hard by the Hubbard's face,  
    some sixty fathoms tall,  
    a seven-mile-long wall  
seven leagues from Yakutat, our base.

*Crack!* A blue serac tottered and gave.

    Stunned at the water's edge,  
    we fled our vantage ledge  
like oyster catchers skittering from a wave.

Separation has become my fear.  
    What was does not console,  
    what is, is past control—  
the disembodiment that looms so near.

Detachment? So an ice cliff by the sea  
    calves with a seismic crash  
    of bergy bits and brash,  
choking a waterway with its debris.

We clear the neap tide beach of glacial wrack,  
    pace and mark the ground,  
    then wave the Cessna round.  
Pilot, we bank on you to bear us back.

# To the Oppressors

By [Pauli Murray](#)

Now you are strong  
And we are but grapes aching with ripeness.  
Crush us!  
Squeeze from us all the brave life  
Contained in these full skins.  
But ours is a subtle strength  
Potent with centuries of yearning,  
Of being kegged and shut away  
In dark forgotten places.

We shall endure  
To steal your senses  
In that lonely twilight  
Of your winter's grief.

# Words

By [Pauli Murray](#)

We are spendthrifts with words,  
We squander them,  
Toss them like pennies in the air—  
Arrogant words,  
Angry words,  
Cruel words,  
Comradely words,  
Shy words tiptoeing from mouth to ear.

But the slowly wrought words of love  
and the thunderous words of heartbreak—  
Those we hoard.

# Daughters 1900

By [Marilyn Nelson](#)

Five daughters, in the slant light on the porch,  
are bickering. The eldest has come home  
with new truths she can hardly wait to teach.

She lectures them: the younger daughters search  
the sky, elbow each other's ribs, and groan.  
Five daughters, in the slant light on the porch

and blue-sprigged dresses, like a stand of birch  
saplings whose leaves are going yellow-brown  
with new truths. They can hardly wait to teach,

themselves, to be called "Ma'am," to march  
high-heeled across the hanging bridge to town.  
Five daughters. In the slant light on the porch

Pomp lowers his paper for a while, to watch  
the beauties he's begotten with his Ann:  
these new truths they can hardly wait to teach.

The eldest sniffs, "A lady doesn't scratch."  
The third snorts back, "Knock, knock: nobody home."  
The fourth concedes, "Well, maybe not in *church* . . ."  
Five daughters in the slant light on the porch.

## How I Discovered Poetry

By [Marilyn Nelson](#)

It was like soul-kissing, the way the words  
filled my mouth as Mrs. Purdy read from her desk.  
All the other kids zoned an hour ahead to 3:15,  
but Mrs. Purdy and I wandered lonely as clouds borne  
by a breeze off Mount Parnassus. She must have seen  
the darkest eyes in the room brim: The next day  
she gave me a poem she'd chosen especially for me  
to read to the all except for me white class.  
She smiled when she told me to read it, smiled harder,  
said oh yes I could. She smiled harder and harder  
until I stood and opened my mouth to banjo playing  
darkies, pickaninnies, disses and dats. When I finished  
my classmates stared at the floor. We walked silent  
to the buses, awed by the power of words.

## Worth

By [Marilyn Nelson](#)

*For Ruben Ahoueya*

Today in America people were bought and sold:  
five hundred for a "likely Negro wench."  
If someone at auction is worth her weight in gold,

how much would she be worth by pound? By ounce?  
If I owned an unimaginable quantity of wealth,  
could I buy an iota of myself?  
How would I know which part belonged to me?  
If I owned part, could I set my part free?  
It must be worth something—maybe a lot—  
that my great-grandfather, they say, killed a lion.  
They say he was black, with muscles as hard as iron,  
that he wore a necklace of the claws of the lion he'd fought.  
How much do I hear, for his majesty in my blood?  
I auction myself. And I make the highest bid.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## The Consent

By [Howard Nemerov](#)

Late in November, on a single night  
Not even near to freezing, the ginkgo trees  
That stand along the walk drop all their leaves  
In one consent, and neither to rain nor to wind  
But as though to time alone: the golden and green  
Leaves litter the lawn today, that yesterday  
Had spread aloft their fluttering fans of light.

What signal from the stars? What senses took it in?  
What in those wooden motives so decided  
To strike their leaves, to down their leaves,  
Rebellion or surrender? and if this  
Can happen thus, what race shall be exempt?  
What use to learn the lessons taught by time,  
If a star at any time may tell us: *Now*.

## Life Cycle of Common Man

By [Howard Nemerov](#)

Roughly figured, this man of moderate habits,  
This average consumer of the middle class,  
Consumed in the course of his average life span  
Just under half a million cigarettes,  
Four thousand fifths of gin and about  
A quarter as much vermouth; he drank  
Maybe a hundred thousand cups of coffee,

And counting his parents' share it cost  
Something like half a million dollars  
To put him through life. How many beasts  
Died to provide him with meat, belt and shoes  
Cannot be certainly said.

But anyhow,

It is in this way that a man travels through time,  
Leaving behind him a lengthening trail  
Of empty bottles and bones, of broken shoes,  
Frayed collars and worn out or outgrown  
Diapers and dinnerjackets, silk ties and slickers.

Given the energy and security thus achieved,  
He did . . . ? What? The usual things, of course,  
The eating, dreaming, drinking and begetting,  
And he worked for the money which was to pay  
For the eating, et cetera, which were necessary  
If he were to go on working for the money, et cetera,  
But chiefly he talked. As the bottles and bones  
Accumulated behind him, the words proceeded  
Steadily from the front of his face as he  
Advanced into the silence and made it verbal.  
Who can tally the tale of his words? A lifetime  
Would barely suffice for their repetition;  
If you merely printed all his commas the result  
Would be a very large volume, and the number of times  
He said "thank you" or "very little sugar, please,"  
Would stagger the imagination. There were also  
Witticisms, platitudes, and statements beginning  
"It seems to me" or "As I always say."  
Consider the courage in all that, and behold the man  
Walking into deep silence, with the ectoplasmic  
Cartoon's balloon of speech proceeding  
Steadily out of the front of his face, the words  
Borne along on the breath which is his spirit  
Telling the numberless tale of his untold Word  
Which makes the world his apple, and forces him to eat.

## Magnitudes

By [Howard Nemerov](#)

Earth's Wrath at our assaults is slow to come  
But relentless when it does. It has to do  
With catastrophic change, and with the limit  
At which one order more of Magnitude

Will bring us to a qualitative change  
And disasters drastically different  
From those we daily have to know about.

As with the speed of light, where speed itself  
Becomes a limit and an absolute;  
As with the splitting of the atom  
And a little later of the nucleus;  
As with the millions rising into billions—  
The piker's kind in terms of money, yes,  
But a million in terms of time and space  
As the universe grew vast while the earth  
Our habitat diminished to the size  
Of a billiard ball, both relative  
To the cosmos and to the numbers of ourselves,  
The doubling numbers, the earth could accommodate.

We stand now in the place and limit of time  
Where hardest knowledge is turning into dream,  
And nightmares still contained in sleeping dark  
Seem on the point of bringing into day  
The sweating panic that starts the sleeper up.  
One or another nightmare may come true,  
And what to do then? What in the world to do?

## **To David, About His Education**

By [Howard Nemerov](#)

The world is full of mostly invisible things,  
And there is no way but putting the mind's eye,  
Or its nose, in a book, to find them out,  
Things like the square root of Everest  
Or how many times Byron goes into Texas,  
Or whether the law of the excluded middle  
Applies west of the Rockies. For these  
And the like reasons, you have to go to school  
And study books and listen to what you are told,  
And sometimes try to remember. Though I don't know  
What you will do with the mean annual rainfall  
On Plato's Republic, or the calorie content  
Of the Diet of Worms, such things are said to be  
Good for you, and you will have to learn them  
In order to become one of the grown-ups  
Who sees invisible things neither steadily nor whole,  
But keeps gravely the grand confusion of the world

Under his hat, which is where it belongs,  
And teaches small children to do this in their turn.

## **The Vacuum**

By [Howard Nemerov](#)

The house is so quiet now  
The vacuum cleaner sulks in the corner closet,  
Its bag limp as a stopped lung, its mouth  
Grinning into the floor, maybe at my  
Slovenly life, my dog-dead youth.

I've lived this way long enough,  
But when my old woman died her soul  
Went into that vacuum cleaner, and I can't bear  
To see the bag swell like a belly, eating the dust  
And the woolen mice, and begin to howl

Because there is old filth everywhere  
She used to crawl, in the corner and under the stair.  
I know now how life is cheap as dirt,  
And still the hungry, angry heart  
Hangs on and howls, biting at air.

## **The War in the Air**

By [Howard Nemerov](#)

For a saving grace, we didn't see our dead,  
Who rarely bothered coming home to die  
But simply stayed away out there  
In the clean war, the war in the air.

Seldom the ghosts come back bearing their tales  
Of hitting the earth, the incompressible sea,  
But stayed up there in the relative wind,  
Shades fading in the mind,

Who had no graves but only epitaphs  
Where never so many spoke for never so few:  
Per ardua, said the partisans of Mars,  
Per aspera, to the stars.

That was the good war, the war we won  
As if there was no death, for goodness's sake.

With the help of the losers we left out there  
In the air, in the empty air.

## Writing

By [Howard Nemerov](#)

The cursive crawl, the squared-off characters  
these by themselves delight, even without  
a meaning, in a foreign language, in  
Chinese, for instance, or when skaters curve  
all day across the lake, scoring their white  
records in ice. Being intelligible,  
these winding ways with their audacities  
and delicate hesitations, they become  
miraculous, so intimately, out there  
at the pen's point or brush's tip, do world  
and spirit wed. The small bones of the wrist  
balance against great skeletons of stars  
exactly; the blind bat surveys his way  
by echo alone. Still, the point of style  
is character. The universe induces  
a different tremor in every hand, from the  
check-forgers to that of the Emperor  
Hui Tsung, who called his own calligraphy  
the 'Slender Gold.' A nervous man  
writes nervously of a nervous world, and so on.

Miraculous. It is as though the world  
were a great writing. Having said so much,  
let us allow there is more to the world  
than writing: continental faults are not  
bare convoluted fissures in the brain.  
Not only must the skaters soon go home;  
also the hard inscription of their skates  
is scored across the open water, which long  
remembers nothing, neither wind nor wake.

## Finale

By [Pablo Neruda](#)

Translated by William O'Daly

Matilde, years or days  
sleeping, feverish,  
here or there,

gazing off,  
twisting my spine,  
bleeding true blood,  
perhaps I awaken  
or am lost, sleeping:  
hospital beds, foreign windows,  
white uniforms of the silent walkers,  
the clumsiness of feet.

And then, these journeys  
and my sea of renewal:  
your head on the pillow,  
your hands floating  
in the light, in my light,  
over my earth.

It was beautiful to live  
when you lived!

The world is bluer and of the earth  
at night, when I sleep  
enormous, within your small hands.

## **Ode to a Large Tuna in the Market**

By [Pablo Neruda](#)

Translated by Robin Robertson

Here,  
among the market vegetables,  
this torpedo  
from the ocean  
depths,  
a missile  
that swam,  
now  
lying in front of me  
dead.

Surrounded  
by the earth's green froth  
—these lettuces,  
bunches of carrots—  
only you  
lived through  
the sea's truth, survived

the unknown, the  
unfathomable  
darkness, the depths  
of the sea,  
the great  
abyss,  
le grand abîme,  
only you:  
varnished  
black-pitched  
witness  
to that deepest night.

Only you:  
dark bullet  
barreled  
from the depths,  
carrying  
only  
your  
one wound,  
but resurgent,  
always renewed,  
locked into the current,  
fins fletched  
like wings  
in the torrent,  
in the coursing  
of  
the  
underwater  
dark,  
like a grieving arrow,  
sea-javelin, a nerveless  
oiled harpoon.

Dead  
in front of me,  
catafalqued king  
of my own ocean;  
once  
sappy as a sprung fir  
in the green turmoil,  
once seed  
to sea-quake,  
tidal wave, now

simply  
dead remains;  
in the whole market  
yours  
was the only shape left  
with purpose or direction  
in this  
jumbled ruin  
of nature;  
you are  
a solitary man of war  
among these frail vegetables,  
your flanks and prow  
black  
and slippery  
as if you were still  
a well-oiled ship of the wind,  
the only  
true  
machine  
of the sea: unflawed,  
undefiled,  
navigating now  
the waters of death.

## One Hundred Love Sonnets: XVII

By [Pablo Neruda](#)

Translated by Mark Eisner

I don't love you as if you were a rose of salt, topaz,  
or arrow of carnations that propagate fire:  
I love you as one loves certain obscure things,  
secretly, between the shadow and the soul.

I love you as the plant that doesn't bloom but carries  
the light of those flowers, hidden, within itself,  
and thanks to your love the tight aroma that arose  
from the earth lives dimly in my body.

I love you without knowing how, or when, or from where,  
I love you directly without problems or pride:  
I love you like this because I don't know any other way to love,  
except in this form in which I am not nor are you,  
so close that your hand upon my chest is mine,  
so close that your eyes close with my dreams.

# On Listening to Your Teacher Take Attendance

By [Aimee Nezhukumatathil](#)

Breathe deep even if it means you wrinkle  
your nose from the fake-lemon antiseptic

of the mopped floors and wiped-down  
doorknobs. The freshly soaped necks

and armpits. Your teacher means well,  
even if he butchers your name like

he has a bloody sausage casing stuck  
between his teeth, handprints

on his white, sloppy apron. And when  
everyone turns around to check out

your face, no need to flush red and warm.  
Just picture all the eyes as if your classroom

is one big scallop with its dozens of icy blues  
and you will remember that winter your family

took you to the China Sea and you sank  
your face in it to gaze at baby clams and sea stars

the size of your outstretched hand. And when  
all those necks start to crane, try not to forget

someone once lathered their bodies, once patted them  
dry with a fluffy towel after a bath, set out their clothes

for the first day of school. Think of their pencil cases  
from third grade, full of sharp pencils, a pink pearl eraser.

Think of their handheld pencil sharpener and its tiny blade.

## Sea Church

By [Aimee Nezhukumatathil](#)

Give me a church  
made entirely of salt.  
Let the walls hiss  
and smoke when

I return to shore.

I ask for the grace  
of a new freckle  
on my cheek, the lift  
of blue and my mother's  
soapy skin to greet me.

Hide me in a room  
with no windows.  
Never let me see  
the dolphins leaping  
into commas

for this water-prayer  
rising like a host  
of sky lanterns into  
the inky evening.  
Let them hang

in the sky until  
they vanish at the edge  
of the constellations —  
the heroes and animals  
too busy and bright to notice.

## What I Learned From the Incredible Hulk

By [Aimee Nezhukumatathil](#)

When it comes to clothes, make  
an allowance for the unexpected.  
Be sure the spare in the trunk  
of your station wagon with wood paneling

isn't in need of repair. A simple jean jacket  
says *Hey, if you aren't trying to smuggle  
rare Incan coins through this peaceful  
little town and kidnap the local orphan,*

*I can be one heck of a mellow kinda guy.*  
But no matter how angry a man gets, a smile  
and a soft stroke on his bicep can work  
wonders. I learned that male chests

*also* have nipples, warm and established—

green doesn't always mean envy.  
It's the meadows full of clover  
and chicory the Hulk seeks for rest, a return

to normal. And sometimes, a woman  
gets to go with him, her tiny hands  
correcting his rumpled hair, the cuts  
in his hand. Green is the space between

water and sun, cover for a quiet man,  
each rib shuttling drops of liquid light.

## **Uptown, Minneapolis, Minnesota**

By [Hieu Minh Nguyen](#)

Even though it's May & the ice cream truck  
parked outside my apartment is somehow certain,  
I have a hard time believing winter is somehow,  
all of a sudden, over — *the worst one of my life*,  
the woman at the bank tells me. Though I'd like to be,  
it's impossible to be prepared for everything.  
Even the mundane hum of my phone catches me  
off guard today. Every voice that says my name  
is a voice I don't think I could possibly leave  
(*it's unfair to not ask for the things you need*)  
even though I think about it often, even though  
leaving is a train headed somewhere I'd probably hate.  
Crossing Lyndale to meet a friend for coffee  
I have to maneuver around a hearse that pulled too far  
into the crosswalk. It's empty. Perhaps spring is here.  
Perhaps it will all be worth it. Even though I knew  
even then it was worth it, staying, I mean.  
Even now, there is someone, somehow, waiting for me.

## **Snowy Owl Near Ocean Shores**

By [Duane Niatum](#)

A castaway blown south from the arctic tundra  
sits on a stump in an abandoned farmer's field.  
Beyond the dunes cattails toss and bend as snappy  
as the surf, rushing and crashing down the jetty.

His head a swivel of round glances,  
his eyes a deeper yellow than the winter sun,

he wonders if the spot two hundred feet away  
is a mouse on the crawl from mud hole  
to deer-grass patch.

An hour of wind and sleet whips the air,  
nothing darts or passes but the river underground.  
A North Pole creature shows us how to last.  
The wind ruffles his feathers from crown to claw

while he gazes into zeroes the salt-slick rain.  
As a double-rainbow before us arcs  
sky and owl, we leave him surrendering  
to the echo of his white refrain.

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Beyond the dunes cattails toss and bend as snappy  
as the surf, rushing and crashing down the jetty.

His head a swivel of round glances,  
his eyes a deeper yellow than the winter sun,  
he wonders if the spot two hundred feet away  
is a mouse on the crawl from mud hole  
to deer-grass patch.

An hour of wind and sleet whips the air,  
nothing darts or passes but the river underground.  
A North Pole creature shows us how to last.  
The wind ruffles his feathers from crown to claw

while he gazes into zeroes the salt-slick rain.  
As a double-rainbow before us arcs  
sky and owl, we leave him surrendering  
to the echo of his white refrain.

## **[He Lived—Childhood Summers]**

By [Lorine Niedecker](#)

He lived—childhood summers  
thru bare feet  
then years of money's lack

and heat  
  
beside the river—out of flood  
    came his wood, dog,  
woman, lost her, daughter—  
    prologue  
  
to planting trees. He buried carp  
    beneath the rose  
where grass-still  
    the marsh rail goes.  
  
To bankers on high land  
    he opened his wine tank.  
He wished his only daughter  
    to work in the bank  
  
but he'd given her a source  
    to sustain her—  
a weedy speech,  
    a marshy retainer.

## [I married]

By [Lorine Niedecker](#)

I married  
  
in the world's black night  
for warmth  
    if not repose.  
    At the close—  
someone.  
  
I hid with him  
from the long range guns.  
    We lay leg  
    in the cupboard, head  
in closet.  
  
A slit of light  
at no bird dawn—  
    Untaught  
    I thought  
he drank

too much.  
I say                    I married  
                              and lived unburied.  
I thought—

## Linnaeus in Lapland

By [Lorine Niedecker](#)

Nothing worth noting  
except an Andromeda  
with quadrangular shoots—  
                  the boots  
of the people

wet inside: they must swim  
to church thru the floods  
or be taxed—the blossoms  
                  from the bosoms  
of the leaves

\*

Fog-thick morning—  
I see only  
where I now walk. I carry  
                  my clarity  
with me.

\*

Hear  
where her snow-grave is  
the *You*  
                  *ah you*  
of mourning doves

## [My mother saw the green tree toad]

By [Lorine Niedecker](#)

My mother saw the green tree toad  
on the window sill  
her first one  
since she was young.

We saw it breathe

and swell up round.  
My youth is no sure sign  
I'll find this kind of thing  
tho it does sing.  
Let's take it in

I said so grandmother can see  
but she could not  
it changed to brown  
and town  
changed us, too.

## [What horror to awake at night]

By [Lorine Niedecker](#)

What horror to awake at night  
and in the dimness see the light.  
Time is white  
mosquitoes bite  
I've spent my life on nothing.

The thought that stings. How are you, Nothing,  
sitting around with Something's wife.  
Buzz and burn  
is all I learn  
I've spent my life on nothing.

I'm pillowed and padded, pale and puffing  
lifting household stuffing—  
carpets, dishes  
benches, fishes  
I've spent my life in nothing.

## Strange!

By [John Frederick Nims](#)

I'd have you known! It puzzles me forever  
To hear, day in, day out, the words men use,  
But never a single word about you, never.  
Strange!—in your every gesture, worlds of news.  
On busses people talk. On curbs I hear them;  
In parks I listen, barbershop and bar.

In banks they murmur, and I sidle near them;  
But none allude to you there. None so far.

I read books too, and turn the pages, spying:  
You must be there, one beautiful as you!  
But never, not by name. No planes are flying  
Your name in lacy trailers past the blue  
Marquees of heaven. No trumpets cry your fame.

Strange!—how no constellations spell your name!

## The Poet

By [Yone Noguchi](#)

Out of the deep and the dark,  
A sparkling mystery, a shape,  
Something perfect,  
Comes like the stir of the day:  
One whose breath is an odor,  
Whose eyes show the road to stars,  
The breeze in his face,  
The glory of heaven on his back.  
He steps like a vision hung in air,  
Diffusing the passion of eternity;  
His abode is the sunlight of morn,  
The music of eve his speech:  
In his sight,  
One shall turn from the dust of the grave,  
And move upward to the woodland.

## Mrs. Adam

By [Kathleen Norris](#)

*I have lately come to the conclusion that I am Eve,  
alias Mrs. Adam. You know, there is no account  
of her death in the Bible, and why am I not Eve?  
Emily Dickinson in a letter,  
12 January, 1846*

Wake up,  
you'll need your wits about you.  
This is not a dream,  
but a woman who loves you, speaking.

She was there  
when you cried out;  
she brushed the terror away.  
She knew  
when it was time to sin.  
You were wise  
to let her handle it,  
and leave that place.

We couldn't speak at first  
for the bitter knowledge,  
the sweet taste of memory  
on our tongues.

Listen, it's time.  
You were chosen too,  
to put the world together.

## **The Film**

By [Kate Northrop](#)

Come, let's go in.  
The ticket-taker  
has shyly grinned  
and it's almost time,  
Lovely One.  
Let's go in.

The wind tonight's too wild.  
The sky too deep,  
too thin. Already it's time.  
The lights have dimmed.  
Come, Loveliest.  
Let's go in

and know these bodies  
we do not have to own, passing  
quietly as dreams, as snow.  
Already leaves are falling  
and music begins.  
Lovely One,

it's time.  
Let's go in.

# The Goddess Who Created This Passing World

By [Alice Notley](#)

The Goddess who created this passing world  
Said Let there be lightbulbs & liquefaction  
Life spilled out onto the street, colors whirled  
Cars & the variously shod feet were born  
And the past & future & I born too  
Light as airmail paper away she flew  
To Annapurna or Mt. McKinley  
Or both but instantly  
Clarified, composed, forever was I  
Meant by her to recognize a painting  
As beautiful or a movie stunning  
And to adore the finitude of words  
And understand as surfaces my dreams  
Know the eye the organ of affection  
And depths to be inflections  
Of her voice & wrist & smile

## Immortal Sails

By [Alfred Noyes](#)

Now, in a breath, we'll burst those gates of gold,  
And ransack heaven before our moment fails.  
Now, in a breath, before we, too, grow old,  
We'll mount and sing and spread immortal sails.

It is not time that makes eternity.  
Love and an hour may quite out-span the years,  
And give us more to hear and more to see  
Than life can wash away with all its tears.

Dear, when we part, at last, that sunset sky  
Shall not be touched with deeper hues than this;  
But we shall ride the lightning ere we die  
And seize our brief infinitude of bliss,

With time to spare for all that heaven can tell,  
While eyes meet eyes, and look their last farewell.

# First Night

By [D. Nurske](#)

We brought that newborn home from Maimonides  
and showed her nine blue glittering streets.  
Would she like the semis with hoods of snow?  
The precinct? Bohack's? A lit diner?  
Her eyes were huge and her gaze tilted  
like milk in a pan, toward shadow.  
Would she like the tenement, three dim flights,  
her crib that smelled of Lemon Pledge?  
We slept beside her in our long coats,  
rigid with fatigue in the unmade bed.  
Her breath woke us with its slight catch.  
Would she approve of gray winter dawn?  
We showed her daylight in our cupped hands.  
Then the high clocks began booming  
in this city and the next, we counted for her,  
but just the strokes, not the laggards  
or the tinny echoes, and we taught her  
how to wait, how to watch, how to be held,  
in that icy room, until our own alarm chimed.

# 300 Goats

By [Naomi Shihab Nye](#)

In icy fields.  
  
Is water flowing in the tank?  
  
Will they huddle together, warm bodies pressing?  
  
(Is it the year of the goat or the sheep?  
  
Scholars debating Chinese zodiac,  
  
follower or leader.)  
  
O lead them to a warm corner,  
  
little ones toward bulkier bodies.  
  
Lead them to the brush, which cuts the icy wind.  
  
Another frigid night swooping down —

Aren't you worried about them? I ask my friend,  
who lives by herself on the ranch of goats,  
far from here near the town of Ozona.  
She shrugs, "Not really,  
they know what to do. They're *goats*."

## Boy and Egg

By [Naomi Shihab Nye](#)

Every few minutes, he wants  
to march the trail of flattened rye grass  
back to the house of muttering  
hens. He too could make  
a bed in hay. Yesterday the egg so fresh  
it felt hot in his hand and he pressed it  
to his ear while the other children  
laughed and ran with a ball, leaving him,  
so little yet, too forgetful in games,  
ready to cry if the ball brushed him,  
riveted to the secret of birds  
caught up inside his fist,  
not ready to give it over  
to the refrigerator  
or the rest of the day.

## Burning the Old Year

By [Naomi Shihab Nye](#)

Letters swallow themselves in seconds.  
Notes friends tied to the doorknob,  
transparent scarlet paper,  
sizzle like moth wings,  
marry the air.

So much of any year is flammable,  
lists of vegetables, partial poems.  
Orange swirling flame of days,  
so little is a stone.

Where there was something and suddenly isn't,  
an absence shouts, celebrates, leaves a space.  
I begin again with the smallest numbers.

Quick dance, shuffle of losses and leaves,  
only the things I didn't do  
crackle after the blazing dies.

## **Famous**

By [Naomi Shihab Nye](#)

The river is famous to the fish.

The loud voice is famous to silence,  
which knew it would inherit the earth  
before anybody said so.

The cat sleeping on the fence is famous to the birds  
watching him from the birdhouse.

The tear is famous, briefly, to the cheek.

The idea you carry close to your bosom  
is famous to your bosom.

The boot is famous to the earth,  
more famous than the dress shoe,  
which is famous only to floors.

The bent photograph is famous to the one who carries it  
and not at all famous to the one who is pictured.

I want to be famous to shuffling men  
who smile while crossing streets,  
sticky children in grocery lines,  
famous as the one who smiled back.

I want to be famous in the way a pulley is famous,  
or a buttonhole, not because it did anything spectacular,  
but because it never forgot what it could do.

# Fundamentalism

By [Naomi Shihab Nye](#)

Because the eye has a short shadow or  
it is hard to see over heads in the crowd?

If everyone else seems smarter  
but you need your own secret?

If mystery was never your friend?

If one way could satisfy  
the infinite heart of the heavens?

If you liked the king on his golden throne  
more than the villagers carrying baskets of lemons?

If you wanted to be sure  
his guards would admit you to the party?

The boy with the broken pencil  
scrapes his little knife against the lead  
turning and turning it as a point  
emerges from the wood again

If he would believe his life is like that  
he would not follow his father into war

# Truth Serum

By [Naomi Shihab Nye](#)

We made it from the ground-up corn in the old back pasture.  
Pinched a scent of night jasmine billowing off the fence,  
popped it right in.  
That frog song wanting nothing but echo?  
We used that.  
Stirred it widely. Noticed the clouds while stirring.  
Called upon our ancient great aunts and their long slow eyes  
of summer. Dropped in their names.  
Added a mint leaf now and then  
to hearten the broth. Added a note of cheer and worry.  
Orange butterfly between the claps of thunder?  
Perfect. And once we had it,  
had smelled and tasted the fragrant syrup,  
placing the pan on a back burner for keeping,

the sorrow lifted in small ways.  
We boiled down the lies in another pan till they disappeared.  
We washed that pan.

## The Calm

By [Sean O'Brien](#)

At the mouth of the river,  
Moon, stars, an Arctic calm,  
The twin lights at the end of the piers  
Revolving with the smoothness  
We expect of supernatural machinery.

Seen from down here on the beach  
The harbored ocean slowly tilts,  
Like a mirror discreetly manhandled  
By night from the giant room  
It was supposed to occupy forever.

The mind says *now*, but the stars  
On their angelic gimbals roll  
And fade, a tide of constellations  
Breaking nowhere, every night  
About this time. Strike up the band.

In the tumbledown bar, the singer  
Has fallen from stardom and grace,  
But though her interests nowadays  
Are wholly secular, she can  
Still refer back to the angels,

And knowing that song, we share  
A moment with the saved before  
We leave to make the crossing.  
No captain, no ferry, but  
Cross we shall, believe you me.

## Tomorrow

By [Dennis O'Driscoll](#)

I

Tomorrow I will start to be happy.  
The morning will light up like a celebratory cigar.

Sunbeams sprawling on the lawn will set  
dew sparkling like a cut-glass tumbler of champagne.  
Today will end the worst phase of my life.

I will put my shapeless days behind me,  
fencing off the past, as a golden rind  
of sand parts slipshod sea from solid land.  
It is tomorrow I want to look back on, not today.  
Tomorrow I start to be happy; today is almost yesterday.

## II

Australia, how wise you are to get the day  
over and done with first, out of the way.  
You have eaten the fruit of knowledge, while  
we are dithering about which main course to choose.  
How liberated you must feel, how free from doubt:

the rise and fall of stocks, today's closing prices  
are revealed to you before our bidding has begun.  
Australia, you can gather in your accident statistics  
like a harvest while our roads still have hours to kill.  
When we are in the dark, you have sagely seen the light.

## III

Cagily, presumptuously, I dare to write 2018.  
A date without character or tone. 2018.  
A year without interest rates or mean daily temperature.  
Its hit songs have yet to be written, its new-year  
babies yet to be induced, its truces to be signed.

Much too far off for prophecy, though one hazards  
a tentative guess—a so-so year most likely,  
vague in retrospect, fizzling out with the usual  
end-of-season sales; everything slashed:  
your last chance to salvage something of its style.

## **Back Up Quick They're Hippies**

By [Lani O'Hanlon](#)

That was the year we drove  
into the commune in Cornwall.  
“Jesus Jim,” mam said,  
“back up quick they're hippies.”

Through the car window,  
tents, row after row, flaps open,  
long-haired men and women  
curled around each other like babies

and the babies themselves  
wandered naked across the grass.

I reached for the handle, ready, almost,  
to open the door, drop out and away  
from my sister's aggressive thighs,  
Daddy's slapping hands.

Back home in the Dandelion Market  
I unlearnt the steps my mother taught,  
bought a headband, an afghan coat,  
a fringed skirt — leather skin.

Barefoot on common grass I lay down with kin.

## **Chez Jane**

By [Frank O'Hara](#)

The white chocolate jar full of petals  
swills odds and ends around in a dizzying eye  
of four o'clocks now and to come. The tiger,  
marvellously striped and irritable, leaps  
on the table and without disturbing a hair  
of the flowers' breathless attention, pisses  
into the pot, right down its delicate spout.  
A whisper of steam goes up from that porcelain  
urethra. "Saint-Saëns!" it seems to be whispering,  
curling unerringly around the furry nuts  
of the terrible puss, who is mentally flexing.  
Ah be with me always, spirit of noisy  
contemplation in the studio, the Garden  
of Zoos, the eternally fixed afternoons!  
There, while music scratches its scrofulous  
stomach, the brute beast emerges and stands,  
clear and careful, knowing always the exact peril  
at this moment caressing his fangs with  
a tongue given wholly to luxurious usages;  
which only a moment before dropped aspirin  
in this sunset of roses, and now throws a chair

in the air to aggravate the truly menacing.

## The Day Lady Died

By [Frank O'Hara](#)

It is 12:20 in New York a Friday  
three days after Bastille day, yes  
it is 1959 and I go get a shoeshine  
because I will get off the 4:19 in Easthampton  
at 7:15 and then go straight to dinner  
and I don't know the people who will feed me

I walk up the muggy street beginning to sun  
and have a hamburger and a malted and buy  
an ugly NEW WORLD WRITING to see what the poets  
in Ghana are doing these days

I go on to the bank  
and Miss Stillwagon (first name Linda I once heard)  
doesn't even look up my balance for once in her life  
and in the GOLDEN GRIFFIN I get a little Verlaine  
for Patsy with drawings by Bonnard although I do  
think of Hesiod, trans. Richmond Lattimore or  
Brendan Behan's new play or *Le Balcon* or *Les Nègres*  
of Genet, but I don't, I stick with Verlaine  
after practically going to sleep with quandariness

and for Mike I just stroll into the PARK LANE  
Liquor Store and ask for a bottle of Strega and  
then I go back where I came from to 6th Avenue  
and the tobacconist in the Ziegfeld Theatre and  
casually ask for a carton of Gauloises and a carton  
of Picayunes, and a NEW YORK POST with her face on it

and I am sweating a lot by now and thinking of  
leaning on the john door in the 5 SPOT  
while she whispered a song along the keyboard  
to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing

## To the Harbormaster

By [Frank O'Hara](#)

I wanted to be sure to reach you;  
though my ship was on the way it got caught  
in some moorings. I am always tying up

and then deciding to depart. In storms and  
at sunset, with the metallic coils of the tide  
around my fathomless arms, I am unable  
to understand the forms of my vanity  
or I am hard alee with my Polish rudder  
in my hand and the sun sinking. To  
you I offer my hull and the tattered cordage  
of my will. The terrible channels where  
the wind drives me against the brown lips  
of the reeds are not all behind me. Yet  
I trust the sanity of my vessel; and  
if it sinks, it may well be in answer  
to the reasoning of the eternal voices,  
the waves which have kept me from reaching you.

## Inventing a Horse

By [Meghan O'Rourke](#)

Inventing a horse is not easy. One must not only think of the horse.  
One must dig fence posts around him.  
One must include a place where horses like to live;

or do when they live with humans like you.  
Slowly, you must walk him in the cold;  
feed him bran mash, apples;  
accustom him to the harness;

holding in mind even when you are tired  
harnesses and tack cloths and saddle oil  
to keep the saddle clean as a face in the sun;  
one must imagine teaching him to run

among the knuckles of tree roots,  
not to be skittish at first sight of timber wolves,  
and not to grow thin in the city,  
where at some point you will have to live;

and one must imagine the absence of money.  
Most of all, though: the living weight,  
the sound of his feet on the needles,  
and, since he is heavy, and real,

and sometimes tired after a run  
down the river with a light whip at his side,  
one must imagine love

in the mind that does not know love,

an animal mind, a love that does not depend  
on your image of it,  
your understanding of it;  
indifferent to all that it lacks:

a muzzle and two black eyes  
looking the day away, a field empty  
of everything but witchgrass, fluent trees,  
and some piles of hay.

## Ode

By [Arthur O'Shaughnessy](#)

We are the music makers,  
And we are the dreamers of dreams,  
Wandering by lone sea-breakers,  
And sitting by desolate streams; —  
World-losers and world-forsakers,  
On whom the pale moon gleams:  
Yet we are the movers and shakers  
Of the world for ever, it seems.

With wonderful deathless ditties  
We build up the world's great cities,  
And out of a fabulous story  
We fashion an empire's glory:  
One man with a dream, at pleasure,  
Shall go forth and conquer a crown;  
And three with a new song's measure  
Can trample a kingdom down.

We, in the ages lying,  
In the buried past of the earth,  
Built Nineveh with our sighing,  
And Babel itself in our mirth;  
And o'erthrew them with prophesying  
To the old of the new world's worth;  
For each age is a dream that is dying,  
Or one that is coming to birth.

A breath of our inspiration  
Is the life of each generation;  
A wondrous thing of our dreaming

Unearthly, impossible seeming —  
The soldier, the king, and the peasant  
Are working together in one,  
Till our dream shall become their present,  
And their work in the world be done.

They had no vision amazing  
Of the goodly house they are raising;  
They had no divine foreshowing  
Of the land to which they are going:  
But on one man's soul it hath broken,  
A light that doth not depart;  
And his look, or a word he hath spoken,  
Wrought flame in another man's heart.

And therefore to-day is thrilling  
With a past day's late fulfilling;  
And the multitudes are enlisted  
In the faith that their fathers resisted,  
And, scorning the dream of to-morrow,  
Are bringing to pass, as they may,  
In the world, for its joy or its sorrow,  
The dream that was scorned yesterday.

But we, with our dreaming and singing,  
Ceaseless and sorrowless we!  
The glory about us clinging  
Of the glorious futures we see,  
Our souls with high music ringing:  
O men! it must ever be  
That we dwell, in our dreaming and singing,  
A little apart from ye.

For we are afar with the dawning  
And the suns that are not yet high,  
And out of the infinite morning  
Intrepid you hear us cry —  
How, spite of your human scorning,  
Once more God's future draws nigh,  
And already goes forth the warning  
That ye of the past must die.

Great hail! we cry to the comers  
From the dazzling unknown shore;  
Bring us hither your sun and your summers;  
And renew our world as of yore;

You shall teach us your song's new numbers,  
And things that we dreamed not before:  
Yea, in spite of a dreamer who slumbers,  
And a singer who sings no more.

## At the city pound

By [Vincent O'Sullivan](#)

I'm in charge of a cage. I know those that won't.  
I don't mean can't. Just *won't*. There's a roster  
for Tuesdays, Fridays. Dogs to die.

The disconsolate, the abandoned, those with recurrent  
symptoms, the incorrigible mutt — oh, a dozen  
choices by way of reasons. Even so,

some *won't*. Won't play along once their number's  
up. The "rainbow bridge" in the offing  
as the posher clinics put it, a pig's ear

as a final treat, a venison chew, the profession  
behaving beautifully at a time like this.  
Still, those that won't. Won't go nicely, I mean,

with a gaze to melt, a last slobbed lick.  
Those with a soul's defiance, though embarrassment  
in the lunchroom should you come at that one!

Even after the bag is zipped, you feel it:  
*We're real at the end as you are, buster. We sniff  
the wind. What say if we say it together?* Won't.

## Grandmothers Land

By [William Oandasan](#)

around the house stood an  
orchard of plum, apple and pear  
a blackwalnut tree, one white pine,  
groves of white oak and willow clumps  
the home of Jessie was largely redwood

blood, flesh and bone sprouted  
inside her womb of redwood  
for five generations

the trees now stand unpruned and wild

after relocating so many years before the War  
the seeds of Jessie have returned

afternoon sunlight on the field  
breezes moving grass and leaves  
memories with family names wait  
within the earth, the mountains,  
the valley, the field, the trees

## **The End of Crisis**

By [Cindy Juyoung Ok](#)

When you leap over the deer carcasses  
that line every garden, you will marvel  
at their tidiness, at how bloodless a death  
by drought can be. When I crawl through  
the highway pieces shattered by heat,  
I will admire the clean slits as I kick  
aside crumbles of broken stone with little  
blistering. When you thread between  
the overtaken shores and bodies of elders,  
frozen, when I follow the fallen saplings'  
directions toward the horizon where  
colorless sky and earth meet, we will  
remember rippling at the birthday parties  
for corporations and framing the ash  
of beloved photos burnt in wildfire. When  
we think of crossing the river to each  
other, you from the gorge of the landslide  
to me at the crest of the typhoon, it is then  
we will find ourselves in a dead imaginary,  
in some fictive past where the you exists,  
where I is not a myth we use to keep  
surviving at the cost of bird and glacier,  
home and tenderness. Having ruined  
the future of becoming fossils, finally  
we will know that it is for nothing we  
die, never in place of drowned sea  
turtles or swarming locusts, or to foil  
cancerous sand and mold, not even for  
the dance of subway floods or the graceless  
eclipse of all our promises and planets.

# Ars Poetica

By [José Olivarez](#)

Migration is derived from the word “migrate,” which is a verb defined by Merriam-Webster as “to move from one country, place, or locality to another.” Plot twist: migration never ends. My parents moved from Jalisco, México to Chicago in 1987. They were dislocated from México by capitalism, and they arrived in Chicago just in time to be dislocated by capitalism. Question: is migration possible if there is no “other” land to arrive in. My work: to imagine. My family started migrating in 1987 and they never stopped. I was born mid-migration. I’ve made my home in that motion. Let me try again: I tried to become American, but America is toxic. I tried to become Mexican, but México is toxic. My work: to do more than reproduce the toxic stories I inherited and learned. In other words: just because it is art doesn’t mean it is inherently nonviolent. My work: to write poems that make my people feel safe, seen, or otherwise loved. My work: to make my enemies feel afraid, angry, or otherwise ignored. My people: my people. My enemies: capitalism. Susan Sontag: “victims are interested in the representation of their own sufferings.” Remix: survivors are interested in the representation of their own survival. My work: survival. Question: Why poems? Answer:

## whenever i’m at that land is Chicago

By [José Olivarez](#)

forgive my geography, it’s true i’m obsessed  
with maps. with flags. a Starbucks on the block  
means migration. any restaurant with bulletproof glass  
is a homecoming. underneath my gym shoes  
is a trail of salt. that last sentence is a test.  
does the poet mean:  
(a) grief  
(b) winter  
(c) diaspora  
(d) this is the wrong question  
(e) all of the above  
i’m always out south  
of somewhere. i know the sun rises  
in Lake Michigan and sets out west.  
i got primos i’ve never met. there’s a word  
for that. (where did they go?) all the steel mills shuttering up  
like conquered forts. one day, there will be an urban tour  
through South Chicago. picture the soy cappuccino-  
sipping cool kids wearing Chicago Over Everything-  
branded hoodies taking selfies in front of machines  
that once breathed fire. pretending the bones  
are the real thing.

## ***The Songs of Maximus: SONG 1***

By [Charles Olson](#)

colored pictures  
of all things to eat: dirty  
postcards  
And words, words, words  
all over everything  
No eyes or ears left  
to do their own doings (all  
invaded, appropriated, outraged, all senses  
including the mind, that worker on what is  
And that other sense  
made to give even the most wretched, or any of us, wretched,  
that consolation (greased  
lulled  
even the street-cars  
song

## ***The Songs of Maximus: SONG 2***

By [Charles Olson](#)

all  
wrong  
And I am asked—ask myself (I, too, covered  
with the gurrry of it) where  
shall we go from here, what can we do  
when even the public conveyances  
sing?  
how can we go anywhere,  
even cross-town  
how get out of anywhere (the bodies  
all buried  
in shallow graves?

## ***Time of the Missile***

By [George Oppen](#)

I remember a square of New York's Hudson River glinting between warehouses.  
Difficult to approach the water below the pier

Swirling, covered with oil the ship at the pier  
A steel wall: tons in the water,

Width.

The hand for holding,

Legs for walking,

The eye *sees*! It floods in on us from here to Jersey tangled in the grey bright air!

Become the realm of nations.

My love, my love,

We are endangered

Totally at last. Look

Anywhere to the sight's limit: space

Which is viviparous:

Place of the mind

And eye. Which can destroy us,

Re-arrange itself, assert

Its own stone chain reaction.

## Blind Curse

By [Simon J. Ortiz](#)

You could drive blind

for those two seconds

and they would be forever.

I think that as a diesel truck

passes us eight miles east of Mission.

Churning through the storm, heedless  
of the hill sliding away.

There isn't much use to curse but I do.

Words fly away, tumbling invisibly  
toward the unseen point where  
the prairie and sky meet.

The road is like that in those seconds,  
nothing but the blind white side  
of creation.

You're there somewhere,  
a tiny struggling cell.

You just might be significant

but you might not be anything.

Forever is a space of split time

from which to recover after the mass passes.

My curse flies out there somewhere,  
and then I send my prayer into the wake  
of the diesel truck headed for Sioux Falls  
one hundred and eighty miles through the storm.

## **Anthem for Doomed Youth**

By [Wilfred Owen](#)

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?  
— Only the monstrous anger of the guns.  
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle  
Can patter out their hasty orisons.  
No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells;  
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,—  
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;  
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?  
Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes  
Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.  
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;  
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,  
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

## **The Last Laugh**

By [Wilfred Owen](#)

'O Jesus Christ! I'm hit,' he said; and died.  
Whether he vainly cursed or prayed indeed,  
The Bullets chirped—In vain, vain, vain!  
Machine-guns chuckled—Tut-tut! Tut-tut!  
And the Big Gun guffawed.

Another sighed,—'O Mother,—mother,—Dad!'  
Then smiled at nothing, childlike, being dead.  
And the lofty Shrapnel-cloud  
Leisurely gestured,—Fool!  
And the splinters spat, and tittered.

'My Love!' one moaned. Love-languid seemed his mood,  
Till slowly lowered, his whole face kissed the mud.  
And the Bayonets' long teeth grinned;  
Rabbles of Shells hooted and groaned;  
And the Gas hissed.

# Deaf-Mute in the Pear Tree

By P. K. Page

His clumsy body is a golden fruit  
pendulous in the pear tree

## Blunt fingers among the multitudinous buds

Adriatic blue the sky above and through  
the forking twigs

Sun ruddying tree's trunk, his trunk  
his massive head thick-nobbed with burnished curls  
tight-clenched in bud

(Painting by Generalíc. Primitive.)

I watch him prune with silent secateurs

Boots in the crotch of branches shift their weight  
heavily as oxen in a stall

Hear small inarticulate mewls from his locked mouth  
a kitten in a box

Pear clippings fall  
                        soundlessly on the ground

Spring finches sing  
                        soundlessly in the leaves

A stone. A stone in ears and on his tongue

Through palm and fingertip he knows the tree's  
quick springtime pulse

Smells in its sap the sweet incipient pears

Pale sunlight's choppy water glistens on  
his mutely snapping blades

and flags and scraps of blue  
above him make regatta of the day

But when he sees his wife's foreshortened shape  
sudden and silent in the grass below  
uptilt its face to him

then air is kisses, kisses

stone dissolves

his locked throat finds a little door

and through it feathered joy  
flies screaming like a jay

## **The Metal and the Flower**

By [P. K. Page](#)

Intractable between them grows  
a garden of barbed wire and roses.  
Burning briars like flames devour  
their too innocent attire.  
Dare they meet, the blackened wire  
tears the intervening air.

Trespassers have wandered through  
texture of flesh and petals.  
Dogs like arrows moved along  
pathways that their noses knew.  
While the two who laid it out  
find the metal and the flower  
fatal underfoot.

Black and white at midnight glows  
this garden of barbed wire and roses.  
Doused with darkness roses burn  
coolly as a rainy moon:  
beneath a rainy moon or none  
silver the sheath on barb and thorn.

Change the garden, scale and plan;  
wall it, make it annual.  
There the briary flower grew.  
There the brambled wire ran.  
While they sleep the garden grows,  
deepest wish annuls the will:  
perfect still the wire and rose.

# Double Dutch

By [Gregory Pardlo](#)

The girls turning double-dutch  
bob & weave like boxers pulling  
punches, shadowing each other,  
sparring across the slack cord  
casting parabolas in the air. They  
whip quick as an infant's pulse  
and the jumper, before she  
enters the winking, nods in time  
as if she has a notion to share,  
waiting her chance to speak. But she's  
anticipating the upbeat  
like a bandleader counting off  
the tune they are about to swing into.  
The jumper stair-steps into mid-air  
as if she's jumping rope in low-gravity,  
training for a lunar mission. Airborne a moment  
long enough to fit a second thought in,  
she looks caught in the mouth bones of a fish  
as she flutter-floats into motion  
like a figure in a stack of time-lapse photos  
thumbed alive. Once inside,  
the bells tied to her shoestrings rouse the gods  
who've lain in the dust since the Dutch  
acquired Manhattan. How she dances  
patterns like a dust-heavy bee retracing  
its travels in scale before the hive. How  
the whole stunning contraption of girl and rope  
slaps and scoops like a paddle boat.  
Her misted skin arranges the light  
with each adjustment and flex. Now heather-  
hued, now sheen, light listing on the fulcrum  
of a wrist and the bare jutted joints of elbow  
and knee, and the faceted surfaces of muscle,  
surfaces fracturing and reforming  
like a sun-tickled sleeve of running water.  
She makes jewelry of herself and garlands  
the ground with shadows.

# Written by Himself

By [Gregory Pardlo](#)

I was born in minutes in a roadside kitchen a skillet whispering my name. I was born to  
rainwater and lye;  
I was born across the river where I  
was borrowed with clothespins, a harrow tooth,  
broadside sewn in my shoes. I returned, though  
it please you, through no fault of my own,  
pockets filled with coffee grounds and eggshells.  
I was born still and superstitious; I bore an unexpected burden.  
I gave birth, I gave blessing, I gave rise to suspicion.  
I was born abandoned outdoors in the heat-shaped air,  
air drifting like spirits and old windows.  
I was born a fraction and a cipher and a ledger entry;  
I was an index of first lines when I was born.  
I was born waist-deep stubborn in the water crying  
ain't I a woman and a brother I was born  
to this hall of mirrors, this horror story I was  
born with a prologue of references, pursued  
by mosquitoes and thieves, I was born passing  
off the problem of the twentieth century: I was born.  
I read minds before I could read fishes and loaves;  
I walked a piece of the way alone before I was born.

# Wife's Disaster Manual

By [Deborah Paredez](#)

When the forsaken city starts to burn,  
after the men and children have fled,  
stand still, silent as prey, and slowly turn  
  
back. Behold the curse. Stay and mourn  
the collapsing doorways, the unbroken bread  
in the forsaken city starting to burn.  
  
Don't flinch. Don't join in.  
Resist the righteous scurry and instead  
stand still, silent as prey. Slowly turn  
  
your thoughts away from escape: the iron  
gates unlatched, the responsibilities shed.  
When the forsaken city starts to burn,  
  
surrender to your calling, show concern

for those who remain. Come to a dead  
standstill. Silent as prey, slowly turn

into something essential. Learn  
the names of the fallen. Refuse to run ahead  
when the forsaken city starts to burn.  
Stand still and silent. Pray. Return.

## Nowhere Else to Go

By [Linda Sue Park](#)

Turn off the lights.  
Wear another layer.  
(Sounds like a dad.)  
(Sounds like a mom.)

You say hand-me-down.  
I say retro.

Walk.  
Bike.  
Walk some more.  
Recycle.

(See what I did there,  
bike—*recycle*?)

Your name in Sharpie  
on a good water bottle.  
Backpack. New habits.  
*No thanks, don't need a bag.*

What else.  
Oh yeah.

Tell ten friends  
who can tell ten friends  
who can tell ten friends ...  
Make enough noise,

maybe the grown-ups  
will finally hear

the scream in the title.

# No Day Has Been as Clear by We Kept Saying

By [Suphil Lee Park](#)

There's a slim enough chance  
we're edging our last century.  
On its brink I sit or I think it.  
Snow, white itself, whites itself  
out and us along the way.  
Words of no gravity kept floating  
into water where a future perched  
a comma between brackets  
of waves: [Are we here] barely [Are we  
not now] barely [Leave it] barely  
[And leave] ... Or I think it.  
Or feel it. Whichever is closer  
to knowing. What do we know  
after all. I mean—tell me  
what aided you in your longest grief  
as a glass of water.

## Love Song

By [Dorothy Parker](#)

My own dear love, he is strong and bold  
And he cares not what comes after.  
His words ring sweet as a chime of gold,  
And his eyes are lit with laughter.  
He is jubilant as a flag unfurled—  
Oh, a girl, she'd not forget him.  
My own dear love, he is all my world,—  
And I wish I'd never met him.

My love, he's mad, and my love, he's fleet,  
And a wild young wood-thing bore him!  
The ways are fair to his roaming feet,  
And the skies are sunlit for him.  
As sharply sweet to my heart he seems  
As the fragrance of acacia.  
My own dear love, he is all my dreams,—  
And I wish he were in Asia.

My love runs by like a day in June,  
And he makes no friends of sorrows.  
He'll tread his galloping rigadoon  
In the pathway of the morrows.

He'll live his days where the sunbeams start,  
Nor could storm or wind uproot him.  
My own dear love, he is all my heart,—  
And I wish somebody'd shoot him.

## **Song in a Minor Key**

By [Dorothy Parker](#)

There's a place I know where the birds swing low,  
And wayward vines go roaming,  
Where the lilacs nod, and a marble god  
Is pale, in scented gloaming.  
And at sunset there comes a lady fair  
Whose eyes are deep with yearning.  
By an old, old gate does the lady wait  
Her own true love's returning.

But the days go by, and the lilacs die,  
And trembling birds seek cover;  
Yet the lady stands, with her long white hands  
Held out to greet her lover.  
And it's there she'll stay till the shadowy day  
A monument they grave her.  
She will always wait by the same old gate, —  
The gate her true love gave her.

## **The Obligation to Be Happy**

By [Linda Pastan](#)

It is more onerous  
than the rites of beauty  
or housework, harder than love.  
But you expect it of me casually,  
the way you expect the sun  
to come up, not in spite of rain  
or clouds but because of them.

And so I smile, as if my own fidelity  
to sadness were a hidden vice—  
that downward tug on my mouth,  
my old suspicion that health  
and love are brief irrelevancies,  
no more than laughter in the warm dark  
strangled at dawn.

Happiness. I try to hoist it  
on my narrow shoulders again—  
a knapsack heavy with gold coins.  
I stumble around the house,  
bump into things.  
Only Midas himself  
would understand.

## **At the New Year**

By [Kenneth Patchen](#)

In the shape of this night, in the still fall  
of snow, Father  
In all that is cold and tiny, these little birds  
and children  
In everything that moves tonight, the trolleys  
and the lovers, Father  
In the great hush of country, in the ugly noise  
of our cities  
In this deep throw of stars, in those trenches  
where the dead are, Father  
In all the wide land waiting, and in the liners  
out on the black water  
In all that has been said bravely, in all that is  
mean anywhere in the world, Father  
In all that is good and lovely, in every house  
where sham and hatred are  
In the name of those who wait, in the sound  
of angry voices, Father  
Before the bells ring, before this little point in time  
has rushed us on  
Before this clean moment has gone, before this night  
turns to face tomorrow, Father  
There is this high singing in the air  
Forever this sorrowful human face in eternity's window  
And there are other bells that we would ring, Father  
Other bells that we would ring.

## **‘Be Music, Night’**

By [Kenneth Patchen](#)

Be music, night,  
That her sleep may go

Where angels have their pale tall choirs

Be a hand, sea,  
That her dreams may watch  
Thy guidesman touching the green flesh of the world

Be a voice, sky,  
That her beauties may be counted  
And the stars will tilt their quiet faces  
Into the mirror of her loveliness

Be a road, earth,  
That her walking may take thee  
Where the towns of heaven lift their breathing spires

O be a world and a throne, God,  
That her living may find its weather  
And the souls of ancient bells in a child's book  
Shall lead her into Thy wondrous house

## **The Snow Is Deep on the Ground**

By [Kenneth Patchen](#)

The snow is deep on the ground.  
Always the light falls  
Softly down on the hair of my beloved.

This is a good world.  
The war has failed.  
God shall not forget us.  
Who made the snow waits where love is.

Only a few go mad.  
The sky moves in its whiteness  
Like the withered hand of an old king.  
God shall not forget us.  
Who made the sky knows of our love.

The snow is beautiful on the ground.  
And always the lights of heaven glow  
Softly down on the hair of my beloved.

# Monstrance Man

By [Ricardo Pau-Llosa](#)

As a boy he had trouble speaking,  
past three before a real word preened  
from his lips. And for the longest time,  
malaprops haunted him. His older sister  
did what she could to train the bitten seal  
of his brain to twirl the red ball  
on the nose of eloquence, and his grandmother  
tired of insisting he utter the names  
of toys or foods — for every desire  
was coded — and gave him whatever  
he grunted and pointed to.  
O, the man then a boy  
thought, when I tower among them  
I should invent my own speech  
and leave others empty and afraid  
that they did not know it, could not ask  
or plead their case in the one tongue  
that mattered. I shall have them  
look upon the simplest things,  
the man then a boy thought,  
and fill up with stolen awe,  
and point with their faces,  
their pupils wide as blackened coins,  
and hope with all the revenue  
shattered heart-glass can muster  
that someone had grasped  
their need as need and not  
as the monstrous coupling  
of sounds in a trance of whims.  
Then, the grind of his teeth  
vowed, then the plazas of my city  
will fill with my name,  
and their blood will matter  
as little to them as to me.

# Wind, Water, Stone

By [Octavio Paz](#)

Translated By Eliot Weinberger

*for Roger Caillouis*

Water hollows stone,  
wind scatters water,  
stone stops the wind.  
Water, wind, stone.

Wind carves stone,  
stone's a cup of water,  
water escapes and is wind.  
Stone, wind, water.

Wind sings in its whirling,  
water murmurs going by,  
unmoving stone keeps still.  
Wind, water, stone.

Each is another and no other:  
crossing and vanishing  
through their empty names:  
water, stone, wind.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## The Rain-bow

By [Thomas Love Peacock](#)

The day has pass'd in storms, though not unmix'd  
With transitory calm. The western clouds,  
Dissolving slow, unveil the glorious sun,  
Majestic in decline. The wat'ry east  
Glows with the many-tinted arch of Heav'n.  
We hail it as a pledge that brighter skies  
Shall bless the coming morn. Thus rolls the day,  
The short dark day of life; with tempests thus,  
And fleeting sun-shine chequer'd. At its close,  
When the dread hour draws near, that bursts all ties,  
All commerce with the world, Religion pours  
Hope's fairy-colors on the virtuous mind,  
And, like the rain-bow on the ev'ning clouds,  
Gives the bright promise that a happier dawn  
Shall chase the night and silence of the grave.

# That's My Heart Right There

By [Willie Perdomo](#)

We used to say,  
That's my heart right there.

As if to say,  
Don't mess with her right there.

As if, don't even play,  
That's a part of me right there.

In other words, okay okay,  
That's the start of me right there.

As if, come that day,  
That's the end of me right there.

As if, push come to shove,  
I would fend for her right there.

As if, come what may,  
I would lie for her right there.

As if, come love to pay,  
I would die for that right there.

# Green Light Go

By [Emmy Pérez](#)

To be a disco ball dangling in a storefront window, in the sun, with a cage on it. To be two and three disco balls, downtown McAllen, spangles of sun and water that grew tangerine skins late February, pink bottlebrush nostrils, buff-bellied hummingbirds. To be mirrors and hexagonal combs, mexican honey wasps, larvae, paper, wax. To make geometry without vocabulary, to be live music—take off your jacket, girl, wear your tank top . . . it's ninety degrees! To be a green light go, downtown Corpus, after cars and trucks zooming on beach sand, before hot tubs. To be an orange sun driving from Anzaldúa's grave, to be a cactus bloom fuchsia, opuntia, Laguna Atascosa, Laguna Madre, to be a watering hole, a mud chimney air vent for crawdad water tunnels. To be a silver lizard run over by tires, a swatch of river on asphalt, to be a bolt loosened from the border wall, to be a peso falling out of the border crossing's revolving slot, to be a coke-bottle dove, a mexican coca-cola, a cooing quorum of lotería cards signing a resolution. To be a goose perched on top of an abandoned sink in a yard, in a town that fords the river, to be the woman stretched on her beloved's grave, returned after decades. To be a kid in juvie, to be her guardian, the judge, the p.o., to be the letters she writes, the words that matter more than food, almost as much as music and

more than makeup, nearly suns seen through the mandatory skylight, imagined by the control room monitor. To be el chalán, the last hand-drawn ferry on the river, its ropes pulled by pilots, to be a passenger almost on the other side.

## Say This

By [Lucia Perillo](#)

I live a small life, barely bigger than a speck,  
barely more than a blip on the radar sweep  
though it is not nothing, as the garter snake  
climbs the rock rose shrub and the squirrel creeps  
on bramble thorns. Not nothing to the crows  
who heckle from the crowns of the last light's trees  
winterstripped of green, except for the boles  
that ivy winds each hour round. See, the world is busy  
and the world is quick, barely time for a spider  
to suck the juice from a hawk moth's head  
so it can use the moth as a spindle that it wraps in fiber  
while the moth constricts until it's thin as a stick  
you might think was nothing, a random bit  
caught in a web coming loose from the window frame, in wind.

## Epitaph

By [Katherine Philips](#)

*On her Son H.P. at St. Syth's Church where her body also lies interred*

What on Earth deserves our trust?  
Youth and Beauty both are dust.  
Long we gathering are with pain,  
What one moment calls again.  
Seven years childless marriage past,  
A Son, a son is born at last:  
So exactly lim'd and fair,  
Full of good Spirits, Meen, and Air,  
As a long life promised,  
Yet, in less than six weeks dead.  
Too promising, too great a mind  
In so small room to be confined:  
Therefore, as fit in Heaven to dwell,  
He quickly broke the Prison shell.  
So the subtle Alchemist,  
Can't with *Hermes* Seal resist  
The powerful spirit's subtler flight,

But t'will bid him long good night.  
And so the Sun if it arise  
Half so glorious as his Eyes,  
Like this Infant, takes a shroud,  
Buried in a morning Cloud.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## A Kind of Meadow

By [Carl Phillips](#)

—shored  
by trees at its far ending,  
as is the way in moral tales:

whether trees as trees actually,  
for their shadow and what  
inside of it

hides, threatens, calls to;  
or as ever-wavering conscience,  
cloaked now, and called Chorus;

or, between these, whatever  
falls upon the rippling and measurable,  
but none to measure it, thin

fabric of *this stands for*.  
A kind of meadow, and then  
trees—many, assembled, a wood

therefore. Through the wood  
the worn  
path, emblematic of Much

Trespass: *Halt. Who goes there?*  
A kind of meadow, where it ends  
begin trees, from whose twinning

of late light and the already underway  
darkness you were expecting perhaps  
the stag to step forward, to make

of its twelve-pointed antlers

the branching foreground to a backdrop  
all branches;

or you wanted the usual  
bird to break cover at that angle  
at which wings catch entirely

what light's left,  
so that for once the bird isn't miracle  
at all, but the simplicity of patience

and a good hand assembling: first  
the thin bones, now in careful  
rows the feathers, like fretwork,

now the brush, for the laying-on  
of sheen.... *As is always the way,*  
you tell yourself, *in*

*poems*—Yes, always,  
until you have gone there,  
and gone there, “into the

field,” vowing *Only until*  
*there's nothing more*  
*I want*—thinking it, wrongly,

a thing attainable, any real end  
to wanting, and that it is close, and that  
it is likely, how will you not

this time catch hold of it: flashing,  
flesh at once

lit and lightless, a way  
out, the one dappled way, back—

## Luna Moth

By [Carl Phillips](#)

No eye that sees could fail to remark you:  
like any leaf the rain leaves fixed to and  
flat against the barn's gray shingle. But

what leaf, this time of year, is so pale,

the pale of leaves when they've lost just  
enough green to become the green that *means*

loss and more loss, approaching? Give up  
the flesh enough times, and whatever is lost  
gets forgotten: that was the thought that I

woke to, those words in my head. I rose,  
I did not dress, I left no particular body  
sleeping and, stepping into the hour, I saw

you, strange sign, at once transparent and  
impossible to entirely see through. and how  
still: the still of being unmoved, and then

the still of no longer being able to be  
moved. If I think of a heart, his, as I've  
found it.... If I think of, increasingly, my

own.... If I look at you now, as from above,  
and see the diva when she is caught in mid-  
triumph, arms half-raised, the body as if

set at last free of the green sheath that has—  
how many nights?—held her, it is not  
without remembering another I once saw:

like you, except that something, a bird, some  
wild and necessary hunger, had gotten to it;  
and like the diva, but now broken, splayed

and torn, the green torn piecemeal from her.  
I remember the hands, and—how small they  
seemed, bringing the small ripped thing to me.

## **Dream of the Phone Booth**

By [Emilia Phillips](#)

My story's told in the mis-dial's  
hesitance & anonyms of crank calls,

in the wires' electric elegy  
& glass expanded by the moth

flicker of filament. I call a past

that believes I'm dead. On the concrete

here, you can see where  
I stood in rust, lashed to the grid.

On the corner of Pine & Idlewood,  
I've seen a virgin on her knees

before the angel  
of a streetlight & Moses stealing the *Times*

to build a fire. I've seen the city fly  
right through a memory & not break

its neck. But the street still needs a shrine,  
so return my ringing heart & no one

to answer it, a traveler whose only destination is  
waywardness. Forgive us

our apologies, the bees in our bells, the receiver's  
grease, days horizoned

into words. If we stand  
monument to anything,

it's that only some voices belong  
to men.

## Violins

By [Rowan Ricardo Phillips](#)

He never saw a violin.  
But he saw a lifetime of violence.

This is not to presume  
That if he had simply seen

A violin he would have seen  
Less violence. Or that living among

Violins, as though they were  
Boulangeries or toppling stacks

Of other glazed goods like young adult

Fiction, would have made the violence

Less crack and more cocaine,  
Less of course and more why god oh why.

More of one thing  
Doesn't rhyme with one thing.

A swill of stars doesn't rhyme  
With star. A posse of poets doesn't rhyme

With poet. We are all in prison.  
This is the brutal lesson of the 21st century,

Swilled like a sour stone  
Through the vein of the beast

Who watches you while you eat;  
Our eternal host, the chummed fiddler,

The better tomorrow,  
MMXVI.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud Students: In regards to "MMXVI" either the Roman numerals or the year may be recited.*

## To be of use

By [Marge Piercy](#)

The people I love the best  
jump into work head first  
without dallying in the shallows  
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.  
They seem to become natives of that element,  
the black sleek heads of seals  
bouncing like half-submerged balls.

I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,  
who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,  
who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,  
who do what has to be done, again and again.

I want to be with people who submerge  
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest  
and work in a row and pass the bags along,

who are not parlor generals and field deserters  
but move in a common rhythm  
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.

The work of the world is common as mud.  
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.  
But the thing worth doing well done  
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.  
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,  
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums  
but you know they were made to be used.  
The pitcher cries for water to carry  
and a person for work that is real.

## **To have without holding**

By [Marge Piercy](#)

Learning to love differently is hard,  
love with the hands wide open, love  
with the doors banging on their hinges,  
the cupboard unlocked, the wind  
roaring and whimpering in the rooms  
rustling the sheets and snapping the blinds  
that thwack like rubber bands  
in an open palm.

It hurts to love wide open  
stretching the muscles that feel  
as if they are made of wet plaster,  
then of blunt knives, then  
of sharp knives.

It hurts to thwart the reflexes  
of grab, of clutch ; to love and let  
go again and again. It pesters to remember  
the lover who is not in the bed,  
to hold back what is owed to the work  
that gutters like a candle in a cave  
without air, to love consciously,  
conscientiously, concretely, constructively.

I can't do it, you say it's killing  
me, but you thrive, you glow  
on the street like a neon raspberry,  
You float and sail, a helium balloon

bright bachelor's button blue and bobbing  
on the cold and hot winds of our breath,  
as we make and unmake in passionate  
diastole and systole the rhythm  
of our unbound bonding, to have  
and not to hold, to love  
with minimized malice, hunger  
and anger moment by moment balanced.

## **A Song: Lying in an occupation**

By [Laetitia Pilkington](#)

Lying is an occupation,  
Used by all who mean to rise;  
Politicians owe their station,  
But to well concerted lies.

These to lovers give assistance,  
To ensnare the fair-one's heart;  
And the virgin's best resistance  
Yields to this commanding art.

Study this superior science,  
Would you rise in Church or State;  
Bid to Truth a bold defiance,  
'Tis the practice of the great.

## **The Wish, By a Young Lady**

By [Laetitia Pilkington](#)

I ask not wit, nor beauty do I crave,  
Nor wealth, nor pompous titles wish to have;  
But since, 'tis doomed through all degrees of life,  
Whether a daughter, sister, or a wife;  
That females should the stronger males obey,  
And yield implicit to their lordly sway;  
Since this, I say, is ev'ry woman's fate,  
Give me a mind to suit my slavish state.

## **Poem about People**

By [Robert Pinsky](#)

The jaunty crop-haired graying  
Women in grocery stores,

Their clothes boyish and neat,  
New mittens or clean sneakers,

Clean hands, hips not bad still,  
Buying ice cream, steaks, soda,  
Fresh melons and soap—or the big  
Balding young men in work shoes

And green work pants, beer belly  
And white T-shirt, the porky walk  
Back to the truck, polite; possible  
To feel briefly like Jesus,

A gust of diffuse tenderness  
Crossing the dark spaces  
To where the dry self burrows  
Or nests, something that stirs,

Watching the kinds of people  
On the street for a while—  
But how love falters and flags  
When anyone's difficult eyes come

Into focus, terrible gaze of a unique  
Soul, its need unlovable: my friend  
In his divorced schoolteacher  
Apartment, his own unsuspected

Paintings hung everywhere,  
Which his wife kept in a closet—  
Not, he says, that she wasn't  
Perfectly right; or me, mis-hearing

My rock radio sing my self-pity:  
“The Angels Wished Him Dead”—all  
The hideous, sudden stare of self,  
Soul showing through like the lizard

Ancestry showing in the frontal gaze  
Of a robin busy on the lawn.  
In the movies, when the sensitive  
Young Jewish soldier nearly drowns

Trying to rescue the thrashing  
Anti-semitic bully, swimming across  
The river raked by nazi fire,

The awful part is the part truth:

*Hate my whole kind*, but me,  
Love me for myself. The weather  
Changes in the black of night,  
And the dream-wind, bowling across

The sopping open spaces  
Of roads, golf courses, parking lots,  
Flails a commotion  
In the dripping treetops,

Tries a half-rotten shingle  
Or a down-hung branch, and we  
All dream it, the dark wind crossing  
The wide spaces between us.

## The Conqueror Worm

By [Edgar Allan Poe](#)

Lo! 't is a gala night  
Within the lonesome latter years!  
An angel throng, bewinged, bedight  
In veils, and drowned in tears,  
Sit in a theatre, to see  
A play of hopes and fears,  
While the orchestra breathes fitfully  
The music of the spheres.

Mimes, in the form of God on high,  
Mutter and mumble low,  
And hither and thither fly—  
Mere puppets they, who come and go  
At bidding of vast formless things  
That shift the scenery to and fro,  
Flapping from out their Condor wings  
Invisible Wo!

That motley drama—oh, be sure  
It shall not be forgot!  
With its Phantom chased for evermore  
By a crowd that seize it not,  
Through a circle that ever returneth in  
To the self-same spot,  
And much of Madness, and more of Sin,

And Horror the soul of the plot.

But see, amid the mimic rout,  
A crawling shape intrude!  
A blood-red thing that writhes from out  
The scenic solitude!  
It writhes!—it writhes!—with mortal pangs  
The mimes become its food,  
And seraphs sob at vermin fangs  
In human gore imbued.

Out—out are the lights—out all!  
And, over each quivering form,  
The curtain, a funeral pall,  
Comes down with the rush of a storm,  
While the angels, all pallid and wan,  
Uprising, unveiling, affirm  
That the play is the tragedy, “Man,”  
And its hero, the Conqueror Worm.

## Israfel

By [Edgar Allan Poe](#)

*And the angel Israfel, whose heart-strings are a lute, and who has the sweetest voice of all God's creatures. —KORAN*

In Heaven a spirit doth dwell  
“Whose heart-strings are a lute”;  
None sing so wildly well  
As the angel Israfel,  
And the giddy stars (so legends tell),  
Ceasing their hymns, attend the spell  
Of his voice, all mute.

Tottering above  
In her highest noon,  
The enamoured moon  
Blushes with love,  
While, to listen, the red levin  
(With the rapid Pleiads, even,  
Which were seven,)  
Pauses in Heaven.

And they say (the starry choir  
And the other listening things)

That Israfeli's fire  
Is owing to that lyre  
    By which he sits and sings—  
The trembling living wire  
    Of those unusual strings.

But the skies that angel trod,  
    Where deep thoughts are a duty,  
Where Love's a grown-up God,  
    Where the Houri glances are  
Imbued with all the beauty  
    Which we worship in a star.

Therefore, thou art not wrong,  
    Israfeli, who despisest  
An unimpassioned song;  
To thee the laurels belong,  
    Best bard, because the wisest!  
Merrily live, and long!

The ecstasies above  
    With thy burning measures suit—  
Thy grief, thy joy, thy hate, thy love,  
    With the fervour of thy lute—  
Well may the stars be mute!

Yes, Heaven is thine; but this  
    Is a world of sweets and sour;  
Our flowers are merely—flowers,  
And the shadow of thy perfect bliss  
    Is the sunshine of ours.

If I could dwell  
Where Israfel  
    Hath dwelt, and he where I,  
He might not sing so wildly well  
    A mortal melody,  
While a bolder note than this might swell  
    From my lyre within the sky.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud Participants: The epigraph of this poem is optional for recitation.*

# To Helen

By [Edgar Allan Poe](#)

Helen, thy beauty is to me  
Like those Nicéan barks of yore,  
That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,  
The weary, way-worn wanderer bore  
To his own native shore.

On desperate seas long wont to roam,  
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,  
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home  
To the glory that was Greece,  
And the grandeur that was Rome.

Lo! in yon brilliant window-niche  
How statue-like I see thee stand,  
The agate lamp within thy hand!  
Ah, Psyche, from the regions which  
Are Holy-Land!

# Old Mama Saturday

By [Marie Ponsot](#)

*“Saturday’s child must work for a living.”*

“I’m moving from Grief Street.  
Taxes are high here  
though the mortgage’s cheap.

The house is well built.  
With stuff to protect, that  
mattered to me,  
the security.

These things that I mind,  
you know, aren’t mine.  
I mind minding them.  
They weigh on my mind.

I don’t mind them well.  
I haven’t got the knack  
of kindly minding.  
I say Take them back  
but you never do.

When I throw them out  
it may frighten you  
and maybe me too.

Maybe  
it will empty me  
too emptily

and keep me here  
asleep, at sea  
under the guilt quilt,  
under the you tree.”

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Winter

By [Marie Ponsot](#)

I don't know what to say to you, neighbor,  
as you shovel snow from your part of our street  
neat in your Greek black. I've waited for  
chance to find words; now, by chance, we meet.

We took our boys to the same kindergarten,  
thirteen years ago when our husbands went.  
Both boys hated school, dropped out feral, dropped in  
to separate troubles. You shift snow fast, back bent,  
but your boy killed himself, six days dead.

My boy washed your wall when the police were done.  
He says, “We weren't friends?” and shakes his head,  
“I told him it was great he had that gun,”  
and shakes. I shake, close to you, close to you.  
You have a path to clear, and so you do.

## Ode on Solitude

By [Alexander Pope](#)

Happy the man, whose wish and care  
A few paternal acres bound,  
Content to breathe his native air,  
In his own ground.

Whose herds with milk, whose fields with bread,  
Whose flocks supply him with attire,  
Whose trees in summer yield him shade,  
In winter fire.

Blest, who can unconcernedly find  
Hours, days, and years slide soft away,  
In health of body, peace of mind,  
Quiet by day,

Sound sleep by night; study and ease,  
Together mixed; sweet recreation;  
And innocence, which most does please,  
With meditation.

Thus let me live, unseen, unknown;  
Thus unlamented let me die;  
Steal from the world, and not a stone  
Tell where I lie.

## Envoi

By [Ezra Pound](#)

Go, dumb-born book,  
Tell her that sang me once that song of Lawes:  
Hadst thou but song  
As thou hast subjects known,  
Then were there cause in thee that should condone  
Even my faults that heavy upon me lie  
And build her glories their longevity.

Tell her that sheds  
Such treasure in the air,  
Recking naught else but that her graces give  
Life to the moment,  
I would bid them live  
As roses might, in magic amber laid,  
Red overwrought with orange and all made  
One substance and one colour  
Braving time.

Tell her that goes  
With song upon her lips  
But sings not out the song, nor knows

The maker of it, some other mouth,  
May be as fair as hers,  
Might, in new ages, gain her worshippers,  
When our two dusts with Waller's shall be laid,  
Siftings on siftings in oblivion,  
Till change hath broken down  
All things save Beauty alone.

## Portrait d'une Femme

By [Ezra Pound](#)

Your mind and you are our Sargasso Sea,  
    London has swept about you this score years  
And bright ships left you this or that in fee:  
    Ideas, old gossip, oddments of all things,  
Strange spars of knowledge and dimmed wares of price.  
    Great minds have sought you — lacking someone else.  
You have been second always. Tragical?  
    No. You preferred it to the usual thing:  
One dull man, dulling and uxorious,  
    One average mind — with one thought less, each year.  
Oh, you are patient, I have seen you sit  
    Hours, where something might have floated up.  
And now you pay one. Yes, you richly pay.  
    You are a person of some interest, one comes to you  
And takes strange gain away:  
    Trophies fished up; some curious suggestion;  
Fact that leads nowhere; and a tale for two,  
    Pregnant with mandrakes, or with something else  
That might prove useful and yet never proves,  
    That never fits a corner or shows use,  
Or finds its hour upon the loom of days:  
    The tarnished, gaudy, wonderful old work;  
Idols and ambergris and rare inlays,  
    These are your riches, your great store; and yet  
For all this sea-hoard of deciduous things,  
    Strange woods half sodden, and new brighter stuff:  
In the slow float of differing light and deep,  
    No! there is nothing! In the whole and all,  
Nothing that's quite your own.  
    Yet this is you.

# The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter

By [Ezra Pound](#)

*After Li Po*

While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead  
I played about the front gate, pulling flowers.  
You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse,  
You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums.  
And we went on living in the village of Chōkan:  
Two small people, without dislike or suspicion.  
At fourteen I married My Lord you.  
I never laughed, being bashful.  
Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.  
Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back.

At fifteen I stopped scowling,  
I desired my dust to be mingled with yours  
Forever and forever, and forever.  
Why should I climb the look out?

At sixteen you departed  
You went into far Ku-tō-en, by the river of swirling eddies,  
And you have been gone five months.  
The monkeys make sorrowful noise overhead.

You dragged your feet when you went out.  
By the gate now, the moss is grown, the different mosses,  
Too deep to clear them away!  
The leaves fall early this autumn, in wind.  
The paired butterflies are already yellow with August  
Over the grass in the West garden;  
They hurt me.  
I grow older.  
If you are coming down through the narrows of the river Kiang,  
Please let me know beforehand,  
And I will come out to meet you  
As far as Chō-fū-Sa.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

# A Virginal

By [Ezra Pound](#)

No, no! Go from me. I have left her lately.  
I will not spoil my sheath with lesser brightness,  
For my surrounding air hath a new lightness;  
Slight are her arms, yet they have bound me straitly  
And left me cloaked as with a gauze of æther;  
As with sweet leaves; as with subtle clearness.  
Oh, I have picked up magic in her nearness  
To sheathe me half in half the things that sheathe her.  
No, no! Go from me. I have still the flavour,  
Soft as spring wind that's come from birchen bowers.  
Green come the shoots, aye April in the branches,  
As winter's wound with her sleight hand she staunches,  
Hath of the trees a likeness of the savour:  
As white their bark, so white this lady's hours.

# Orchestral Maneuvers in the Dark

By [D. A. Powell](#)

I play the egg  
and I play the triangle  
I play the reed  
and I play each angle  
I play the lyre  
and I play the lute  
I play the snare  
and I play the flute  
I play the licorice stick  
and I play the juke  
I play the kettle  
and I play the uke  
who ever thought of the triangle  
who ever thought of the clarinet  
the castanets the cornet the  
discotheque the harmonium  
the euphonium marimbas and  
maracas harmonicas  
tom-toms and tatas  
I play the fiddle  
and I play the jug  
I play the washboard  
and the washtub  
I play kalimba

and I play the koto  
I play the organ  
and I play the banjo  
I play the fool I play it cool  
I play hot and I play pranks  
I played your mixtape  
forgot to say thanks

## An Ode

By [Matthew Prior](#)

The merchant, to secure his treasure,  
Conveys it in a borrowed name;  
Euphelia serves to grace my measure,  
But Cloe is my real flame.

My softest verse, my darling lyre,  
Upon Euphelia's toilet lay;  
When Cloe noted her desire  
That I should sing, that I should play.

My lyre I tune, my voice I raise,  
But with my numbers mix my sighs;  
And whilst I sing Euphelia's praise,  
I fix my soul on Cloe's eyes.

Fair Cloe blushed; Euphelia frowned;  
I sung and gazed; I played and trembled;  
And Venus to the Loves around  
Remarked how ill we all dissembled.

## Undoing

By [Khadijah Queen](#)

In winter traffic, fog of midday  
shoves toward our machines—snow eclipses  
the mountainscapes  
I drive toward, keeping time against  
the urge to quit moving. I refuse to not  
know how not to, wrestling  
out loud to music, as hovering me—automatic  
engine, watching miles of sky on the fall—loves such  
undoing, secretly, adding fuel to  
what undoes the ozone, the endless nothing

manifested as sinkholes under permafrost.  
Refusal, indecision—an arctic  
undoing of us, interrupting cascades—  
icy existences. I cannot drive through.

## Ode to Langston

By [Dawn Quigley](#)

Langston, we too, sing Turtle Island.

We are the 574 Nations.  
They want to hide us  
In the past tense,  
Yet we love,  
And dream,  
And are still here.

Today, now,  
We are at the oval table  
As our women lead.  
Nobody can ever  
Say to us,  
“Natives lived, Natives ate, drank, led.”  
We are *present* tense.

Because,  
They will know what we’ve always known  
And be humbled—

We, too, sing Turtle Island.

## Haiti

By [Jennifer Rahim](#)

For the earth has spoken,  
to you, her magma Creole.

Full-throated syllables, up-  
rising from deep down,

an honest elocution —  
rudimentary sound: guttural

nouns, forthright, strong,

the rumbled conviction of verbs

unfettered by reticence  
as the first poetry of creation.

A secret has passed between you  
so wonderfully terrible,

it laid your cities prostrate,  
raptured your citizenry.

Now, we look to your remnant  
courtesy cable TV

and garble theories thinking  
ourselves saved.

Only the wise among us pin  
our ears to the ground,

listening in hope of catching  
even a half syllable

of the language forming  
like a new world on your tongue.

## **Nature, That Washed Her Hands in Milk**

By [Sir Walter Raleigh](#)

Nature, that washed her hands in milk,  
And had forgot to dry them,  
Instead of earth took snow and silk,  
At love's request to try them,  
If she a mistress could compose  
To please love's fancy out of those.

Her eyes he would should be of light,  
A violet breath, and lips of jelly;  
Her hair not black, nor overbright,  
And of the softest down her belly;  
As for her inside he'd have it  
Only of wantonness and wit.

At love's entreaty such a one  
Nature made, but with her beauty

She hath framed a heart of stone;  
So as love, by ill destiny,  
Must die for her whom nature gave him,  
Because her darling would not save him.

But time (which nature doth despise,  
And rudely gives her love the lie,  
Makes hope a fool, and sorrow wise)  
His hands do neither wash nor dry;  
But being made of steel and rust,  
Turns snow and silk and milk to dust.

The light, the belly, lips, and breath,  
He dims, discolors, and destroys;  
With those he feeds but fills not death,  
Which sometimes were the food of joys.  
Yea, time doth dull each lively wit,  
And dries all wantonness with it.

Oh, cruel time! which takes in trust  
Our youth, our joys, and all we have,  
And pays us but with age and dust;  
Who in the dark and silent grave  
When we have wandered all our ways  
Shuts up the story of our days.

## The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd

By [Sir Walter Raleigh](#)

If all the world and love were young,  
And truth in every Shepherd's tongue,  
These pretty pleasures might me move,  
To live with thee, and be thy love.

Time drives the flocks from field to fold,  
When Rivers rage and Rocks grow cold,  
And *Philomel* becometh dumb,  
The rest complains of cares to come.

The flowers do fade, and wanton fields,  
To wayward winter reckoning yields,  
A honey tongue, a heart of gall,  
Is fancy's spring, but sorrow's fall.

Thy gowns, thy shoes, thy beds of Roses,

Thy cap, thy kirtle, and thy posies  
Soon break, soon wither, soon forgotten:  
In folly ripe, in reason rotten.

Thy belt of straw and Ivy buds,  
The Coral clasps and amber studs,  
All these in me no means can move  
To come to thee and be thy love.

But could youth last, and love still breed,  
Had joys no date, nor age no need,  
Then these delights my mind might move  
To live with thee, and be thy love.

## **The Current Isolationism**

By [Camille Rankine](#)

In the half-light, I am most  
at home, my shadow  
as company.

When I feel hot, I push a button  
to make it stop. I mean this stain on my mind  
I can't get out. How human

I seem. Like modern man,  
I traffic in extinction. I have a gift.  
Like an animal, I sustain.

A flock of birds  
when touched, I scatter. I won't approach  
until the back is turned.

My heart betrays. I confess: I am afraid.  
How selfish of me.  
When there's no one here, I halve

the distance between  
our bodies infinitesimally.  
In this long passageway, I pose

against the wallpaper, dig  
my heels in, catch the light.  
In my vision, the back door opens

on a garden that is always  
in bloom. The dogs  
are chained so they can't attack like I know

they want to. In the next yard  
over, honeybees swarm  
and their sound is huge.

## History

By [Camille Rankine](#)

Our stone wall was built by slaves and my bones, my bones  
are paid for. We have two

of everything, twice heavy  
in our pockets, warming  
our two big hands.

This is the story, as I know it. One morning:  
the ships came, as foretold, and death  
pearl-handled, almost

and completely.  
How cheap a date I turned out to be.

Each finger weak with the memory:  
lost teeth, regret. Our ghosts  
walk the shoulders of the road at night.  
I get the feeling you've been lying to me.

## Symptoms of Prophecy

By [Camille Rankine](#)

In the new century,  
we lose the art of many things.

For example, at the beep, I communicate  
using the wrong machine.

I called to say we have two lives  
and only one of them is real.

When the phone rings: you could be anybody.  
In the evening: you are homeless

and hunting for good light, as safe a place  
as any to make a bed for the night.

In both my lives, my nerves go bust.  
I'm certain that I'm not

as I appear, that I'm a figment and  
you're not really here.

The struggle  
is authenticity.

I have a message.  
You must believe me.

## **Don't Let Me Be Lonely: “At the airport-security checkpoint...”**

By [Claudia Rankine](#)

At the airport-security checkpoint on my way to visit my grandmother, I am asked to drink  
from my water bottle.

This water bottle?

That's right. Open it and drink from it.

/

At the airport-security checkpoint on my way to visit my grandmother, I am asked to take  
off my shoes.

Take off my shoes?

Yes. Both Please.

/

At the airport-security checkpoint on my way to visit my grandmother, I am asked if I have  
a fever.

A fever? Really?

Yes. Really.

/

My grandmother is in a nursing home. It's not bad. It doesn't smell like pee. It doesn't smell like anything. When I go to see her, as I walk through the hall past the common room and the nurses' station, old person after old person puts out his or her hand to me. Steven, one says. Ann, another calls. It's like being in a third-world country, but instead of food or money you are what is wanted, your company. In third-world countries I have felt overwhelmingly American, calcium-rich, privileged, and white. Here, I feel young, lucky, and sad. Sad is one of those words that has given up its life for our country, it's been a martyr for the American dream, it's been neutralized, co-opted by our culture to suggest a tinge of discomfort that lasts the time it takes for this and then for that to happen, the time it takes to change a channel. But sadness is real because once it meant something real. It meant dignified, grave; it meant trustworthy; it meant exceptionally bad, deplorable, shameful; it meant massive, weighty, forming a compact body; it meant falling heavily; and it meant of a color: dark. It meant dark in color, to darken. It meant me. I felt sad.

## Janet Waking

By [John Crowe Ransom](#)

Beautifully Janet slept  
Till it was deeply morning. She woke then  
And thought about her dainty-feathered hen,  
To see how it had kept.

One kiss she gave her mother,  
Only a small one gave she to her daddy  
Who would have kissed each curl of his shining baby;  
No kiss at all for her brother.

“Old Chucky, Old Chucky!” she cried,  
Running across the world upon the grass  
To Chucky’s house, and listening. But alas,  
Her Chucky had died.

It was a transmogrifying bee  
Came droning down on Chucky’s old bald head  
And sat and put the poison. It scarcely bled,  
But how exceedingly

And purply did the knot  
Swell with the venom and communicate  
Its rigour! Now the poor comb stood up straight  
But Chucky did not.

So there was Janet

Kneeling on the wet grass, crying her brown hen  
(Translated far beyond the daughters of men)  
To rise and walk upon it.

And weeping fast as she had breath  
Janet implored us, "Wake her from her sleep!"  
And would not be instructed in how deep  
Was the forgetful kingdom of death.

## Limitations

By [Henrietta Cordelia Ray](#)

The subtlest strain a great musician weaves,  
Cannot attain in rhythmic harmony  
To music in his soul. May it not be  
Celestial lyres send hints to him? He grieves  
That half the sweetness of the song, he leaves  
Unheard in the transition. Thus do we  
Yearn to translate the wondrous majesty  
Of some rare mood, when the rapt soul receives  
A vision exquisite. Yet who can match  
The sunset's iridescent hues? Who sing  
The skylark's ecstasy so seraph-fine?  
We struggle vainly, still we fain would catch  
Such rifts amid life's shadows, for they bring  
Glimpses ineffable of things divine.

## All Thirst Quenched

By [Lois Red Elk](#)

*for my granddaughter, Wahcawin*

I didn't want to scold the sky that year, but  
Grandma's words taunted my senses. If there  
is a thirst, then you need to pity the flowers

in a loud voice. Ask the frogs why they are  
being punished, stomp on the ground and talk  
to the dried clay about cracking open the earth.

I know challenging the storm is risky. "Last  
but not least, burn cedar and pray the lightning  
doesn't strike your town." That night, the stars

disappeared, so did the birds. Perhaps it was  
the season for rain or the dance. In the western  
distance, we thought we heard cannon blasts,

looking over we watched the horizon fill with  
lightning strikes. Rain couldn't pour hard enough  
over the thirsty plain. Accompanying clouds,

called to thunder's voice in extreme decimals  
requesting all the water heaven could send forth,  
to come. Rain and more rain filled empty stream

bottoms. Rivers who had pulled their dry banks  
farther and farther from their center begged for  
a drink to startle dusty beds with a flooding roar.

Lives in dormant places begin to stir and awaken.  
The lives of water beings, those that swim, the  
ones that hop, and the ones that fly, begin to stir.

That year all thirst was quenched.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## The Bad Old Days

By [Kenneth Rexroth](#)

The summer of nineteen eighteen  
I read *The Jungle* and *The*  
*Research Magnificent*. That fall  
My father died and my aunt  
Took me to Chicago to live.  
The first thing I did was to take  
A streetcar to the stockyards.  
In the winter afternoon,  
Gritty and fetid, I walked  
Through the filthy snow, through the  
Squalid streets, looking shyly  
Into the people's faces,  
Those who were home in the daytime.  
Debauched and exhausted faces,  
Starved and looted brains, faces  
Like the faces in the senile  
And insane wards of charity

Hospitals. Predatory  
Faces of little children.  
Then as the soiled twilight darkened,  
Under the green gas lamps, and the  
Sputtering purple arc lamps,  
The faces of the men coming  
Home from work, some still alive with  
The last pulse of hope or courage,  
Some sly and bitter, some smart and  
Silly, most of them already  
Broken and empty, no life,  
Only blinding tiredness, worse  
Than any tired animal.  
The sour smells of a thousand  
Suppers of fried potatoes and  
Fried cabbage bled into the street.  
I was giddy and sick, and out  
Of my misery I felt rising  
A terrible anger and out  
Of the anger, an absolute vow.  
Today the evil is clean  
And prosperous, but it is  
Everywhere, you don't have to  
Take a streetcar to find it,  
And it is the same evil.  
And the misery, and the  
Anger, and the vow are the same.

## **Discrimination**

By [Kenneth Rexroth](#)

I don't mind the human race.  
I've got pretty used to them  
In these past twenty-five years.  
I don't mind if they sit next  
To me on streetcars, or eat  
In the same restaurants, if  
It's not at the same table.  
However, I don't approve  
Of a woman I respect  
Dancing with one of them. I've  
Tried asking them to my home  
Without success. I shouldn't  
Care to see my own sister  
Marry one. Even if she

Loved him, think of the children.  
Their art is interesting,  
But certainly barbarous.  
I'm sure, if given a chance,  
They'd kill us all in our beds.  
And you must admit, they smell.

## On What Planet

By [Kenneth Rexroth](#)

Uniformly over the whole countryside  
The warm air flows imperceptibly seaward;  
The autumn haze drifts in deep bands  
Over the pale water;  
White egrets stand in the blue marshes;  
Tamalpais, Diablo, St. Helena  
Float in the air.  
Climbing on the cliffs of Hunter's Hill  
We look out over fifty miles of sinuous  
Interpenetration of mountains and sea.

Leading up a twisted chimney,  
Just as my eyes rise to the level  
Of a small cave, two white owls  
Fly out, silent, close to my face.  
They hover, confused in the sunlight,  
And disappear into the recesses of the cliff.

All day I have been watching a new climber,  
A young girl with ash blonde hair  
And gentle confident eyes.  
She climbs slowly, precisely,  
With unwasted grace.

While I am coiling the ropes,  
Watching the spectacular sunset,  
She turns to me and says, quietly,  
"It must be very beautiful, the sunset,  
On Saturn, with the rings and all the moons."

## The Wheel Revolves

By [Kenneth Rexroth](#)

You were a girl of satin and gauze

Now you are my mountain and waterfall companion.  
Long ago I read those lines of Po Chu I  
Written in his middle age.  
Young as I was they touched me.  
I never thought in my own middle age  
I would have a beautiful young dancer  
To wander with me by falling crystal waters,  
Among mountains of snow and granite,  
Least of all that unlike Po's girl  
She would be my very daughter.

The earth turns towards the sun.  
Summer comes to the mountains.  
Blue grouse drum in the red fir woods  
All the bright long days.  
You put blue jay and flicker feathers  
In your hair.  
Two and two violet green swallows  
Play over the lake.  
The blue birds have come back  
To nest on the little island.  
The swallows sip water on the wing  
And play at love and dodge and swoop  
Just like the swallows that swirl  
Under and over the Ponte Vecchio.  
Light rain crosses the lake  
Hissing faintly. After the rain  
There are giant puffballs with tortoise shell backs  
At the edge of the meadow.  
Snows of a thousand winters  
Melt in the sun of one summer.  
Wild cyclamen bloom by the stream.  
Trout veer in the transparent current.  
In the evening marmots bark in the rocks.  
The Scorpion curls over the glimmering ice field.  
A white crowned night sparrow sings as the moon sets.  
Thunder growls far off.  
Our campfire is a single light  
Amongst a hundred peaks and waterfalls.  
The manifold voices of falling water  
Talk all night.  
Wrapped in your down bag  
Starlight on your cheeks and eyelids  
Your breath comes and goes  
In a tiny cloud in the frosty night.  
Ten thousand birds sing in the sunrise.

Ten thousand years revolve without change.  
All this will never be again.

**Track: "Gaze," Sweetback, feat. Amel Larrieux (1996)**

By Barbara Jane Reyes

Squeeze your hand into a fist. Now, loosen, just a bit.  
 They say that is the heart, heat, fiber, sugar. Cut  
 around its core, score and invert. Take your teeth  
 to its golden flesh and bite. They say this is the heart  
 of a lovely girl. In these stories, there is always a girl,  
 lovely as that dream just before waking. There is always  
 a girl, whose dainty feet make light where she toe-taps  
 the earth, so soft. Elders tell her patience will saint her.  
 And so she waits. There is always heartbreak, chambers  
 washed in longing, pulsing dark inside the body. She waits.  
 They say she waited with the waning moon, until the dawn.  
 She waited. Press your index finger and tall finger  
 into the underside of your jawbone, and count.

# Planetarium

By Adrienne Rich

*Thinking of Caroline Herschel (1750–1848)  
astronomer, sister of William; and others.*

A woman in the shape of a monster  
a monster in the shape of a woman  
the skies are full of them

a woman ‘in the snow  
among the Clocks and instruments  
or measuring the ground with poles’

in her 98 years to discover  
8 comets

she whom the moon ruled  
like us  
levitating into the night sky  
riding the polished lenses

Galaxies of women, there  
doing penance for impetuosity

ribs chilled  
in those spaces of the mind

An eye,

‘virile, precise and absolutely certain’  
from the mad webs of Uranusborg

encountering the NOVA

every impulse of light exploding

from the core  
as life flies out of us

Tycho whispering at last  
‘Let me not seem to have lived in vain’

What we see, we see  
and seeing is changing

the light that shrivels a mountain  
and leaves a man alive

Heartbeat of the pulsar  
heart sweating through my body

The radio impulse  
pouring in from Taurus

I am bombarded yet I stand

I have been standing all my life in the  
direct path of a battery of signals  
the most accurately transmitted most  
untranslatable language in the universe  
I am a galactic cloud so deep so invo-  
luted that a light wave could take 15  
years to travel through me And has  
taken I am an instrument in the shape  
of a woman trying to translate pulsations  
into images for the relief of the body  
and the reconstruction of the mind.

***Note to Poetry Out Loud students:** This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

# What Kind of Times Are These

By [Adrienne Rich](#)

There's a place between two stands of trees where the grass grows uphill  
and the old revolutionary road breaks off into shadows  
near a meeting-house abandoned by the persecuted  
who disappeared into those shadows.

I've walked there picking mushrooms at the edge of dread, but don't be fooled  
this isn't a Russian poem, this is not somewhere else but here,  
our country moving closer to its own truth and dread,  
its own ways of making people disappear.

I won't tell you where the place is, the dark mesh of the woods  
meeting the unmarked strip of light—  
ghost-ridden crossroads, leafmold paradise:  
I know already who wants to buy it, sell it, make it disappear.

And I won't tell you where it is, so why do I tell you  
anything? Because you still listen, because in times like these  
to have you listen at all, it's necessary  
to talk about trees.

# The Days Gone By

By [James Whitcomb Riley](#)

O the days gone by! O the days gone by!  
The apples in the orchard, and the pathway through the rye;  
The chirrup of the robin, and the whistle of the quail  
As he piped across the meadows sweet as any nightingale;  
When the bloom was on the clover, and the blue was in the sky,  
And my happy heart brimmed over in the days gone by.

In the days gone by, when my naked feet were tripped  
By the honey-suckle's tangles where the water-lilies dipped,  
And the ripples of the river lipped the moss along the brink  
Where the placid-eyed and lazy-footed cattle came to drink,  
And the tilting snipe stood fearless of the truant's wayward cry  
And the splashing of the swimmer, in the days gone by.

O the days gone by! O the days gone by!  
The music of the laughing lip, the luster of the eye;  
The childish faith in fairies, and Aladdin's magic ring—  
The simple, soul-reposing, glad belief in everything,—  
When life was like a story, holding neither sob nor sigh,

In the golden olden glory of the days gone by.

## **The Seekers of Lice**

By [Arthur Rimbaud](#)

Translated by Wallace Fowlie

When the child's forehead, full of red torments,  
Implores the white swarm of indistinct dreams,  
There come near his bed two tall charming sisters  
With slim fingers that have silvery nails.

They seat the child in front of a wide open  
Window where the blue air bathes a mass of flowers  
And in his heavy hair where the dew falls  
Move their delicate, fearful and enticing fingers.

He listens to the singing of their apprehensive breath.  
Which smells of long rosy plant honey  
And which at times a hiss interrupts, saliva  
Caught on the lip or desire for kisses.

He hears their black eyelashes beating in the perfumed  
Silence; and their gentle electric fingers  
Make in his half-drunken indolence the death of the little lice  
Crackle under their royal nails.

Then the wine of Sloth rises in him,  
The sigh of an harmonica which could bring on delirium;  
The child feels, according to the slowness of the caresses  
Surging in him and dying continuously a desire to cry.

## **Border Boy**

By [Alberto Ríos](#)

I grew up on the border and though I left  
I have brought it with me wherever I've gone.

Its line guides me, this long, winding thread of memory.  
The border wasn't as big as they say—

It fit neatly behind my eyes and between my ears—  
It guides me still, I know, but it is not a compass.

It is not a place out there but a place in here.

I catch on its barbed wire in both places.

It is a line I step over and a ledge I duck under.  
I have looked underneath its skirts, and it has caught me—

Many times. We're old friends and we play the game well.  
When someone says *border*, now, or *frontera*, or *the line*.

*La línea*, or *the fence*, or whatever else  
We name the edge and the end of things—

I hear something missing in the words,  
The *what it all used to be*. Its name does not include its childhood.

I grew up liking the border and its great scar,  
Its drama always good for a story the way scars always are.

A scar is the place where the hurting used to be.  
A scar the heroic signature of the healed.

The border is not a scar. Instead, it is something we keep picking at,  
Something that has no name.

The border I knew was something with a history.  
But this thing now, it is a stranger even to itself.

## Rabbits and Fire

By [Alberto Ríos](#)

Everything's been said  
But one last thing about the desert,  
And it's awful: During brush fires in the Sonoran desert,  
Brush fires that happen before the monsoon and in the great,  
Deep, wide, and smothering heat of the hottest months,  
The longest months,  
The hypnotic, immeasurable lulls of August and July—  
During these summer fires, jackrabbits—  
Jackrabbits and everything else  
That lives in the brush of the rolling hills,  
But jackrabbits especially—  
Jackrabbits can get caught in the flames,  
No matter how fast and big and strong and sleek they are.  
And when they're caught,  
Cornered in and against the thick  
Trunks and thin spines of the cactus,

When they can't back up any more,  
When they can't move, the flame—  
It touches them,  
And their fur catches fire.  
Of course, they run away from the flame,  
Finding movement even when there is none to be found,  
Jumping big and high over the wave of fire, or backing  
Even harder through the impenetrable  
Tangle of hardened saguaro  
And prickly pear and cholla and barrel,  
But whichever way they find,  
What happens is what happens: They catch fire  
And then bring the fire with them when they run.  
They don't know they're on fire at first,  
Running so fast as to make the fire  
Shoot like rocket engines and smoke behind them,  
But then the rabbits tire  
And the fire catches up,  
Stuck onto them like the needles of the cactus,  
Which at first must be what they think they feel on their skins.  
They've felt this before, every rabbit.  
But this time the feeling keeps on.  
And of course, they ignite the brush and dried weeds  
All over again, making more fire, all around them.  
I'm sorry for the rabbits.  
And I'm sorry for us  
To know this.

## **We Are of a Tribe**

By [Alberto Ríos](#)

We plant seeds in the ground  
And dreams in the sky,

Hoping that, someday, the roots of one  
Will meet the upstretched limbs of the other.

It has not happened yet.  
We share the sky, all of us, the whole world:

Together, we are a tribe of eyes that look upward,  
Even as we stand on uncertain ground.

The earth beneath us moves, quiet and wild,  
Its boundaries shifting, its muscles wavering.

The dream of sky is indifferent to all this,  
Impervious to borders, fences, reservations.

The sky is our common home, the place we all live.  
There we are in the world together.

The dream of sky requires no passport.  
Blue will not be fenced. Blue will not be a crime.

Look up. Stay awhile. Let your breathing slow.  
Know that you always have a home here.

## Dawn of Man

By [Max Ritvo](#)

After the cocoon I was in a human body  
instead of a butterfly's. All along my back

there was great pain — I groped to my feet  
where I felt wings behind me, trying

to tilt me back. They succeeded in doing so  
after a day of exertion. I called that time,

overwhelmed with the ghosts of my wings, sleep.  
My thoughts remained those of a caterpillar —

I took pleasure in climbing trees. I snuck food  
into all my pains. My mouth produced language

which I attempted to spin over myself  
and rip through happier and healthier.

I'd do this every few minutes. I'd think to myself  
*What made me such a failure?*

It's all a little touchingly pathetic. To live like this,  
a grown creature telling ghost stories,

staring at pictures, paralyzed for hours.  
And even over dinner or in bed —

still hearing the stories, seeing the pictures —  
an undertow sucking me back into myself.

I'm told to set myself goals. But my mind  
doesn't work that way. I, instead, have wishes

for myself. Wishes aren't afraid  
to take on their own color and life —

like a boy who takes a razor from a high cabinet  
puffs out his cheeks and strips them bloody.

## Not Guilty

By [David Rivard](#)

The days are dog-eared, the edges torn,  
ragged—like those pages  
I ripped once out of library books,

for their photos  
of Vallejo and bootless Robert Johnson.  
A fine needs paying now

it's true, but  
not by me.  
I am no more guilty

than that thrush is  
who sits there stripping moss  
off the wet bark of a tree.

A red fleck, like his, glows  
at the back of my head—a beauty mark,  
left by the brain's after-jets.

I would not wish for the three brains  
Robert required  
to double-clutch his guitar

and chase those sounds he had to know  
led down  
and into a troubled dusky river, always.

Three brains did Johnson no earthly good,  
neither his nor Vallejo's 4 & 1/2  
worked right exactly—O bunglers,

O banged-up pans of disaster!  
Crying for days, said Cesar, & singing for months.  
How can I be so strong some times,

at others weak? I wish to be free,  
but free to do what? To leave myself behind?  
To switch channels remotely?

Better to sing.  
Not like the bird, but as they sang,  
Cesar & Robert—

with the shocked & seeded  
sweetness of an apple  
split open by a meat cleaver.

## Torque

By [David Rivard](#)

After his ham & cheese in the drape factory cafeteria,  
having slipped by the bald shipping foreman  
to ride a rattling elevator to the attic  
where doves flicker into the massive eaves  
and where piled boxes of out-of-style  
cotton and lace won't ever be  
decorating anyone's sun parlor windows.  
Having dozed off in that hideout he fixed  
between five four-by-six cardboard storage cartons  
while the rest of us pack Mediterranean Dreams  
and Colonial Ruffles and drapes colored like moons,  
and he wakes lost—  
shot through  
into a world of unlocked unlocking light—  
suddenly he knows where he is and feels half nuts  
and feels like killing some pigeons with a slingshot.

That's all, and that's why he pokes  
his calloused fingers into the broken machinery,  
hunting for loose nuts a half inch wide—  
five greasy cold ones that warm in his pocket—  
and yanks back the snag-cut strip of inner tube  
with a nut snug at the curve to snap it  
at the soft chest of a dopey bird.  
Then the noise of pigeons flopping down  
to creosoted hardwood, and then a grin

the guy gives me & all his other pals later.  
And afternoon tightens down on all  
our shoulders, until the shift whistle  
blasts, blowing through the plant like air  
through lace. As it always has, as it does.  
That bright. That stunned.

## **if time is queer/and memory is trans/and my hands hurt in the cold/then**

By [Raquel Salas Rivera](#)

there are ways to hold pain like night follows day  
not knowing how tomorrow went down.

it hurts like never when the always is now,  
the now that time won't allow.

there is no manner of tomorrow, nor shape of today  
only like always having to leave  
from and toward the future's could-be,  
in order to never more see  
the sí;

and if forever proves me wrong,  
it'll hurt with the hurt of before the before.  
it'll have to take me along:  
all the never-enough of why and therefore.

life has given me much to believe,  
but more is the doubt that undid what i know,

for, like night follows day, the pleasure is sure,  
of forever beginning once more.

## **be careful**

By [Ed Roberson](#)

i must be careful about such things as these.  
the thin-grained oak. the quiet grizzlies scared  
into the hills by the constant tracks squeezing  
in behind them closer in the snow. the snared  
rigidity of the winter lake. deer after deer  
crossing on the spines of fish who look up and stare  
with their eyes pressed to the ice. in a sleep. hearing

the thin taps leading away to collapse like the bear  
in the high quiet. i must be careful not to shake  
anything in too wild an elation. not to jar  
the fragile mountains against the paper far-  
ness. nor avalanche the fog or the eagle from the air.  
of the gentle wilderness i must set the precarious  
words. like rocks. without one snowcapped mistake.

## I Don't See

By [Ed Roberson](#)

I expected something up out of the water  
not the shadow in the wave that rose

to fill the wave then splash a breath  
off the abutting air then disappear.

I didn't see any of this only  
the dark wave. Even the size of a whale

I don't see what I look directly at.  
I didn't see the pronghorn antelope,

speed they pointed out equal our car's,  
but never having seen distance so large

I couldn't pin in it point to antler  
and saw in parallax instead the world

entire a still brown arc of leap so like  
a first look at the milky way each stone

a star I saw but could not see.  
I didn't see

the Nazca earth drawings looking at a line  
like a path the vision on it my not looking up.

& trying to see from on the ground looking  
from a plane thousands of feet above

maybe I saw only what the unenlightened  
marking out the lines could see from there

because I never saw the figures

until shown from books.

I've told folk half the truth    that I was there I was  
but embarrassed    never told    I missed my chance

until I saw:    without embarrassment  
this country miss its chance    looking at color

and not see what it looked directly at,  
without embarrassment

act    and not see that done  
on its own hands    not see its own bright blood.

## Eros Turannos

By [Edwin Arlington Robinson](#)

She fears him, and will always ask  
    What fated her to choose him;  
She meets in his engaging mask  
    All reasons to refuse him;  
But what she meets and what she fears  
Are less than are the downward years,  
Drawn slowly to the foamless weirs  
    Of age, were she to lose him.

Between a blurred sagacity  
    That once had power to sound him,  
And Love, that will not let him be  
    The Judas that she found him,  
Her pride assuages her almost,  
As if it were alone the cost.—  
He sees that he will not be lost,  
    And waits and looks around him.

A sense of ocean and old trees  
    Envelops and allures him;  
Tradition, touching all he sees  
    Beguiles and reassures him;  
And all her doubts of what he says  
Are dimmed with what she knows of days—  
Till even prejudice delays  
    And fades, and she secures him.

The falling leaf inaugurates

The reign of her confusion;  
The pounding wave reverberates  
The dirge of her illusion;  
And home, where passion lived and died,  
Becomes a place where she can hide,  
While all the town and harbor side  
Vibrate with her seclusion.

We tell you, tapping on our brows,  
The story as it should be,—  
As if the story of a house  
Were told, or ever could be;  
We'll have no kindly veil between  
Her visions and those we have seen,—  
As if we guessed what hers have been,  
Or what they are or would be.

Meanwhile we do no harm; for they  
That with a god have striven,  
Not hearing much of what we say,  
Take what the god has given;  
Though like waves breaking it may be,  
Or like a changed familiar tree,  
Or like a stairway to the sea  
Where down the blind are driven.

## Luke Havergal

By [Edwin Arlington Robinson](#)

Go to the western gate, Luke Havergal,  
There where the vines cling crimson on the wall,  
And in the twilight wait for what will come.  
The leaves will whisper there of her, and some,  
Like flying words, will strike you as they fall;  
But go, and if you listen she will call.  
Go to the western gate, Luke Havergal—  
Luke Havergal.

No, there is not a dawn in eastern skies  
To rift the fiery night that's in your eyes;  
But there, where western glooms are gathering,  
The dark will end the dark, if anything:  
God slays Himself with every leaf that flies,  
And hell is more than half of paradise.  
No, there is not a dawn in eastern skies—

In eastern skies.

Out of a grave I come to tell you this,  
Out of a grave I come to quench the kiss  
That flames upon your forehead with a glow  
That blinds you to the way that you must go.  
Yes, there is yet one way to where she is,  
Bitter, but one that faith may never miss.  
Out of a grave I come to tell you this—  
To tell you this.

There is the western gate, Luke Havergal,  
There are the crimson leaves upon the wall.  
Go, for the winds are tearing them away,—  
Nor think to riddle the dead words they say,  
Nor any more to feel them as they fall;  
But go, and if you trust her she will call.  
There is the western gate, Luke Havergal—  
Luke Havergal.

## Miniver Cheevy

By [Edwin Arlington Robinson](#)

Miniver Cheevy, child of scorn,  
Grew lean while he assailed the seasons;  
He wept that he was ever born,  
And he had reasons.

Miniver loved the days of old  
When swords were bright and steeds were prancing;  
The vision of a warrior bold  
Would set him dancing.

Miniver sighed for what was not,  
And dreamed, and rested from his labors;  
He dreamed of Thebes and Camelot,  
And Priam's neighbors.

Miniver mourned the ripe renown  
That made so many a name so fragrant;  
He mourned Romance, now on the town,  
And Art, a vagrant.

Miniver loved the Medici,  
Albeit he had never seen one;

He would have sinned incessantly  
Could he have been one.

Miniver cursed the commonplace  
And eyed a khaki suit with loathing;  
He missed the mediæval grace  
Of iron clothing.

Miniver scorned the gold he sought,  
But sore annoyed was he without it;  
Miniver thought, and thought, and thought,  
And thought about it.

Miniver Cheevy, born too late,  
Scratched his head and kept on thinking;  
Miniver coughed, and called it fate,  
And kept on drinking.

## January, 1795

By [Mary Robinson](#)

Pavement slipp'ry, people sneezing,  
Lords in ermine, beggars freezing;  
Titled gluttons dainties carving,  
Genius in a garret starving.

Lofty mansions, warm and spacious;  
Courtiers cringing and voracious;  
Misers scarce the wretched heeding;  
Gallant soldiers fighting, bleeding.

Wives who laugh at passive spouses;  
Theatres, and meeting-houses;  
Balls, where simp'ring misses languish;  
Hospitals, and groans of anguish.

Arts and sciences bewailing;  
Commerce drooping, credit failing;  
Placemen mocking subjects loyal;  
Separations, weddings royal.

Authors who can't earn a dinner;  
Many a subtle rogue a winner;  
Fugitives for shelter seeking;  
Misers hoarding, tradesmen breaking.

Taste and talents quite deserted;  
All the laws of truth perverted;  
Arrogance o'er merit soaring;  
Merit silently deploring.

Ladies gambling night and morning;  
Fools the works of genius scorning;  
Ancient dames for girls mistaken,  
Youthful damsels quite forsaken.

Some in luxury delighting;  
More in talking than in fighting;  
Lovers old, and beaux decrepid;  
Lordlings empty and insipid.

Poets, painters, and musicians;  
Lawyers, doctors, politicians:  
Pamphlets, newspapers, and odes,  
Seeking fame by different roads.

Gallant souls with empty purses;  
Gen'ral's only fit for nurses;  
School-boys, smit with martial spirit,  
Taking place of vet'ran merit.

Honest men who can't get places,  
Knave's who shew unblushing faces;  
Ruin hasten'd, peace retarded;  
Candor spurn'd, and art rewarded.

## Undress

By [Ruby Robinson](#)

There is an ash tree behind this house. You  
can see it from our bedroom window.  
If you stare at it for long enough, you'll see  
it drop a leaf. Stare at it now, you said,  
and notice the moment a leaf strips away  
from its branch, giving a twirl. Consider this.

The ash tree unclothes itself Octoberly.  
From beside our bed, fingering the curtain,  
observe the dark candles at the top of  
that tree, naked and alert, tending to the breeze.

A sheet of ice between the rooftops  
and this noiseless sky has turned the air

inside out. Black veins of branches  
shake against the blue screen on which they  
hang. Small mammals are hibernating  
in pellets of warm air under ground. But,  
in spite of the cold, this ash tree does not shy  
from shrugging off its coat, sloping its nude

shoulders to the night. So, you said, undo,  
unbutton, unclasp, slowly remove. Let down your  
hair, breathe out. Stand stark in this room until  
we remember how not to feel the chill.  
Stand at the window, lift your arms right up  
like a tree. Yes — like that. Watch leaves drop.

## **I Knew a Woman**

By [Theodore Roethke](#)

I knew a woman, lovely in her bones,  
When small birds sighed, she would sigh back at them;  
Ah, when she moved, she moved more ways than one:  
The shapes a bright container can contain!  
Of her choice virtues only gods should speak,  
Or English poets who grew up on Greek  
(I'd have them sing in chorus, cheek to cheek).

How well her wishes went! She stroked my chin,  
She taught me Turn, and Counter-turn, and Stand;  
She taught me Touch, that undulant white skin;  
I nibbled meekly from her proffered hand;  
She was the sickle; I, poor I, the rake,  
Coming behind her for her pretty sake  
(But what prodigious mowing we did make).

Love likes a gander, and adores a goose:  
Her full lips pursed, the errant note to seize;  
She played it quick, she played it light and loose;  
My eyes, they dazzled at her flowing knees;  
Her several parts could keep a pure repose,  
Or one hip quiver with a mobile nose  
(She moved in circles, and those circles moved).

Let seed be grass, and grass turn into hay:

I'm martyr to a motion not my own;  
What's freedom for? To know eternity.  
I swear she cast a shadow white as stone.  
But who would count eternity in days?  
These old bones live to learn her wanton ways:  
(I measure time by how a body sways).

## In a Dark Time

By [Theodore Roethke](#)

In a dark time, the eye begins to see,  
I meet my shadow in the deepening shade;  
I hear my echo in the echoing wood—  
A lord of nature weeping to a tree.  
I live between the heron and the wren,  
Beasts of the hill and serpents of the den.

What's madness but nobility of soul  
At odds with circumstance? The day's on fire!  
I know the purity of pure despair,  
My shadow pinned against a sweating wall.  
That place among the rocks—is it a cave,  
Or winding path? The edge is what I have.

A steady storm of correspondences!  
A night flowing with birds, a ragged moon,  
And in broad day the midnight come again!  
A man goes far to find out what he is—  
Death of the self in a long, tearless night,  
All natural shapes blazing unnatural light.

Dark, dark my light, and darker my desire.  
My soul, like some heat-maddened summer fly,  
Keeps buzzing at the sill. Which I is *I*?  
A fallen man, I climb out of my fear.  
The mind enters itself, and God the mind,  
And one is One, free in the tearing wind.

## My Papa's Waltz

By [Theodore Roethke](#)

The whiskey on your breath  
Could make a small boy dizzy;  
But I hung on like death:

Such waltzing was not easy.

We romped until the pans  
Slid from the kitchen shelf;  
My mother's countenance  
Could not unfrown itself.

The hand that held my wrist  
Was battered on one knuckle;  
At every step you missed  
My right ear scraped a buckle.

You beat time on my head  
With a palm caked hard by dirt,  
Then waltzed me off to bed  
Still clinging to your shirt.

## The Waking

By [Theodore Roethke](#)

I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.  
I feel my fate in what I cannot fear.  
I learn by going where I have to go.

We think by feeling. What is there to know?  
I hear my being dance from ear to ear.  
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Of those so close beside me, which are you?  
God bless the Ground! I shall walk softly there,  
And learn by going where I have to go.

Light takes the Tree; but who can tell us how?  
The lowly worm climbs up a winding stair;  
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Great Nature has another thing to do  
To you and me; so take the lively air,  
And, lovely, learn by going where to go.

This shaking keeps me steady. I should know.  
What falls away is always. And is near.  
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.  
I learn by going where I have to go.

# Watching the Perseids

By [Isabel Rogers](#)

The parrot, Einstein of birds, who can count  
and reason calmly in our tongue  
while outliving us, disdains the ostrich.  
For all its sprint records,  
the ostrich will be remembered  
for hiding from the truth.  
You can't outrun stupid.

We the people hold some truths  
to be self-evident: our magnificent brain  
in a body that can't flee, can't smell fear,  
can't hear death, can't see straight.  
Even so, our retinas, with rods and cones  
as intricate as any telescope array,  
evolved to see a predator  
slide out of oblique shadow  
and give us time to bolt.

We survey our closed dominion  
until we look up in August  
to find comet dust flaring in the night.

This vastness, this vertiginous awareness  
mocking gravity on our speck of now,  
wakes us with a recalibrating jolt.

But soon our familiar star will claw toward us  
in seven-league boots from the east,  
drawing its Valium thread across our planet  
as if to cloak a birdcage  
to muffle questions that blink through dark matter  
and would pour over us  
until we drowned, dreaming of amnesia.

## Bruce Banner #3

By [Kenyatta Rogers](#)

I never missed that \$60,  
I could spend it easily.  
I can take the stairs,  
I have fingers and can use buttons.  
Before lightning there should be thunder

and if there's not, it's still ok.

It was 2 p.m. and I saw a crane standing in a creek.  
It was 3:40 and I saw an owl staring at me.  
I rode my bike for 5 hours as I watched a sundial.  
When I was fishing  
I told every fish sorry,  
kissed them on the mouth  
and threw them all back.

Think about this:  
everything I experience  
popped out of my head.

In the afterlife I hope  
all of my pets are there.  
There is no wrong way to mourn  
we're drinking the same water as the dinosaurs.

I'm a superhero,  
a green man  
who gets angry,  
runs through peoples lives  
and destroys everything they own,  
insurance doesn't cover acts of god.

## The Greatest Grandeur

By [Pattiann Rogers](#)

Some say it's in the reptilian dance  
of the purple-tongued sand goanna,  
for there the magnificent translation  
of tenacity into bone and grace occurs.

And some declare it to be an expansive  
desert—solid rust-orange rock  
like dusk captured on earth in stone—  
simply for the perfect contrast it provides  
to the blue-grey ridge of rain  
in the distant hills.

Some claim the harmonics of shifting  
electron rings to be most rare and some  
the complex motion of seven sandpipers  
bisecting the arcs and pitches

of come and retreat over the mounting  
hayfield.

Others, for grandeur, choose the terror  
of lightning peals on prairies or the tall  
collapsing cathedrals of stormy seas,  
because there they feel dwarfed  
and appropriately helpless; others select  
the serenity of that ceiling/cellar  
of stars they see at night on placid lakes,  
because there they feel assured  
and universally magnanimous.

But it is the dark emptiness contained  
in every next moment that seems to me  
the most singularly glorious gift,  
that void which one is free to fill  
with processions of men bearing burning  
cedar knots or with parades of blue horses,  
belled and ribboned and stepping sideways,  
with tumbling white-faced mimes or companies  
of black-robed choristers; to fill simply  
with hammered silver teapots or kiln-dried  
crockery, tangerine and almond custards,  
polonaises, polkas, whittling sticks, wailing  
walls; that space large enough to hold all  
invented blasphemies and pieties, 10,000  
definitions of god and more, never fully  
filled, never.

## **On the Existence of the Soul**

By [Pattiann Rogers](#)

How confident I am it is there. Don't I bring it,  
As if it were enclosed in a fine leather case,  
To particular places solely for its own sake?  
Haven't I set it down before the variegated canyon  
And the undeviating bald salt dome?  
Don't I feed it on ivory calcium and ruffled  
Shell bellies, shore boulders, on the sight  
Of the petrel motionless over the sea, its splayed  
Feet hanging? Don't I make sure it apprehends  
The invisibly fine spray more than once?

I have seen that it takes in every detail

I can manage concerning the garden wall and its borders.  
I have listed for it the comings and goings  
Of one hundred species of insects explicitly described.  
I have named the chartreuse stripe  
And the fimbriated antenna, the bulbed thorax  
And the multiple eye. I have sketched  
The brilliant wings of the trumpet vine and invented  
New vocabularies describing the interchanges between rocks  
And their crevices, between the holly lip  
And its concept of itself.

And if not for its sake, why would I go  
Out into the night alone and stare deliberately  
Straight up into 15 billion years ago and more?

I have cherished it. I have named it.  
By my own solicitations  
I have proof of its presence.

## **The Origin of Order**

By [Pattiann Rogers](#)

Stellar dust has settled.  
It is green underwater now in the leaves  
Of the yellow crowfoot. Its vacancies are gathered together  
Under pine litter as emerging flower of the pink arbutus.  
It has gained the power to make itself again  
In the bone-filled egg of osprey and teal.

One could say this toothpick grasshopper  
Is a cloud of decayed nebula congealed and perching  
On his female mating. The tortoise beetle,  
Leaving the stripped veins of morning glory vines  
Like licked bones, is a straw-colored swirl  
Of clever gases.

At this moment there are dead stars seeing  
Themselves as marsh and forest in the eyes  
Of muskrat and shrew, disintegrated suns  
Making songs all night long in the throats  
Of crawfish frogs, in the rubbings and gratings  
Of the red-legged locust. There are spirits of orbiting  
Rock in the shells of pointed winkles  
And apple snails, ghosts of extinct comets caught  
In the leap of darting hare and bobcat, revolutions

Of rushing stone contained in the sound of these words.

The paths of the Pleiades and Coma clusters  
Have been compelled to mathematics by the mind  
Contemplating the nature of itself  
In the motions of stars. The patterns  
Of any starry summer night might be identical  
To the summer heavens circling inside the skull.  
I can feel time speeding now in all directions  
Deeper and deeper into the black oblivion  
Of the electrons directly behind my eyes.

Flesh of the sky, child of the sky, the mind  
Has been obligated from the beginning  
To create an ordered universe  
As the only possible proof of its own inheritance.

## **The Significance of Location**

By [Pattiann Rogers](#)

The cat has the chance to make the sunlight  
Beautiful, to stop it and turn it immediately  
Into black fur and motion, to take it  
As shifting branch and brown feather  
Into the back of the brain forever.

The cardinal has flown the sun in red  
Through the oak forest to the lawn.  
The finch has caught it in yellow  
And taken it among the thorns. By the spider  
It has been bound tightly and tied  
In an eight-stringed knot.

The sun has been intercepted in its one  
Basic state and changed to a million varieties  
Of green stick and tassel. It has been broken  
Into pieces by glass rings, by mist  
Over the river. Its heat  
Has been given the board fence for body,  
The desert rock for fact. On winter hills  
It has been laid down in white like a martyr.

This afternoon we could spread gold scarves  
Clear across the field and say in truth,  
"Sun you are silk."

Imagine the sun totally isolated,  
Its brightness shot in continuous streaks straight out  
Into the black, never arrested,  
Never once being made light.

Someone should take note  
Of how the earth has saved the sun from oblivion.

## Free Radical

By [Alison C. Rollins](#)

Before Gilgamesh invented  
the kaleidoscope and Galileo  
the Rubik's cube, before the  
scimitar-horned oryx went  
missing, before the tamarind  
trees went bare, before the  
stars' eyelids were wrapped  
in tinfoil, before the leaves  
could gnaw on water, before  
electrons made donations,  
before the owl wore a mask,  
before the wind had a sound,  
before the moon had a name  
and the smoke a spine, before  
the tulips crossed their legs,  
before the tongue was  
armored, before the ghosts  
rode centaurs to riots, before  
cyberspace was culled and  
belly buttons sown to wombs,  
before the taste had an after,  
before intellect became  
property and thunder  
premeditated, before the  
New, New World, before a  
stone wished to be more  
than a stone, before we had a  
change of clothes, before the  
grass was color-blind, before  
the rivers lost their fingers,  
and the rain stopped teething,  
before the kings were all  
beheaded, the gravedigger

neither young nor old, before  
a lion was still a lion, before  
the girls were all killed, before  
the trapeze gave way.      We  
hung      suspended in time  
by the arches of our curved  
feet and this tickled the gods,  
tickled them to death.      & I  
think our silence cut us loose,  
let us go falling from the doubt,  
secretly thrilled at the hems  
and ever so eager to break.

## Happy Hour

By [Lee Ann Roripaugh](#)

I always forget the name,  
*delphinium*,  
even though it was the flower

the hummingbirds  
loved best. They came in pairs—sleek,  
emerald-bright

heads, the clockwork machinery  
of their blurred wings  
thrumming swift, menacing engines.

They slipped their beaks.  
as if they were swizzle sticks, deep  
into the blue

throat of delphinium and sucked  
dry the nectar-  
chilled hearts like goblets full of sweet,

frozen daiquiri.  
I liked to sit on the back porch  
in the evenings,

watching them and eating Spanish  
peanuts, rolling  
each nut between thumb and forefinger

to rub away

the red salty skin like brittle  
tissue paper,

until the meat emerged gleaming,  
yellow like old  
ivory, smooth as polished bone.

And late August,  
after exclamations of gold  
flowers, tiny

and bitter, the caragana  
trees let down their  
beans to ripen, dry, and rupture—

at first there was  
the soft drum of popcorn, slick with oil,  
puttering some-

where in between seed, heat, and cloud.  
Then sharp cracks like cap  
gun or diminutive fireworks,

caragana  
peas catapulting skyward like  
pellet missiles.

Sometimes a meadowlark would lace  
the night air with  
its elaborate melody,

rippling and sleek  
as a black satin ribbon. Some-  
times there would be

a falling star. And because  
this happened in  
Wyoming, and because this was

my parents' house,  
and because I'm never happy  
with anything,

at any time, I always wished  
that I was some-  
where, anywhere else, but here.

# Women Like Me

By [Wendy Rose](#)

making promises they can't keep.  
For you, Grandmother, I said I would pull  
each invading burr and thistle from your skin,  
cut out the dizzy brittle eucalypt,  
take from the ground the dark oily poison—  
all to restore you happy and proud,  
the whole of you transformed  
and bursting into tomorrow.

But where do I cut first?  
Where should I begin to pull?  
Should it be the Russian thistle  
down the hill where backhoes  
have bitten? Or African senecio  
or tumbleweed bouncing  
above the wind? Or the middle finger  
of my right hand? Or my left eye  
or the other one? Or a slice  
from the small of my back, a slab of fat  
from my thigh? I am broken  
as much as any native ground,  
my roots tap a thousand migrations.  
My daughters were never born, I am  
as much the invader as the native,  
as much the last day of life as the first.  
I presumed you to be as bitter as me,  
to tremble and rage against alien weight.  
Who should blossom? Who should receive pollen?  
Who should be rooted, who pruned,  
who watered, who picked?  
Should I feed the white-faced cattle  
who wait for the death train to come  
or comb the wild seeds from their tails?  
Who should return across the sea  
or the Bering Strait or the world before this one  
or the Mother Ground? Who should go screaming  
to some other planet, burn up or melt  
in a distant sun? Who should be healed  
and who hurt? Who should dry  
under summer's white sky, who should shrivel  
at the first sign of drought? Who should be remembered?  
Who should be the sterile chimera of earth and of another place,  
alien with a native face,  
native with an alien face?

# Break of Day in the Trenches

By [Isaac Rosenberg](#)

The darkness crumbles away.  
It is the same old druid Time as ever,  
Only a live thing leaps my hand,  
A queer sardonic rat,  
As I pull the parapet's poppy  
To stick behind my ear.  
Droll rat, they would shoot you if they knew  
Your cosmopolitan sympathies.  
Now you have touched this English hand  
You will do the same to a German  
Soon, no doubt, if it be your pleasure  
To cross the sleeping green between.  
It seems you inwardly grin as you pass  
Strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes,  
Less chanced than you for life,  
Bonds to the whims of murder,  
Sprawled in the bowels of the earth,  
The torn fields of France.  
What do you see in our eyes  
At the shrieking iron and flame  
Hurled through still heavens?  
What quaver—what heart aghast?  
Poppies whose roots are in man's veins  
Drop, and are ever dropping;  
But mine in my ear is safe—  
Just a little white with the dust.

# Amor Mundi

By [Christina Rossetti](#)

“Oh where are you going with your love-locks flowing  
On the west wind blowing along this valley track?”  
“The downhill path is easy, come with me and it please ye,  
We shall escape the uphill by never turning back.”

So they two went together in glowing August weather,  
The honey-breathing heather lay to their left and right;  
And dear she was to dote on, her swift feet seemed to float on  
The air like soft twin pigeons too sportive to alight.

“Oh what is that in heaven where gray cloud-flakes are seven,  
Where blackest clouds hang riven just at the rainy skirt?”

“Oh that’s a meteor sent us, a message dumb, portentous,  
An undeciphered solemn signal of help or hurt.”

“Oh what is that glides quickly where velvet flowers grow thickly,  
Their scent comes rich and sickly?”—“A scaled and hooded worm.”  
“Oh what’s that in the hollow, so pale I quake to follow?”  
“Oh that’s a thin dead body which waits the eternal term.”

“Turn again, O my sweetest,—turn again, false and fleetest:  
This beaten way thou beatest I fear is hell’s own track.”  
“Nay, too steep for hill-mounting; nay, too late for cost-counting:  
This downhill path is easy, but there’s no turning back.”

## A Birthday

By [Christina Rossetti](#)

My heart is like a singing bird  
    Whose nest is in a water'd shoot;  
My heart is like an apple-tree  
    Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit;  
My heart is like a rainbow shell  
    That paddles in a halcyon sea;  
My heart is gladder than all these  
    Because my love is come to me.

Raise me a dais of silk and down;  
    Hang it with vair and purple dyes;  
Carve it in doves and pomegranates,  
    And peacocks with a hundred eyes;  
Work it in gold and silver grapes,  
    In leaves and silver fleurs-de-lys;  
Because the birthday of my life  
    Is come, my love is come to me.

## Up-Hill

By [Christina Rossetti](#)

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?  
    Yes, to the very end.  
Will the day’s journey take the whole long day?  
    From morn to night, my friend.

But is there for the night a resting-place?  
    A roof for when the slow dark hours begin.

May not the darkness hide it from my face?  
You cannot miss that inn.

Shall I meet other wayfarers at night?  
Those who have gone before.  
Then must I knock, or call when just in sight?  
They will not keep you standing at that door.

Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?  
Of labour you shall find the sum.  
Will there be beds for me and all who seek?  
Yea, beds for all who come.

## **Insomnia**

By [Dante Gabriel Rossetti](#)

Thin are the night-skirts left behind  
By daybreak hours that onward creep,  
And thin, alas! the shred of sleep  
That wavers with the spirit's wind:  
But in half-dreams that shift and roll  
And still remember and forget,  
My soul this hour has drawn your soul  
A little nearer yet.

Our lives, most dear, are never near,  
Our thoughts are never far apart,  
Though all that draws us heart to heart  
Seems fainter now and now more clear.  
To-night Love claims his full control,  
And with desire and with regret  
My soul this hour has drawn your soul  
A little nearer yet.

Is there a home where heavy earth  
Melts to bright air that breathes no pain,  
Where water leaves no thirst again  
And springing fire is Love's new birth?  
If faith long bound to one true goal  
May there at length its hope beget,  
My soul that hour shall draw your soul  
For ever nearer yet.

## Poem (I lived in the first century of world wars)

By [Muriel Rukeyser](#)

I lived in the first century of world wars.  
Most mornings I would be more or less insane,  
The newspapers would arrive with their careless stories,  
The news would pour out of various devices  
Interrupted by attempts to sell products to the unseen.  
I would call my friends on other devices;  
They would be more or less mad for similar reasons.  
Slowly I would get to pen and paper,  
Make my poems for others unseen and unborn.  
In the day I would be reminded of those men and women,  
Brave, setting up signals across vast distances,  
Considering a nameless way of living, of almost unimagined values.  
As the lights darkened, as the lights of night brightened,  
We would try to imagine them, try to find each other,  
To construct peace, to make love, to reconcile  
Waking with sleeping, ourselves with each other,  
Ourselves with ourselves. We would try by any means  
To reach the limits of ourselves, to reach beyond ourselves,  
To let go the means, to wake.

I lived in the first century of these wars.

## The Speaking Tree

By [Muriel Rukeyser](#)

for Robert Payne

Great Alexander sailing was from his true course turned  
By a young wind from a cloud in Asia moving  
Like a most recognizable most silvery woman;  
Tall Alexander to the island came.  
The small breeze blew behind his turning head.  
He walked the foam of ripples into this scene.

The trunk of the speaking tree looks like a tree-trunk  
Until you look again. Then people and animals  
Are ripening on the branches; the broad leaves  
Are leaves; pale horses, sharp fine foxes  
Blossom; the red rabbit falls  
Ready and running. The trunk coils, turns,  
Snakes, fishes. Now the ripe people fall and run,  
Three of them in their shore-dance, flames that stand

Where reeds are creatures and the foam is flame.

Stiff Alexander stands. He cannot turn.  
But he is free to turn : this is the speaking tree,  
It calls your name. It tells us what we mean.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## **“Where did the handsome beloved go?”**

By [Jalal al-Din Rumi](#)

Translated by Brad Gooch and Maryam Mortaz

Where did the handsome beloved go?  
I wonder, where did that tall, shapely cypress tree go?

He spread his light among us like a candle.  
Where did he go? So strange, where did he go without me?

All day long my heart trembles like a leaf.  
All alone at midnight, where did that beloved go?

Go to the road, and ask any passing traveler —  
That soul-stirring companion, where did he go?

Go to the garden, and ask the gardener —  
That tall, shapely rose stem, where did he go?

Go to the rooftop, and ask the watchman —  
That unique sultan, where did he go?

Like a madman, I search in the meadows!  
That deer in the meadows, where did he go?

My tearful eyes overflow like a river —  
That pearl in the vast sea, where did he go?

All night long, I implore both moon and Venus —  
That lovely face, like a moon, where did he go?

If he is mine, why is he with others?  
Since he's not here, to what “there” did he go?

If his heart and soul are joined with God,  
And he left this realm of earth and water, where did he go?

Tell me clearly, Shams of Tabriz,  
Of whom it is said, “The sun never dies” — where did he go?

## **A Certain Kind of Eden**

By [Kay Ryan](#)

It seems like you could, but you can't go back and pull  
the roots and runners and replant.  
It's all too deep for that.  
You've overprized intention,  
have mistaken any bent you're given  
for control. You thought you chose  
the bean and chose the soil.  
You even thought you abandoned  
one or two gardens. But those things  
keep growing where we put them—  
if we put them at all.  
A certain kind of Eden holds us thrall.  
Even the one vine that tendrils out alone  
in time turns on its own impulse,  
twisting back down its upward course  
a strong and then a stronger rope,  
the greenest saddest strongest  
kind of hope.

## **Sharks' Teeth**

By [Kay Ryan](#)

Everything contains some  
silence. Noise gets  
its zest from the  
small shark's-tooth  
shaped fragments  
of rest angled  
in it. An hour  
of city holds maybe  
a minute of these  
remnants of a time  
when silence reigned,  
compact and dangerous  
as a shark. Sometimes  
a bit of a tail  
or fin can still

be sensed in parks.

## Surfaces

By [Kay Ryan](#)

Surfaces serve  
their own purposes,  
strive to remain  
constant (all lives  
want that). There is  
a skin, not just on  
peaches but on oceans  
(note the telltale  
slough of foam on beaches).  
Sometimes it's loose,  
as in the case  
of cats: you feel how a  
second life slides  
under it. Sometimes it  
fits. Take glass.  
Sometimes it outlasts  
its underside. Take reefs.

The private lives of surfaces  
are innocent, not devious.  
Take the one-dimensional  
belief of enamel in itself,  
the furious autonomy  
of luster (crush a pearl—  
it's powder), the whole  
curious seamless  
of how we're each surrounded  
and what it doesn't teach.

## Larkinesque

By [Michael Ryan](#)

Reading in the paper a summary  
of a five-year psychological study  
that shows those perceived as most beautiful  
are treated differently,

I think *they could have just asked me*,  
remembering a kind of pudgy kid

and late puberty, the bloody noses  
and wisecracks because I wore glasses,

though we all know by now how awful it is  
for the busty starlet no one takes seriously,  
the loveliest women I've lunched with  
lamenting the opacity of the body,

they can never trust a man's interest  
even when he seems not just out for sex  
(eyes focus on me above rim of wineglass),  
and who *would* want to live like this?

And what does beauty do to a man?—  
Don Juan, Casanova, Lord Byron—  
those fiery eyes and steel jawlines  
can front a furnace of self-loathing,

all those breathless women rushing to him  
while hubby's at the office or ball game,  
primed to be consumed by his beauty  
while he stands next to it, watching.

So maybe the looks we're dealt are best.  
It's only common sense that happiness  
depends on some bearable deprivation  
or defect, and who knows what conflicts

great beauty could have caused,  
what cruelties one might have suffered  
from those now friends, what unmanageable  
possibilities smiling at every small turn?

So if I get up to draw a tumbler  
of ordinary tap water and think *what if this were*  
*nectar dripping from delicious burning fingers*,  
will all I've missed knock me senseless?

No. Of course not. It won't.

## Self-Help

By [Michael Ryan](#)

What kind of delusion are you under?  
The life he hid just knocked you flat.

You see the lightning but not the thunder.

What God hath joined let no man put asunder.  
Did God know you'd marry a rat?  
What kind of delusion are you under?

His online persona simply stunned her  
as it did you when you started to chat.  
You see the lightning but not the thunder.

To the victors go the plunder:  
you should crown them with a baseball bat.  
What kind of delusion are you under?

The kind that causes blunder after blunder.  
Is there any other kind than that?  
You see the lightning but not the thunder,

and for one second the world's a wonder.  
Just keep it thrilling under your hat.  
What kind of delusion are you under?  
You see the lightning but not the thunder.

## A Thank-You Note

By [Michael Ryan](#)

*For John Skoyles*

My daughter made drawings with the pens you sent,  
line drawings that suggest the things they represent,  
different from any drawings she — at ten — had done,  
closer to real art, implying what the mind fills in.  
For her mother she made a flower fragile on its stem;  
for me, a lion, calm, contained, but not a handsome one.  
She drew a lion for me once before, on a get-well card,  
and wrote I must be brave even when it's hard.

Such love is healing — as you know, my friend,  
especially when it comes unbidden from our children  
despite the flaws they see so vividly in us.  
Who can love you as your child does?  
Your son so ill, the brutal chemo, his looming loss  
owning you now — yet you would be this generous  
to think of my child. With the pens you sent  
she has made I hope a healing instrument.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## To the Desert

By [Benjamin Alire Sáenz](#)

I came to you one rainless August night.  
You taught me how to live without the rain.  
You are thirst and thirst is all I know.  
You are sand, wind, sun, and burning sky,  
The hottest blue. You blow a breeze and brand  
Your breath into my mouth. You reach—then *bend*  
*Your force, to break, blow, burn, and make me new.*  
You wrap your name tight around my ribs  
And keep me warm. I was born for you.  
Above, below, by you, by you surrounded.  
I wake to you at dawn. Never break your  
Knot. Reach, rise, blow, *Sálvame, mi dios,*  
*Trágame, mi tierra. Salva, traga, Break me,*  
I am bread. I will be the water for your thirst.

## Evolution of My Block

By [Jacob Saenz](#)

As a boy I bicycled the block  
w/a brown mop top falling  
into a tail bleached blond,  
  
gold-like under golden light,  
like colors of Noble Knights  
'banging on corners, unconcerned  
  
w/the colors I bore—a shorty  
too small to war with, too brown  
to be down for the block.  
  
White Knights became brown  
Kings still showing black & gold  
on corners now crowned,  
  
the block a branch branded  
w/la corona graffitied on  
garage doors by the pawns.  
  
As a teen, I could've beamed

the crown, walked in w/out  
the beat down custom,

warred w/my cousin  
who claimed Two-Six,  
the set on the next block

decked in black & beige.  
But I preferred games to gangs,  
books to crooks wearing hats

crooked to the left or right  
fighting for a plot, a block  
to spot & mark w/blood

of boys who knew no better  
way to grow up than throw up  
the crown & be down for whatever.

## Holding Court

By [Jacob Saenz](#)

Today I became King  
of the Court w/out a diamond-  
encrusted crown thrust upon  
my sweaty head. Instead  
my markings of royalty  
were the t-shirt draping  
my body like a robe soaked  
in champagne & the pain  
in my right knee — a sign  
of a battle endured, my will  
tested & bested by none  
as the ball flew off my hands  
as swift as an arrow toward  
the heart of a target — my fingers  
ringless yet feeling like gold.

## Alive

By [Natasha Sajé](#)

You and me, of course, and the animals  
we feed and then slaughter. The boxelder  
bug with its dot of red, yeast in the air

making bread and wine, bacteria  
in yogurt, carrots, the apple tree,  
each white blossom. And rock, which lives  
so slowly it's hard to imagine it  
as sand then glass. A sea called dead is one that  
will not mirror us. We think as human  
beings we deserve every last thing. Say  
the element copper. Incandescence  
glowing bright and soft like Venus.  
Ductile as a shewolf's eyes pigmented red  
or green, exposed to acid in the air.  
Copper primes your liver, its mines leach lead  
and arsenic. Smelting is to melting  
the way smite is to mite. A violence  
of extraction. What's lost when a language  
dies? When its tropes oppose our own?  
In the at-risk language Aymara  
the past stretches out in front, the future  
lags behind. Imagine being led  
by knowing, imagine the end as clear.

## Muzzle

By [Julia Salem](#)

In a bleary part of town,  
I traverse the blackboard silence of snow.

Through the slats of the cypresses  
Flounce paper-white feathers of snow.

On the red leaves of my palms  
Distend melted messages of snow.

The road is iron anvil  
Stinging with sparks of snow.

My nocturnal heart thrums  
In white wasp whirl of snow.

Moonlight purls like nectar  
Sweetening the blandness of snow.

Glaucous berries hang from the rowans  
Like frostbitten pearls of snow.

Mice hide in the lee of alders,  
Shirking the cold tusks of snow.

Shadows vine like crewelwork  
On linen twill of snow.

Around your black spade pupil  
Lurks an avalanche of snow.

I wish you'd toss your cards  
Like fireworks against cumuli of snow.

Instead, my name catches in your throat,  
Congealed in its amnion of snow.

## **Mi Casa**

By [Luis Daniel Salgado](#)

When I was a boy  
I was either a child eating bugs  
or a child being eaten by bugs, but  
now that I am older am I a man  
who devours the world or am I a man  
being devoured by the world?

Someone once told me that mothers  
come from a different planet. And if she was correct  
then my mother was a warrior from that planet.  
And now that my mother is older the history  
that is her face is starting to look like a worn map.  
The hills that once were her cheeks now have roads  
carved into them that tell her secrets.  
The roots of her hair are starting to shimmer with silver  
that she colors once she sees ten or more.

She no longer cares for long hair.  
She says pelo largo is a young woman's game.  
In a few years she will be older than my grandmother  
ever was.

## **John Lennon**

By [Mary Jo Salter](#)

The music was already turning sad,

those fresh-faced voices singing in a round  
the lie that time could set its needle back  
and play from the beginning. Had you lived  
to eighty, as you'd wished, who knows?—you might  
have broken from the circle of that past  
more ours than yours. Never even sure  
which was the truest color for your hair  
(it changed with each photographer), we claimed  
you for ourselves; called you John and named  
the day you left us (spun out like a reel—  
the last broadcast to prove you'd lived at all)  
an end to hope itself. It isn't true,  
and worse, does you no justice if we call  
your death the death of anything but you.

## II

It put you in the headlines once again:  
years after you'd left the band, you joined  
another—of those whose lives, in breaking, link  
all memory with their end. The studio  
of history can tamper with you now,  
as if there'd always been a single track  
chance traveled on, and your discordant voice  
had led us to the final violence.  
Yet like the times when I, a star-crossed fan,  
had catalogued your favorite foods, your views  
on monarchy and war, and gaily clipped  
your quips and daily antics from the news,  
I keep a loving record of your death.  
All the evidence is in—of what,  
and to what end, it's hard to figure out,  
riddles you might have beat into a song.  
A younger face of yours, a cover shot,  
peered from all the newsstands as if proof

of some noteworthy thing you'd newly done.

## Video Blues

By [Mary Jo Salter](#)

My husband has a crush on Myrna Loy,  
and likes to rent her movies, for a treat.  
It makes some evenings harder to enjoy.

The list of actresses who might employ  
him as their slave is too long to repeat.  
(My husband has a crush on Myrna Loy,

Carole Lombard, Paulette Goddard, coy  
Jean Arthur with that voice as dry as wheat ...)  
It makes some evenings harder to enjoy.

Does he confess all this just to annoy  
a loyal spouse? I know I can't compete.  
My husband has a crush on Myrna Loy.

And can't a woman have her dreamboats? Boy,  
I wouldn't say my life is incomplete,  
but some evening I could certainly enjoy

two hours with Cary Grant as *my* own toy.  
I guess, though, we were destined not to meet.  
My husband has a crush on Myrna Loy,  
which makes some evenings harder to enjoy.

## Kingdom of Debt

By [Erika L. Sánchez](#)

*According to a report from the University of San Diego's Justice in Mexico project,  
138,000 people have been murdered in Mexico since 2006.*

They call it the corner of heaven:  
a laboratory, a foot at the throat  
of an empire. Before the holy  
dirt, the woman with the feline gait  
waits with tangled hair, mouth  
agape — the letter X marked  
on what's left of her breasts  
and face. Nuestra Belleza

Mexicana. A roped mule  
watches a man place a crown  
on her severed head. Tomorrow  
the queen will be picked clean  
by the kindness of the sea.  
Shuttered shops and empty  
restaurants. Stray dogs couple  
in a courtyard. Under a swaying  
palm tree, a cluster of men  
finger golden pistols, whisper,  
aquí ni se paran las moscas.  
Two boys, transfixed, watch  
a pixelated video: a family fed  
to a swarm of insatiable pigs.  
A butcher sweeps blood  
from an empty street. Death  
is my godmother, he repeats.  
Death is a burnt mirror.  
When the crackling stereo  
dithers between stations — amor  
de mis amores, sangre de mi alma —  
a gaggle of silent children  
gather before a sputtering  
trash bin. Together they watch  
the terror hover like flies.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Plaint in a Major Key

By [Jorge Sánchez](#)

*Without even leaving one's door,  
One can know the whole world.  
—Laozi*

The rumble of the night sounds  
even in the bright daylight  
of morning. Life blooms amid  
the Ten Thousand Things, but  
does not bloom amid the Ten  
Thousand Things. Shrivelled-eyed  
I wake up and tend to the One  
here and now, clamoring to be  
let out. Down with the gate,

out with the boy, to the rooms  
of life's necessities, first  
to void and next to fill.  
The Order is only order which  
is disorder, the only Disorder  
is the disorder that is order.  
We usher ourselves, each in our  
own way, back down the way  
for various brushings, combings,  
other groomings. Each in our  
own way we urge the other  
toward some kind of growth:  
one to assume, the other  
to renounce; one to grow larger,  
the other to grow smaller,  
thereby growing larger. Words  
do not work, and when they do not,  
other words might. This makes  
more sense than it seems, works  
more often than it doesn't,  
except when it really doesn't,  
and then that disorder creeps  
back in. In five minutes,  
a different challenge. In five  
hours, a different One. Six  
more hours, the One is rubbing  
eyes, untangled like a dragon,  
shucked and undone like an oyster.  
The night slowly rolls abed  
and the words form stories form  
sleep, the sleep of the Ten  
Thousand Things, the sleep  
that will echo the next day  
in the night's rumbling sounds,  
in the bright light of morning.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## **Haiku and Tanka for Harriet Tubman**

By [Sonia Sanchez](#)

1

Picture a woman

riding thunder on  
the legs of slavery ...

2

Picture her kissing  
our spines saying *no* to  
the eyes of slavery ...

3

Picture her rotating  
the earth into a shape  
of lives becoming ...

4

Picture her leaning  
into the eyes of our  
birth clouds ...

5

Picture this woman  
saying *no* to the constant  
*yes* of slavery ...

6

Picture a woman  
jumping rivers her  
legs inhaling moons ...

7

Picture her ripe  
with seasons of  
legs ... running ...

8

Picture her tasting  
the secret corners  
of woods ...

9

Picture her saying:  
*You have within you the strength,  
the patience, and the passion  
to reach for the stars,  
to change the world ...*

10

Imagine her words:  
*Every great dream begins  
with a dreamer ...*

11

Imagine her saying:  
*I freed a thousand slaves,  
could have freed  
a thousand more if they  
only knew they were slaves ...*

12

Imagine her humming:  
*How many days we got  
fore we taste freedom ...*

13

Imagine a woman  
asking: *How many workers  
for this freedom quilt ...*

14

Picture her saying:

*A live runaway could do  
great harm by going back  
but a dead runaway  
could tell no secrets ...*

15

Picture the daylight  
bringing her to woods  
full of birth moons ...

16

Picture John Brown  
shaking her hands three times saying:  
General Tubman. General Tubman. General Tubman.

17

Picture her words:  
*There's two things I got a  
right to: death or liberty ...*

18

Picture her saying *no*  
to a play called *Uncle Tom's Cabin*:  
*I am the real thing ...*

19

Picture a Black woman:  
could not read or write  
trailing freedom refrains ...

20

Picture her face  
turning southward walking  
down a Southern road ...

21

Picture this woman  
freedom bound ... tasting a  
people's preserved breath ...

22

Picture this woman  
of royalty ... wearing a crown  
of morning air ...

23

Picture her walking,  
running, reviving  
a country's breath ...

24

Picture black voices  
leaving behind  
lost tongues ...

## **This Is Not A Small Voice**

By [Sonia Sanchez](#)

This is not a small voice  
you hear this is a large  
voice coming out of these cities.  
This is the voice of LaTanya.  
Kadesha. Shaniqua. This  
is the voice of Antoine.  
Darryl. Shaquille.  
Running over waters  
navigating the hallways  
of our schools spilling out

on the corners of our cities and  
no epitaphs spill out of their river  
mouths.

This is not a small love  
you hear     this is a large  
love, a passion for kissing learning  
on its face.

This is a love that crowns the feet  
with hands  
that nourishes, conceives, feels the  
water sails  
mends the children,  
folds them inside our history  
where they  
toast more than the flesh  
where they suck the bones of the  
alphabet  
and spit out closed vowels.  
This is a love colored with iron  
and lace.  
This is a love initialed Black  
Genius.

This is not a small voice  
you hear.

## Cool Tombs

By [Carl Sandburg](#)

When Abraham Lincoln was shoveled into the tombs, he forgot the copperheads and the  
assassin ... in the dust, in the cool tombs.

And Ulysses Grant lost all thought of con men and Wall Street, cash and collateral turned  
ashes ... in the dust, in the cool tombs.

Pocahontas' body, lovely as a poplar, sweet as a red haw in November or a pawpaw in May,  
did she wonder? does she remember? ... in the dust, in the cool tombs?

Take any streetful of people buying clothes and groceries, cheering a hero or throwing  
confetti and blowing tin horns ... tell me if the lovers are losers ... tell me if any get more  
than the lovers ... in the dust ... in the cool tombs.

# I Am the People, the Mob

By [Carl Sandburg](#)

I am the people—the mob—the crowd—the mass.  
Do you know that all the great work of the world is done through me?  
I am the workingman, the inventor, the maker of the world's food and clothes.  
I am the audience that witnesses history. The Napoleons come from me and the Lincolns.  
They die. And then I send forth more Napoleons and Lincolns.  
I am the seed ground. I am a prairie that will stand for much plowing. Terrible storms pass over me. I forget. The best of me is sucked out and wasted. I forget. Everything but  
Death comes to me and makes me work and give up what I have. And I forget.  
Sometimes I growl, shake myself and spatter a few red drops for history to remember.  
Then—I forget.  
When I, the People, learn to remember, when I, the People, use the lessons of yesterday and no longer forget who robbed me last year, who played me for a fool—then there will be no speaker in all the world say the name: “The People,” with any fleck of a sneer in his voice or any far-off smile of derision.  
The mob—the crowd—the mass—will arrive then.

## Knucks

By [Carl Sandburg](#)

In Abraham Lincoln's city,  
Where they remember his lawyer's shingle,  
The place where they brought him  
Wrapped in battle flags,  
Wrapped in the smoke of memories  
From Tallahassee to the Yukon,  
The place now where the shaft of his tomb  
Points white against the blue prairie dome,  
In Abraham Lincoln's city ... I saw knucks  
In the window of Mister Fischman's second-hand store  
On Second Street.

I went in and asked, “How much?”  
“Thirty cents apiece,” answered Mister Fischman.  
And taking a box of new ones off a shelf  
He filled anew the box in the showcase  
And said incidentally, most casually  
And incidentally:  
“I sell a carload a month of these.”

I slipped my fingers into a set of knucks,  
Cast-iron knucks molded in a foundry pattern,  
And there came to me a set of thoughts like these:

Mister Fischman is for Abe and the “malice to none” stuff,  
And the street car strikers and the strike-breakers,  
And the slugers, gunmen, detectives, policemen,  
Judges, utility heads, newspapers, priests, lawyers,  
They are all for Abe and the “malice to none” stuff.

I started for the door.  
“Maybe you want a lighter pair,”  
Came Mister Fischman’s voice.  
I opened the door ... and the voice again:  
“You are a funny customer.”

Wrapped in battle flags,  
Wrapped in the smoke of memories,  
This is the place they brought him,  
This is Abraham Lincoln's home town.

## *from* **The People, Yes**

By [Carl Sandburg](#)

Lincoln?  
He was a mystery in smoke and flags  
Saying yes to the smoke, yes to the flags,  
Yes to the paradoxes of democracy,  
Yes to the hopes of government  
Of the people by the people for the people,  
No to debauchery of the public mind,  
No to personal malice nursed and fed,  
Yes to the Constitution when a help,  
No to the Constitution when a hindrance  
Yes to man as a struggler amid illusions,  
Each man fated to answer for himself:  
Which of the faiths and illusions of mankind  
Must I choose for my own sustaining light  
To bring me beyond the present wilderness?

Lincoln? Was he a poet?  
And did he write verses?  
“I have not willingly planted a thorn  
in any man’s bosom.”  
I shall do nothing through malice: what  
I deal with is too vast for malice.”

Death was in the air.  
So was birth.

# Gulf Memo

By [Stephen Sandy](#)

Tell me the way to the wedding  
Tell me the way to the war,  
Tell me the needle you're threading  
I won't raise my voice anymore.

And tell me what axe you are grinding  
Where the boy on the bivouac believes,  
What reel you are unwinding  
For the girl in her bed who grieves.

While behind a derrick's girder  
He watches the sinking sun,  
He asks what he'll do for murder  
And what he will do for fun.

Will you read him the ways of war  
His Miranda rights in sin,  
Will you tell him what to ignore  
When he studies your discipline?

He dozes off—but he shakes  
In a dream that he is the one  
Death finds abed and wakes  
Just as the night is done.

Tell me what boats go ashore  
Riding the oil-dimmed tide,  
Red streamers and black in store  
For the boy with a pain in his side.

And tell me where they are heading  
Tonight; now tell me the score.  
Tell me the way to their wedding  
I won't raise my own voice anymore.

# One Girl

By [Sappho](#)

Translated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti

I

Like the sweet apple which reddens upon the topmost bough,

Atop on the topmost twig, — which the pluckers forgot, somehow, —  
Forget it not, nay; but got it not, for none could get it till now.

## II

Like the wild hyacinth flower which on the hills is found,  
Which the passing feet of the shepherds for ever tear and wound,  
Until the purple blossom is trodden in the ground

# A Country Incident

By [May Sarton](#)

Absorbed in planting bulbs, that work of hope,  
I was startled by a loud human voice,  
“Do go on working while I talk. Don’t stop!”  
And I was caught upon the difficult choice—  
To yield the last half hour of precious light,  
Or to stay on my knees, absurd and rude;  
I willed her to be gone with all my might,  
This kindly neighbor who destroyed a mood;  
I could not think of next spring any more,  
I had to re-assess the way I live.  
Long after I went in and closed the door,  
I pondered on the crude imperative.

What it is to be caught up in each day  
Like a child fighting imaginary wars,  
Converting work into this passionate play,  
A rounded whole made up of different chores  
Which one might name haphazard meditation.  
And yet an unexpected call destroys  
Or puts to rout my primitive elation:  
Why be so serious about mere joys?  
Is this where some outmoded madness lies,  
Poet as recluse? No, what comes to me  
Is how my father looked out of his eyes,  
And how he fought for his own passionate play.

He could tear up unread and throw away  
Communications from officialdom,  
And, courteous in every other way,  
Would not brook anything that kept him from  
Those lively dialogues with man’s whole past  
That were his intimate and fruitful pleasure.  
Impetuous, impatient to the last,  
“Be adamant, keep clear, strike for your treasure!”

I hear the youthful ardor in his voice  
(And so I must forgive a self in labor).  
I feel his unrepentant smiling choice,  
(And so I ask forgiveness of my neighbor).

## Of Molluscs

By [May Sarton](#)

As the tide rises, the closed mollusc  
Opens a fraction to the ocean's food,  
Bathed in its riches. Do not ask  
What force would do, or if force could.

A knife is of no use against a fortress.  
You might break it to pieces as gulls do.  
No, only the rising tide and its slow progress  
Opens the shell. Lovers, I tell you true.

You who have held yourselves closed hard  
Against warm sun and wind, shelled up in fears  
And hostile to a touch or tender word—  
The ocean rises, salt as unshed tears.

Now you are floated on this gentle flood  
That cannot force or be forced, welcome food  
Salt as your tears, the rich ocean's blood,  
Eat, rest, be nourished on the tide of love.

## The Work of Happiness

By [May Sarton](#)

I thought of happiness, how it is woven  
Out of the silence in the empty house each day  
And how it is not sudden and it is not given  
But is creation itself like the growth of a tree.  
No one has seen it happen, but inside the bark  
Another circle is growing in the expanding ring.  
No one has heard the root go deeper in the dark,  
But the tree is lifted by this inward work  
And its plumes shine, and its leaves are glittering.

So happiness is woven out of the peace of hours  
And strikes its roots deep in the house alone:  
The old chest in the corner, cool waxed floors,

White curtains softly and continually blown  
As the free air moves quietly about the room;  
A shelf of books, a table, and the white-washed wall—  
These are the dear familiar gods of home,  
And here the work of faith can best be done,  
The growing tree is green and musical.

For what is happiness but growth in peace,  
The timeless sense of time when furniture  
Has stood a life's span in a single place,  
And as the air moves, so the old dreams stir  
The shining leaves of present happiness?  
No one has heard thought or listened to a mind,  
But where people have lived in inwardness  
The air is charged with blessing and does bless;  
Windows look out on mountains and the walls are kind.

## Dreamers

By [Siegfried Sassoon](#)

Soldiers are citizens of death's grey land,  
Drawing no dividend from time's to-morrows.  
In the great hour of destiny they stand,  
Each with his feuds, and jealousies, and sorrows.  
Soldiers are sworn to action; they must win  
Some flaming, fatal climax with their lives.  
Soldiers are dreamers; when the guns begin  
They think of firelit homes, clean beds and wives.

I see them in foul dug-outs, gnawed by rats,  
And in the ruined trenches, lashed with rain,  
Dreaming of things they did with balls and bats,  
And mocked by hopeless longing to regain  
Bank-holidays, and picture shows, and spats,  
And going to the office in the train.

## The Poet As Hero

By [Siegfried Sassoon](#)

You've heard me, scornful, harsh, and discontented,  
Mocking and loathing War: you've asked me why  
Of my old, silly sweetness I've repented—  
My ecstasies changed to an ugly cry.

You are aware that once I sought the Grail,  
Riding in armour bright, serene and strong;  
And it was told that through my infant wail  
There rose immortal semblances of song.

But now I've said good-bye to Galahad,  
And am no more the knight of dreams and show:  
For lust and senseless hatred make me glad,  
And my killed friends are with me where I go.  
Wound for red wound I burn to smite their wrongs;  
And there is absolution in my songs.

## **The Redeemer**

By [Siegfried Sassoon](#)

Darkness: the rain sluiced down; the mire was deep;  
It was past twelve on a mid-winter night,  
When peaceful folk in beds lay snug asleep;  
There, with much work to do before the light,  
We lugged our clay-sucked boots as best we might  
Along the trench; sometimes a bullet sang,  
And droning shells burst with a hollow bang;  
We were soaked, chilled and wretched, every one;  
Darkness; the distant wink of a huge gun.

I turned in the black ditch, loathing the storm;  
A rocket fizzed and burned with blanching flare,  
And lit the face of what had been a form  
Floundering in mirk. He stood before me there;  
I say that He was Christ; stiff in the glare,  
And leaning forward from His burdening task,  
Both arms supporting it; His eyes on mine  
Stared from the woeful head that seemed a mask  
Of mortal pain in Hell's unholy shine.

No thorny crown, only a woollen cap  
He wore—an English soldier, white and strong,  
Who loved his time like any simple chap,  
Good days of work and sport and homely song;  
Now he has learned that nights are very long,  
And dawn a watching of the windowed sky.  
But to the end, unjudging, he'll endure  
Horror and pain, not discontent to die  
That Lancaster on Lune may stand secure.

He faced me, reeling in his weariness,  
Shouldering his load of planks, so hard to bear.  
I say that He was Christ, who wrought to bless  
All groping things with freedom bright as air,  
And with His mercy washed and made them fair.  
Then the flame sank, and all grew black as pitch,  
While we began to struggle along the ditch;  
And someone flung his burden in the muck,  
Mumbling: 'O Christ Almighty, now I'm stuck!'

## Carousel

By [Jaya Savige](#)

Dense night is a needs thing.

You were lured  
in a luminous canoe  
said to have once ruled  
a lunar ocean.

The 2 am soda pour  
of stars is all but silent;  
only listen —

sedater than a sauropod  
in the bone epics  
it spills all the moon spice,

releasing a sap odour  
that laces  
us to a vaster scale  
of road opus.

A carousel of oral cues,  
these spinning sonic coins.

A slide show of old wishes.

## Ixmiquilpan, Hidalgo, México

By [Natalie Scenters-Zapico](#)

1

Part of the simulation is not knowing  
your coyote's real name. Part of the simulation

is knowing your group could leave you  
behind. Part of the simulation is knowing  
that if you are left behind, a pickup truck  
will take you back to your hotel.

2

Through caves, through brush, through needles  
we form a line by holding on  
to a stranger's backpack. In the dark live  
rounds are fired. I duck, people laugh.

3

The desert here is no desert at all & I think of how  
I could cut a thick barrel cactus open  
& eat it. In Chihuahua I've never seen  
thick barrel cactus, only the thin long threads  
of ocotillo that don't carry much water.

4

The chairros pay 250 pesos to walk  
all night in the desert in the middle of México  
to simulate a border crossing. They bring jugs  
filled with water & pose for selfies.

5

When you wade across the river you only have to worry  
about swimming if a current pulls you under, not the red  
glare of night-vision goggles, floodlights & guns.

6

In the simulation, only two people make it  
to *the other side* without getting stopped by actors  
portraying la migra or narcos. All are brought back  
for cups of atole. *It's three in the morning*, a girl laughs.

7

I walk back to my room, turn on the light  
& the flying ants won't stop swarming. It is so dark  
& have so much water left in my jug.  
My teeth full of grit from the atole.

## Dyed Carnations

By [Robyn Schiff](#)

There's blue, and then there's blue.

A number, not a hue, this blue  
is not the undertone of any one  
but there it is, primary.  
I held the bouquet  
in shock and cut the stems at a deadly angle.  
I opened the toxic sachet of flower food  
with my canine and rinsed my mouth.  
I used to wash my hands and daydream.  
I dreamed of myself and washed  
my hands of everything. Easy math.  
Now I can't get their procedure  
at the florist off my mind.  
The white flowers arrived! They overnighted  
in a chemical bath  
and now they have a fake laugh  
that catches like a match  
that starts the kind of kitchen fire  
that is fanned by water.  
They won't even look at me.  
Happy Anniversary.

## American Solitude

By [Grace Schulman](#)

*"The cure for loneliness is solitude."*  
—Marianne Moore

Hopper never painted this, but here  
on a snaky path his vision lingers:

three white tombs, robots with glassed-in faces  
and meters for eyes, grim mouths, flat noses,

lean forward on a platform, like strangers  
with identical frowns scanning a blur,

far off, that might be their train.  
Gas tanks broken for decades face Parson's

smithy, planked shut now. Both relics must stay.  
The pumps have roots in gas pools, and the smithy

stores memories of hammers forging scythes  
to cut spartina grass for dry salt hay.

The tanks have the remove of local clammers  
who sink buckets and stand, never in pairs,

but one and one and one, blank-eyed, alone,  
more serene than lonely. Today a woman

rakes in the shallows, then bends to receive  
last rays in shimmering water, her long shadow

knifing the bay. She slides into her truck  
to watch the sky flame over sand flats, a hawk's

wind arabesque, an island risen, brown  
Atlantis, at low tide; she probes the shoreline

and beyond grassy dunes for where the land  
might slope off into night. Hers is no common

emptiness, but a vaster silence filled  
with terns' cries, an abundant solitude.

Nearby, the three dry gas pumps, worn  
survivors of clam-digging generations,

are luminous, and have an exile's grandeur  
that says: In perfect solitude, there's fire.

One day I approached the vessels  
and wanted to drive on, the road ablaze

with dogwood in full bloom, but the contraptions  
outdazzled the road's white, even outshone

a bleached shirt flapping alone  
on a laundry line, arms pointed down.

High noon. Three urns, ironic in their outcast  
dignity—as though, like some pine chests,

they might be prized in disuse—cast rays,  
spun leaf—covered numbers, clanked, then wheezed

and stopped again. Shadows cut the road  
before I drove off into the dark woods.

***Note to Poetry Out Loud students:*** This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.

# Greed

By [Philip Schultz](#)

My ocean town struggles  
to pick up leaves,  
offer summer school,  
and keep our library open.  
Every day now  
more men stand  
at the railroad station,  
waiting to be chosen for work.  
Because it's thought  
the Hispanics will work for less  
they get picked first,  
while the whites and blacks  
avoid the terror  
in one another's eyes.  
Our handyman, Santos,  
who expects only  
what his hands earn,  
is proud of his half acre in Guatemala,  
where he plans to retire.  
His desire to proceed with dignity  
is admirable, but he knows  
that now no one retires,  
everyone works harder.  
My father imagined a life  
more satisfying than the one  
he managed to lead.  
He didn't see himself as uneducated,  
thwarted, or bitter,  
but soon-to-be rich.  
Being rich was his right, he believed.  
Happiness, I used to think,  
was a necessary illusion.  
Now I think it's just  
precious moments of relief,  
like dreams of Guatemala.  
Sometimes, at night,  
in winter, surrounded by  
the significant silence  
of empty mansions,  
which once were cottages,  
where people lived their lives,  
and now are owned by banks  
and the absent rich,

I like to stand at my window,  
looking for a tv's futile flickering,  
always surprised to see  
instead  
the quaint, porous face  
of my reflection,  
immersed  
in its one abundance.

## Object Lesson

By [Claire Schwartz](#)

You learn to recognize beauty by its frame.  
In the gilded hall, in the gilded frame, her milky neck

extended as she peers over the drawn bath. A target,  
a study, a lesson: she requires you

to be beautiful. You should save her, no matter the price.  
No matter the price, the Collector will take it. His collection makes him

good, when he lends the woman's image  
to the museum, where schoolchildren stand

before it, anointed with lessons in color and feeling. *Pay*  
*attention*, the teacher scolds the fidgeter in back. *Bad*,

the child whose movement calls to her own beauty, the child  
whose wails insist his mother is most beautiful of all. *Eyes this way*,

the teacher syrups. All that grows, rots. Good little stillnesses,  
guardians-to-be. If you are good, one day

an embossed invitation will arrive at the door of the house  
you own. You will sit next to the Collector, light

chattering along the chandeliers, your napkin shaped like a swan.  
To protect your silk, you snap its neck with flourish. The blood, beautiful,

reddening your cheeks as you slip into the chair drawn just for you. *Sit*, the  
chair says  
to the patron. *Stand*, to the guard. The guard shifts on blistered feet. *She*  
*loves you*,

*she loves you not*. The children pluck the daisy bald,

discard their little suns in the gutter.

## Calmly We Walk through This April's Day

By [Delmore Schwartz](#)

Calmly we walk through this April's day,  
Metropolitan poetry here and there,  
In the park sit pauper and *rentier*,  
The screaming children, the motor-car  
Fugitive about us, running away,  
Between the worker and the millionaire  
Number provides all distances,  
It is Nineteen Thirty-Seven now,  
Many great dears are taken away,  
What will become of you and me  
(This is the school in which we learn ...)  
Besides the photo and the memory?  
(... that time is the fire in which we burn.)

(This is the school in which we learn ...)  
What is the self amid this blaze?  
What am I now that I was then  
Which I shall suffer and act again,  
The theodicy I wrote in my high school days  
Restored all life from infancy,  
The children shouting are bright as they run  
(This is the school in which they learn ...)  
Ravished entirely in their passing play!  
(... that time is the fire in which they burn.)

Avid its rush, that reeling blaze!  
Where is my father and Eleanor?  
Not where are they now, dead seven years,  
But what they were then?  
No more? No more?  
From Nineteen-Fourteen to the present day,  
Bert Spira and Rhoda consume, consume  
Not where they are now (where are they now?)  
But what they were then, both beautiful;

Each minute bursts in the burning room,  
The great globe reels in the solar fire,  
Spinning the trivial and unique away.  
(How all things flash! How all things flare!)  
What am I now that I was then?

May memory restore again and again  
The smallest color of the smallest day:  
Time is the school in which we learn,  
Time is the fire in which we burn.

## The True-Blue American

By [Delmore Schwartz](#)

Jeremiah Dickson was a true-blue American,  
For he was a little boy who understood America, for he felt that he must  
Think about *everything*; because that's *all* there is to think about,  
Knowing immediately the intimacy of truth and comedy,  
Knowing intuitively how a sense of humor was a necessity  
For one and for all who live in America. Thus, natively, and  
Naturally when on an April Sunday in an ice cream parlor Jeremiah  
Was requested to choose between a chocolate sundae and a banana split  
He answered unhesitatingly, having no need to think of it  
Being a true-blue American, determined to continue as he began:  
Rejecting the either-or of Kierkegaard, and many another European;  
Refusing to accept alternatives, refusing to believe the choice of between;  
Rejecting selection; denying dilemma; electing absolute affirmation: knowing  
    in his breast  
        The infinite and the gold  
        Of the endless frontier, the deathless West.

“Both: I will have them both!” declared this true-blue American  
In Cambridge, Massachusetts, on an April Sunday, instructed  
    By the great department stores, by the Five-and-Ten,  
Taught by Christmas, by the circus, by the vulgarity and grandeur of  
    Niagara Falls and the Grand Canyon,  
Tutored by the grandeur, vulgarity, and infinite appetite gratified and  
    Shining in the darkness, of the light  
On Saturdays at the double bills of the moon pictures,  
The consummation of the advertisements of the imagination of the light  
Which is as it was—the infinite belief in infinite hope—of Columbus,  
    Barnum, Edison, and Jeremiah Dickson.

## And

By [Nicole Sealy](#)

Withstand pandemonium  
and scandalous  
nightstands  
commanding candlelight

and  
quicksand

and zinfandel  
clandestine landmines  
candy handfuls  
and contraband

and  
handmade

commandments  
and merchandise  
secondhand husbands  
philandering

and  
landless

and vandal  
bandwagons slandered  
and branded  
handwritten reprimands

and  
meander

on an island  
landscaped with chandeliers  
abandon handcuffs  
standstills

and  
backhands

notwithstanding  
thousands of oleanders  
and dandelions  
handpicked

and  
sandalwood

and mandrake  
and random demands

the bystander  
wanders

in  
wonderland.

## Across the Street

By [Austin Segrest](#)

I ran across the street, I didn't know any better.  
Ran out in the street, I didn't know no better.  
I just knew a woman was there, though I'd never met her.

She sat me in her parlor, distracted me with trinkets,  
milky glass birds and fish, distracting trinkets.  
She said my mother would be fine, but did she think it?

The world was a blur of crystal wings and fins.  
My tears were casked in crystal, wings and fins.  
She was the first of many lady-friends.

The tree shadows shortened, she brought me a drink of water.  
Morning matured, she brought me a glass of water.  
I drank it so fast, she went and brought another.

I kept looking out the window, she didn't ask me what for.  
I watched out that window, she didn't ask what for.  
The seconds broke off and lay there on the floor.

I imagined my mother's route, as far as I could.  
Her long morning walk, followed as far as I could.  
Nothing I could do would do any good.

Suffer the little children, and forbid them not.  
Christ said suffer the little children, and forbid them not.  
Said love thy neighbor, sometimes she's all you got.

## Blade, Unplugged

By [Tim Seibles](#)

It's true: I almost never  
smile, but that doesn't mean

I'm not *in love*: my heart

is that black violin  
played slowly. You know that

moment late in the solo  
when the voice  
is so pure you feel  
the blood in it: the wound

between rage  
and complete surrender. That's  
where I'm smiling. You just  
can't see it—the sound

bleeding perfectly  
inside me. The first time  
I killed a vampire I was

sad: I mean  
we were almost  
family.

But that's  
so many lives  
ago. I believe

in the cry that cuts  
into the melody, the strings  
calling back the forgotten world.

When I think of the madness  
that has made me and the midnight  
I walk inside—all day long:

when I think of that  
one note that breaks  
what's left of what's  
human in me, man,

I love everything

## **Bright Copper Kettles**

By [Vijay Seshadri](#)

Dead friends coming back to life, dead family,  
speaking languages living and dead, their minds retentive,

their five senses intact, their footprints like a butterfly's,  
mercy shining from their comprehensive faces—  
this is one of my favorite things.  
I like it so much I sleep all the time.  
Moon by day and sun by night find me dispersed  
deep in the dreams where they appear.  
In fields of goldenrod, in the city of five pyramids,  
before the empress with the melting face, under  
the towering plane tree, they just show up.  
“It's all right,” they seem to say. “It always was.”  
They are diffident and polite.  
(Who knew the dead were so polite?)  
They don't want to scare me; their heads don't spin like weather vanes.  
They don't want to steal my body  
and possess the earth and wreak vengeance.  
They're dead, you understand, they don't exist. And, besides,  
why would they care? They're subatomic, horizontal. Think about it.  
One of them shyly offers me a pencil.  
The eyes under the eyelids dart faster and faster.  
Through the intercom of the house where for so long there was no music,  
the right Reverend Al Green is singing,  
“I could never see tomorrow.  
I was never told about the sorrow.”

## **Sonnet 84: While one sere leaf, that parting Autumn yields**

By [Anna Seward](#)

While one sere leaf, that parting Autumn yields,  
Trembles upon the thin, and naked spray,  
November, dragging on this sunless day,  
Lours, cold and sullen, on the watery fields;  
And Nature to the waste dominion yields,  
Stripped her last robes, with gold and purple gay —  
So droops my life, of your soft beams despoiled,  
Youth, Health, and Hope, that long exulting smiled;  
And the wild carols, and the bloomy hues  
Of merry Spring-time, spruce on every plain  
Her half-blown bushes, moist with sunny rain,  
More pensive thoughts in my sunk heart infuse  
Than Winter's grey, and desolate domain  
Faded like my lost Youth, that no bright Spring renews.

## Sonnet 91: On the fleet streams, the Sun, that late arose

By [Anna Seward](#)

On the fleet streams, the Sun, that late arose,  
In amber radiance plays; the tall young grass  
No foot hath bruised; clear morning, as I pass,  
Breathes the pure gale, that on the blossom blows;  
And, as with gold yon green hill's summit glows,  
The lake inlays the vale with molten glass:  
Now is the year's soft youth, yet one, alas!  
Cheers not as it was wont; impending woes  
Weigh on my heart; the joys, that once were mine,  
Spring leads not back; and those that yet remain  
Fade while she blooms. Each hour more lovely shine  
Her crystal beams, and feed her floral train,  
But oh with pale, and warring fires, decline  
Those eyes, whose light my filial hopes sustain.

## Song: “Blow, blow, thou winter wind”

By [William Shakespeare](#)

Blow, blow, thou winter wind,  
Thou art not so unkind  
As man's ingratitude;  
Thy tooth is not so keen,  
Because thou art not seen,  
Although thy breath be rude.  
*Heigh-ho! sing, heigh-ho! unto the green holly:  
Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly:  
Then, heigh-ho, the holly!  
This life is most jolly.*

Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,  
That dost not bite so nigh  
As benefits forgot:  
Though thou the waters warp,  
Thy sting is not so sharp  
As friend remembered not.  
*Heigh-ho! sing, heigh-ho! unto the green holly...*

## Sonnet 15: When I consider everything that grows

By [William Shakespeare](#)

When I consider everything that grows

Holds in perfection but a little moment,  
That this huge stage presenteth nought but shows  
Whereon the stars in secret influence comment;  
When I perceive that men as plants increase,  
Cheered and check'd even by the selfsame sky,  
Vaunt in their youthful sap, at height decrease,  
And wear their brave state out of memory;  
Then the conceit of this inconstant stay  
Sets you most rich in youth before my sight,  
Where wasteful Time debateth with Decay  
To change your day of youth to sullied night;  
And all in war with Time for love of you,  
As he takes from you, I engraft you new.

## **Sonnet 18: Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?**

By [William Shakespeare](#)

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date;  
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;  
And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;  
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;  
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:  
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

## **Sonnet 29: When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes**

By [William Shakespeare](#)

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,  
I all alone beweep my outcast state,  
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,  
And look upon myself and curse my fate,  
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,  
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,  
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,  
With what I most enjoy contented least;  
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,

Haply I think on thee, and then my state,  
(Like to the lark at break of day arising  
From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's gate;  
For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings  
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

## Sonnet 55: Not marble nor the gilded monuments

By [William Shakespeare](#)

Not marble nor the gilded monuments  
Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme,  
But you shall shine more bright in these contents  
Than unswept stone besmeared with sluttish time.  
When wasteful war shall statues overturn,  
And broils root out the work of masonry,  
Nor Mars his sword nor war's quick fire shall burn  
The living record of your memory.  
'Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity  
Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room  
Even in the eyes of all posterity  
That wear this world out to the ending doom.  
So, till the Judgement that yourself arise,  
You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.

## Trace Evidence

By [Charif Shanahan](#)

When I say *But mother, Black or not Black,*  
*Of course you are polyethnic,* your look does not change  
Though it does harden, a drying clay bust  
Abandoned or deliberately incomplete,  
All the features carved in  
Except the eyes. *What I'm trying—*  
*I mean—You are an Arab, yes,*  
*By culture, by language, and in part by blood; by blood*  
*You are also Black African—and when, then, I say*  
*And also probably a fair amount of European, too—the lights,*  
Though we're standing at the corner of 195th and Jerome,

Turn up somehow

Tracing an outline of you onto the armory's sharp red brick, the El  
Barreling up from the tunnel like a surge of magma reaching  
For air and as I wait for it to pass so that you can

Hear me again, so that I can hear myself at last  
Say *But here, for me, that doesn't exactly matter. Don't you see—?*  
Your face hangs on the *fair* of *fair amount*—heavy drops  
Of oil, or old rain, falling onto us from the tracks—almost willing away  
The layer of long-dead men flattened onto it, and the desperate  
Rest of you, until I say with my looking  
Through the unbearable human noise, *My darling sweet mother, it is*  
*Fine, it is fine. For us here now I will be the first of our line.*

## Contraction

By [Ravi Shankar](#)

Honest self-scrutiny too easily mutinies,  
mutates into false memories  
Which find language a receptive host,  
Boosted by boastful embellishments.

Self-esteem is raised on wobbly beams,  
seeming seen as stuff enough  
To fund the hedge of personality,  
Though personally, I cannot forget

Whom I have met and somehow wronged,  
wrung for a jot of fugitive juice,  
Trading some ruse for a blot or two,  
Labored to braid from transparent diction

Fiction, quick fix, quixotic fixation.  
As the pulse of impulses  
Drained through my veins, I tried to live  
Twenty lives at once. Now one is plenty.

## Not Horses

By [Natalie Shapero](#)

What I adore is not horses, with their modern  
domestic life span of 25 years. What I adore  
is a bug that lives only one day, especially if  
it's a terrible day, a day of train derailment or  
chemical lake or cop admits to cover-up, a day  
when no one thinks of anything else, least of all  
that bug. I know how it feels, born as I've been  
into these rotting times, as into sin. Everybody's  
busy, so distraught they forget to kill me,

and even that won't keep me alive. I share  
my home not with horses, but with a little dog  
who sees poorly at dusk and menaces stumps,  
makes her muscle known to every statue.  
I wish she could have a single day of language,  
so that I might reassure her *don't be afraid* —  
*our whole world is dead and so can do you no harm.*

## Sunshower

By [Natalie Shapero](#)

Some people say the devil is beating  
his wife. Some people say the devil  
is pawing his wife. Some people say  
the devil is doubling down on an overall  
attitude of entitlement toward  
the body of his wife. Some people  
say the devil won't need to be sorry,  
as the devil believes that nothing  
comes after this life. Some people say  
that in spite of the devil's public,  
long-standing, and meticulously  
logged disdain for the health  
and wholeness of his wife, the devil  
spends all day, every day, insisting  
grandly and gleefully on his general  
pro-woman ethos, that the devil truly  
considers himself to be an unswayed  
crusader: effortlessly magnetic,  
scrupulous, gracious, and, in spite of  
the devil's several advanced degrees,  
a luminous autodidact. Some people  
say calm down; this is commonplace.  
Some people say calm down;  
this is very rare. Some people say  
the sun is washing her face. Some  
people say in Hell, they're having a fair.

## Buick

By [Karl Shapiro](#)

As a sloop with a sweep of immaculate wing on her delicate spine  
And a keel as steel as a root that holds in the sea as she leans,  
Leaning and laughing, my warm-hearted beauty, you ride, you ride,

You tack on the curves with parabola speed and a kiss of goodbye,  
Like a thoroughbred sloop, my new high-spirited spirit, my kiss.

As my foot suggests that you leap in the air with your hips of a girl,  
My finger that praises your wheel and announces your voices of song,  
Flouncing your skirts, you blueness of joy, you flirt of politeness,  
You leap, you intelligence, essence of wheelness with silvery nose,  
And your platinum clocks of excitement stir like the hairs of a fern.

But how alien you are from the booming belts of your birth and the smoke  
Where you turned on the stinging lathes of Detroit and Lansing at night  
And shrieked at the torch in your secret parts and the amorous tests,  
But now with your eyes that enter the future of roads you forget;  
You are all instinct with your phosphorous glow and your streaking hair.

And now when we stop it is not as the bird from the shell that I leave  
Or the leathery pilot who steps from his bird with a sneer of delight,  
And not as the ignorant beast do you squat and watch me depart,  
But with exquisite breathing you smile, with satisfaction of love,  
And I touch you again as you tick in the silence and settle in sleep.

## Stanzas ["Oh, come to me in dreams, my love!"]

By [Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley](#)

Oh, come to me in dreams, my love!  
I will not ask a dearer bliss;  
Come with the starry beams, my love,  
And press mine eyelids with thy kiss.

'Twas thus, as ancient fables tell,  
Love visited a Grecian maid,  
Till she disturbed the sacred spell,  
And woke to find her hopes betrayed.

But gentle sleep shall veil my sight,  
And Psyche's lamp shall darkling be,  
When, in the visions of the night,  
Thou dost renew thy vows to me.

Then come to me in dreams, my love,  
I will not ask a dearer bliss;  
Come with the starry beams, my love,  
And press mine eyelids with thy kiss.

# England in 1819

By [Percy Bysshe Shelley](#)

An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying King;  
Princes, the dregs of their dull race, who flow  
Through public scorn,—mud from a muddy spring;  
Rulers who neither see nor feel nor know,  
But leechlike to their fainting country cling  
Till they drop, blind in blood, without a blow.  
A people starved and stabbed in th' untilled field;  
An army, whom liberticide and prey  
Makes as a two-edged sword to all who wield;  
Golden and sanguine laws which tempt and slay;  
Religion Christless, Godless—a book sealed;  
A senate, Time's worst statute, unrepealed—  
Are graves from which a glorious Phantom may  
Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day.

# Love's Philosophy

By [Percy Bysshe Shelley](#)

The fountains mingle with the river  
And the rivers with the ocean,  
The winds of heaven mix for ever  
With a sweet emotion;  
Nothing in the world is single;  
All things by a law divine  
In one spirit meet and mingle.  
Why not I with thine?—

See the mountains kiss high heaven  
And the waves clasp one another;  
No sister-flower would be forgiven  
If it disdained its brother;  
And the sunlight clasps the earth  
And the moonbeams kiss the sea:  
What is all this sweet work worth  
If thou kiss not me?

# Ozymandias

By [Percy Bysshe Shelley](#)

I met a traveller from an antique land,  
Who said—"Two vast and trunkless legs of stone

Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;  
And on the pedestal, these words appear:  
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;  
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.”

## Living Ancients

By [Matthew Shenoda](#)

For those of us young  
healthy  
we will face the mourning of our elders.  
Bury them beneath  
the earth.  
And for those of us  
who believe the living  
ever-live  
we will stand by the graves of our teachers  
and know that we  
like those we've buried  
are living ancients.

## Hesitation Theory

By [Reginald Shepherd](#)

I drift into the sound of wind,  
how small my life must be  
to fit into his palm like that, holly  
leaf, bluejay feather, milkweed fluff,  
pin straw or sycamore pod, resembling  
scraps of light. The world  
slips through these fingers  
so easily, there's so much  
to miss: the sociable bones  
linked up in supple rows, mineral  
seams just under the skin. I hold  
my palm against the sun and don't see

palm or sun, don't hold anything  
in either hand. I look up, look  
away (*what's that?*), I trip  
and stumble (fall  
again), find myself face down  
in duff, a foam of fallen live oak  
leaves, with only  
this life, mine at times.

## The World in the Evening

By [Rachel Sherwood](#)

As this suburban summer wanders toward dark  
cats watch from their driveways — they are bored  
and await miracles. The houses show, through windows  
flashes of knife and fork, the blue light  
of televisions, inconsequential fights  
between wife and husband in the guest bathroom

voices sound like echoes in these streets

the chattering of awful boys as they plot  
behind the juniper and ivy, miniature guerillas  
that mimic the ancient news of the world  
and shout threats, piped high across mock fences  
to girls riding by in the last pieces of light

the color of the sky makes brilliant reflection  
in the water and oil along the curb  
deepened aqua and the sharp pure rose of the clouds  
there is no sun or moon, few stars wheel  
above the domestic scene — this half-lit world  
still, quiet calming the dogs worried by distant alarms

there — a woman in a window washes a glass

a man across the street laughs through an open door  
utterly alien, alone. There is a time, seconds between  
the last light and the dark stretch ahead, when color  
is lost — the girl on her swing becomes a swift  
apparition, black and white flowing suddenly into night.

# The Glories of Our Blood and State

By [James Shirley](#)

The glories of our blood and state  
Are shadows, not substantial things;  
There is no armour against Fate;  
Death lays his icy hand on kings:  
Sceptre and Crown  
Must tumble down,  
And in the dust be equal made  
With the poor crooked scythe and spade.

Some men with swords may reap the field,  
And plant fresh laurels where they kill:  
But their strong nerves at last must yield;  
They tame but one another still:  
Early or late  
They stoop to fate,  
And must give up their murmuring breath  
When they, pale captives, creep to death.

The garlands wither on your brow;  
Then boast no more your mighty deeds!  
Upon Death's purple altar now  
See where the victor-victim bleeds.  
Your heads must come  
To the cold tomb:  
Only the actions of the just  
Smell sweet and blossom in their dust.

## on new year's eve

By [Evie Shockley](#)

we make midnight a maquette of the year:  
frostlight glinting off snow to solemnize  
the vows we offer to ourselves in near  
silence: the competition shimmerwise

of champagne and chandeliers to attract  
laughter and cheers: the glow from the fireplace  
reflecting the burning intra-red pact  
between beloveds: we cosset the space

of a fey hour, anxious gods molding our  
hoped-for adams with this temporal clay:

each of us edacious for shining or  
rash enough to think sacrifice will stay

this fugacious time: while stillness suspends  
vitality in balance, as passions  
struggle with passions for sway, the mind wends  
towards what's to come: a callithump of fashions,

ersatz smiles, crowded days: a bloodless cut  
that severs soul from bone: a long aching  
quiet in which we will hear nothing but  
the clean crack of our promises breaking.

## **the way we live now ::**

By [Evie Shockley](#)

when the cultivators of corpses are busy seeding  
plague across vast acres of the land, choking schools  
and churches in the motley toxins of grief, breeding  
virile shoots of violence so soon verdant even fools  
fear to tread in their wake :: when all known tools  
of resistance are clutched in the hands of the vile  
like a wilting bouquet, cut from their roots, while

the disempowered slice smiles across their own faces  
and hide the wet knives in writhing thickets of hair  
for future use :: when breathing in the ashen traces  
of dreams deferred, the detonator's ticking a queer  
echo that amplifies instead of fading :: when there-  
you-are is where-you-were and the sunset groans  
into the atlantic, setting blue fire to dark white bones.

## **Least Concern**

By [John Shoptaw](#)

Chimerical, the rhinoceros egret,  
its keratin dehorned in South Africa  
and container-shipped to Vietnam or China  
where it's ground by aphrodisiasts  
and snorted by affluent boneheads,

metamorphs into the hippopotamus egret,  
the elephant, Cape buffalo, zebra, giraffe,  
the ostrich, and the camel egret,

the deep-domed tortoise, and in the Americas  
the cow heron or cattle egret.

Ranging like wildfire over the last century,  
a migration prodded by the transmutation  
of forests into ranches, the cattle egret  
writhes and champs and tilts and plods  
and darts in cursive at grasshoppers.

And where its livestock gets concentrated,  
decapitated, tenderized, charred, whatever,  
the *Bubulcus ibis* or cattleman wader,  
capitalizing on a field without cattle,  
reinvents itself as the tractor egret

though the unattached bird is emblem enough  
of the other end of extinction, ignition,  
when not just its shaggy breeding crest  
and breast plumage go up in flame  
but its legs, beak, lores, and irises catch color.

## Pilgrims

By [Jacob Shores-Argüello](#)

*Costa Rica*

The bus arrives in the orchid heat,  
in the place where coffee grows  
like rubies in the valley's black soil.  
We disembark, walk in twos so we  
don't slip on the genesis mud.  
The woman next to me carries  
three cellphones as gifts for cousins  
and a bucket of chicken to share.  
How is it that I have come this far  
with nothing, that I am empty-  
handed in this country of blessings?  
A procession of rust-colored macaws  
glides above us. Their ashy shadows  
draw crosses onto all of our heads.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

# The Gentle Art of Shabby Dressing

By [Spencer Short](#)

There's nothing dandier than threadbare threads  
worn by a discerning shabby dresser.  
A collar's fret or subtle fray is not *lesser*  
because it's worn away but models instead

the bespoke tailoring of time itself.  
Done poorly—the gentleman farmer's  
piecemeal pastoral, that NoHo charmer's  
duct-taped boots—it's like an unread bookshelf

of secondhand prose: a too-studied pose.  
Done well, it draws you in to draw you near,  
reveals the intricate pattern in the years'  
inexorable ravel. Between *decompose*

and *deconstruct*, what seemed a foppish quirk  
grows wise. Design undone. We wear time's work.

## Sonnet 1

By [Sir Philip Sidney](#)

Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show,  
That she, dear she, might take some pleasure of my pain,  
Pleasure might cause her read, reading might make her know,  
Knowledge might pity win, and pity grace obtain,—  
I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,  
Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain,  
Oft turning others' leaves, to see if thence would flow  
Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sunburned brain.  
But words came halting forth, wanting Invention's stay:  
Invention, Nature's child, fled step-dame Study's blows,  
And others' feet still seemed but strangers in my way.  
Thus great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes,  
Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite:  
“Fool,” said my Muse to me, “look in thy heart and write.”

## What did you learn here? (Old Man House)

By [Cedar Sigo](#)

*For Joy Harjo*

How to fall asleep easily on the beach, to dig clams, to dream a net made of nettles, a medicine of marsh tea boiled out to the open air, a memory of cedar bark coiled, resting for months in cold water to be fashioned into our so-called lifestyle, clothes for ceremony as well as our dailiness, canoe bailers, diapers, we used the wood for our half-mile longhouse and totems, dried fish, a hard smoke, wooden oval plates that hooked together filled with clear oil of salmon, to wet our palates and smooth our bodies. A shawl of woolly dog (now extinct) they were bred on tiny islands we can still identify, Tatoosh Island off of Cape Flattery, where there were whaling tribes too, the Makah, one of whose villages collapsed, preserved in silt (later unearthed) and how else? Which other ceremonies or necessary edges of objects? Our ivory needles, otter pelts, mat creasers, our dances. What else do you remember dreaming of? A kind of rake to skim the waves, to catch tiny fish on rows of twisted nails.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Poetry

By [Lydia Huntley Sigourney](#)

Morn on her rosy couch awoke,  
    Enchantment led the hour,  
And mirth and music drank the dews  
    That freshen'd Beauty's flower,  
Then from her bower of deep delight,  
    I heard a young girl sing,  
'Oh, speak no ill of poetry,  
    For 'tis a holy thing.'

The Sun in noon-day heat rose high,  
    And on the heaving breast,  
I saw a weary pilgrim toil  
    Unpitied and unblest,  
Yet still in trembling measures flow'd  
    Forth from a broken string,  
'Oh, speak no ill of poetry,  
    For 'tis a holy thing.'

'Twas night, and Death the curtains drew,  
    'Mid agony severe,  
While there a willing spirit went  
    Home to a glorious sphere,  
Yet still it sigh'd, even when was spread  
    The waiting Angel's wing,  
'Oh, speak no ill of poetry,  
    For 'tis a holy thing.'

# Song of Weights and Measurements

By [Martha Silano](#)

For there is a dram.  
For there is a farthing.  
A bushel for your thoughts.  
A hand for your withered heights.

For I have jouled along attempting  
to quire and wisp.

For I have sized up a mountain's meters,  
come down jiffy by shake to the tune  
of leagues and stones.

For once I was your peckish darling.

For once there was the measure  
of what an ox could plow  
in a single morning.

For once the fother, the reed, the palm.

For one megalithic year I fixed my gaze  
on the smiling meniscus, against the gray wall  
of graduated cylinder.

For once I measured ten out of ten  
on the scale of pain.

For I knew that soon I'd kiss good-bye  
the bovine, the hide and hundredweight.

For in each pinch of salt, a whisper of doubt,  
for in each medieval moment, emotion,

like an unruly cough syrup bottle,  
uncapped. For though I dutifully swallowed

my banana doses, ascended, from welcome  
to lanthorn, three barleycorns at a time,

I could not tackle the trudging, trenchant cart.

For now I am forty rods from your chain and bolt.  
For now I am my six-sacked self.

# Past-Lives Therapy

By [Charles Simic](#)

They explained to me the bloody bandages  
On the floor in the maternity ward in Rochester, N.Y.,  
Cured the backache I acquired bowing to my old master,  
Made me stop putting thumbtacks round my bed.

They showed me an officer on horseback,  
Waving a saber next to a burning farmhouse  
And a barefoot woman in a nightgown,  
Throwing stones after him and calling him Lucifer.

I was a straw-headed boy in patched overalls.  
Come dark a chicken would roost in my hair.  
Some even laid eggs as I played my ukulele  
And my mother and father crossed themselves.

Next, I saw myself inside an abandoned gas station  
Constructing a spaceship out of a coffin,  
Red traffic cone, cement mixer and ear warmers,  
When a church lady fainted seeing me in my underwear.

Some days, however, they opened door after door,  
Always to a different room, and could not find me.  
There'd be only a small squeak now and then,  
As if a miner's canary got caught in a mousetrap.

# The Wooden Toy

By [Charles Simic](#)

## 1

The brightly-painted horse  
Had a boy's face,  
And four small wheels  
Under his feet,

Plus a long string  
To pull him by this way and that  
Across the floor,  
Should you care to.

A string in-waiting  
That slipped away

In many wiles  
From each and every try.

**2**

Knock and they'll answer,  
Mother told me.

So I climbed four flights of stairs  
And went in unannounced.

And found a small wooden toy  
For the taking

In the ensuing emptiness  
And the fading daylight

That still gives me a shudder  
As if I held the key to mysteries in my hand.

**3**

Where's the Lost and Found Department,  
And the quiet entry,  
The undeveloped film  
Of the few clear moments  
Of our blurred lives?

Where's the drop of blood  
And the teeny nail  
That pricked my finger  
As I bent down to touch the toy

And caught its eye?

**4**

Evening light,

Make me a Sunday  
Go-to meeting shadow  
For my toy.

My dearest memories are  
Steep stair-wells  
In dusty buildings

On dead-end streets,

Where I talk to the walls  
And closed doors  
As if they understood me.

5

The wooden toy sitting pretty.

No, quieter than that.

Like the sound of eyebrows  
Raised by a villain  
In a silent movie.

*Psst*, someone said behind my back.

## In the Woods

By [Kathryn Simmonds](#)

The baby sleeps.  
Sunlight plays upon my lap, through doily leaves a black lab comes,  
a scotty goes, the day wears on, the baby wakes.

The good birds sing,  
invisible or seldom seen, in hidden kingdoms, grateful for the in-  
between. The baby sleeps. Elsewhere the Queen rolls by

on gusts of cheer —  
ladies wave and bless her reign. The baby frets. The baby feeds.  
The end of lunch, a daytime moon. The leaves

are lightly tinkered with.  
It's spring? No, autumn? Afternoon? We've sat so long, we've walked  
so far. The woods in shade, the woods in sun, the singing birds,

the noble trees.  
The child is grown. The child is gone. The black lab comes,  
his circuit done. His mistress coils his scarlet lead.

# Russell Market

By [Maurya Simon](#)

What I want most is what I deeply fear:  
loss of self; yet here I stand, a “memsahib,”  
all decked out in wonder, and still a stranger  
amid the harvest, old gaffar at my side.

Here’s a pandit preaching in the flower stall:  
he turns funeral wreaths into wheels of rapture.  
I must shrug off my notion of knowing anything  
of substance about the world, about the spirit.

Sparrows dart between the columns like music.  
Huge pupae, bananas split their golden skins;  
flies moisten their hands in bands of dew.  
Lepers limp by on crutches, in slow motion.

Where is there order in the world? None,  
none, I think—no order, only spirals of power.  
The pyramids of onion, guava, melon—all defy  
my reason: they shine like galaxy-driven planets.

A balancing scale becomes a barge of plenty,  
a cornucopia endlessly filling up and emptying.  
The wages of sin are more sin: virtue’s wages,  
more virtue—and all such earnings, weightless.

I’ve forgotten my errand; I float now through  
myself like a howl through a phantom mouth—  
the world’s an illusory marketplace where I  
must bargain hardest for what I hope I’m worth.

# On the Lawn at the Villa

By [Louis Simpson](#)

On the lawn at the villa—  
That’s the way to start, eh, reader?  
We know where we stand—somewhere expensive—  
You and I *imperturbes*, as Walt would say,  
Before the diversions of wealth, you and I *engagés*.

On the lawn at the villa  
Sat a manufacturer of explosives,  
His wife from Paris,

And a young man named Bruno,

And myself, being American,  
Willing to talk to these malefactors,  
The manufacturer of explosives, and so on,  
But somehow superior. By that I mean democratic.  
It's complicated, being an American,  
Having the money and the bad conscience, both at the same time.  
Perhaps, after all, this is not the right subject for a poem.

We were all sitting there paralyzed  
In the hot Tuscan afternoon,  
And the bodies of the machine-gun crew were draped over the balcony.  
So we sat there all afternoon.

## **To the Western World**

By [Louis Simpson](#)

A siren sang, and Europe turned away  
From the high castle and the shepherd's crook.  
Three caravels went sailing to Cathay  
On the strange ocean, and the captains shook  
Their banners out across the Mexique Bay.

And in our early days we did the same.  
Remembering our fathers in their wreck  
We crossed the sea from Palos where they came  
And saw, enormous to the little deck,  
A shore in silence waiting for a name.

The treasures of Cathay were never found.  
In this America, this wilderness  
Where the axe echoes with a lonely sound,  
The generations labor to possess  
And grave by grave we civilize the ground.

## **The Ragged and the Beautiful**

By [Safia Sinclair](#)

Doubt is a storming bull, crashing through  
the blue-wide windows of myself. Here in the heart  
of my heart where it never stops raining,

I am an outsider looking in. But in the garden

of my good days, no body is wrong. Here every  
flower grows ragged and sideways and always

beautiful. We bloom with the outcasts,  
our soon-to-be sunlit, we dreamers. We are strange  
and unbelonging. Yes. We are just enough

of ourselves to catch the wind in our feathers,  
and fly so perfectly away.

## The Bookshelf of the God of Infinite Space

By [Jeffrey Skinner](#)

You would expect an uncountable number,  
Acres and acres of books in rows  
Like wheat or gold bullion. Or that the words just  
Appear in the mind, like banner headlines.  
In fact there is one shelf  
Holding a modest number, ten or twelve volumes.  
No dust jackets, because — no dust.  
Covers made of gold or skin  
Or golden skin, or creosote or rain-  
Soaked macadam, or some  
Mix of salt & glass. You turn a page  
& mountains rise, clouds drawn by children  
Bubble in the sky, you are twenty  
Again, trying to read a map  
Dissolving in your hands. I say *You* & mean  
*Me*, say *God* & mean *Librarian* — who after long research  
Offers you a glass of water and an apple —  
*You*, grateful to discover your name,  
A footnote in that book.

## Epistle to Mrs. Tyler

By [Christopher Smart](#)

It ever was allow'd, dear Madam,  
Ev'n from the days of father Adam,  
Of all perfection flesh is heir to,  
Fair patience is the gentlest virtue;  
This is a truth our grandames teach,  
Our poets sing, and parsons preach;  
Yet after all, dear Moll, the fact is  
We seldom put it into practice;

I'll warrant (if one knew the truth)  
You've call'd me many an idle youth,  
And styled me rude ungrateful bear,  
Enough to make a parson swear.

I shall not make a long oration  
In order for my vindication,  
For what the plague can I say more  
Than lazy dogs have done before;  
Such stuff is nought but mere tautology,  
And so take that for my apology.

First then for custards, my dear Mary,  
The produce of your dainty dairy,  
For stew'd, for bak'd, for boil'd, for roast,  
And all the teas and all the toast;  
With thankful tongue and bowing attitude,  
I here present you with my gratitude:  
Next for you apples, pears and plums  
Acknowledgment in order comes;  
For wine, for ale, for fowl, for fish—for  
Ev'n all one's appetite can wish for:  
But O ye pens, and O ye pencils,  
And all ye scribbling utensils,  
Say in what words and in what metre,  
Shall unfeign'd admiration greet her,  
For that rich banquet so refin'd  
Her conversation gave the mind;  
The solid meal of sense and worth,  
Set off by the desert of mirth;  
Wit's fruit and pleasure's genial bowl,  
And all the joyous flow of soul;  
For these, and every kind ingredient  
That form'd your love—your most obedient.

## **Oh, Hope! Thou soother sweet of human woes**

By [Charlotte Smith](#)

Oh, Hope! thou soother sweet of human woes!  
How shall I lure thee to my haunts forlorn!  
For me wilt thou renew the withered rose,  
And clear my painful path of pointed thorn?  
Ah come, sweet nymph! in smiles and softness drest,  
Like the young hours that lead the tender year  
Enchantress come! and charm my cares to rest:

Alas! the flatterer flies, and will not hear!  
A prey to fear, anxiety, and pain,  
Must I a sad existence still deplore?  
Lo! the flowers fade, but all the thorns remain,  
‘For me the vernal garland blooms no more.’  
Come then, ‘pale Misery’s love!’ be thou my cure,  
And I will bless thee, who though slow art sure.

## **Sonnet: On Being Cautioned Against Walking on an Headland Overlooking the Sea, Because It Was Frequented by a Lunatic**

By [Charlotte Smith](#)

Is there a solitary wretch who hies  
To the tall cliff, with starting pace or slow,  
And, measuring, views with wild and hollow eyes  
Its distance from the waves that chide below;  
Who, as the sea-born gale with frequent sighs  
Chills his cold bed upon the mountain turf,  
With hoarse, half-uttered lamentation, lies  
Murmuring responses to the dashing surf?  
In moody sadness, on the giddy brink,  
I see him more with envy than with fear;  
*He* has no *nice felicities* that shrink  
From giant horrors; wildly wandering here,  
He seems (uncursed with reason) not to know  
The depth or the duration of his woe.

## **alternate names for black boys**

By [Danez Smith](#)

1. smoke above the burning bush
2. archnemesis of summer night
3. first son of soil
4. coal awaiting spark & wind
5. guilty until proven dead
6. oil heavy starlight
7. monster until proven ghost
8. gone
9. phoenix who forgets to un-ash
10. going, going, gone
11. gods of shovels & black veils
12. what once passed for kindling

13. fireworks at dawn
14. brilliant, shadow hued coral
15. (I thought to leave this blank  
but who am I to name us nothing?)
16. prayer who learned to bite & sprint
17. a mother's joy & clutched breath

## How Dark the Beginning

By [Maggie Smith](#)

All we ever talk of is light—  
*let there be light, there was light then,*

*good light*—but what I consider  
dawn is darker than all that.

So many hours between the day  
receding and what we recognize

as morning, the sun cresting  
like a wave that won't break

over us—as if light were protective,  
as if no hearts were flayed,

no bodies broken on a day  
like today. In any film,

the sunrise tells us everything  
will be all right. Danger wouldn't

dare show up now, dragging  
its shadow across the screen.

We talk so much of light, please  
let me speak on behalf

of the good dark. Let us  
talk more of how dark

the beginning of a day is.

# Threshold

By [Maggie Smith](#)

You want a door you can be  
on both sides of at once.

You want to be  
on both sides of here

and there, now and then,  
together and—(what

did we call the life  
we would wish back?

The old life? The before?)  
alone. But any open

space may be  
a threshold, an arch

of entering and leaving.  
Crossing a field, wading

through nothing  
but timothy grass,

imagine yourself passing from  
and into. Passing through

doorway after  
doorway after doorway.

# Hip-Hop Ghazal

By [Patricia Smith](#)

Gotta love us brown girls, munching on fat, swinging blue hips,  
decked out in shells and splashes, Lawdie, bringing them woo hips.

As the jukebox teases, watch my sistas throat the heartbreak,  
inhaling bassline, cracking backbone and singing thru hips.

Like something boneless, we glide silent, seeping 'tween floorboards,  
wrapping around the hims, and *ooh wee*, clinging like glue hips.

Engines grinding, rotating, smokin', gotta pull back some.  
Natural minds are lost at the mere sight of ringing true hips.

Gotta love us girls, just struttin' down Manhattan streets  
killing the menfolk with a dose of that stinging view. Hips.

Crying 'bout getting old—Patricia, you need to get up off  
what God gave you. Say a prayer and start slinging. Cue hips.

## **Katrina**

By [Patricia Smith](#)

I was birthed restless and elsewhere

gut dragging and bulging with ball lightning, slush,  
broke through with branches, steel

I was bitch-monikered, hipped, I hefted  
a whip rain, a swirling sheet of grit.

Scraping toward the first of you, hungering for wood, walls,  
unturned skin. With shifting and frantic mouth, I loudly loved  
the slow bones

of elders, fools, and willows.

## **Siblings**

By [Patricia Smith](#)

*Hurricanes, 2005*

Arlene learned to dance backwards in heels that were too high.  
Bret prayed for a shaggy mustache made of mud and hair.  
Cindy just couldn't keep her windy legs together.  
Dennis never learned to swim.  
Emily whispered her gusts into a thousand skins.  
Franklin, farsighted and anxious, bumbled villages.  
Gert spat her matronly name against a city's flat face.  
Harvey hurled a wailing child high.  
Irene, the baby girl, threw pounding tantrums.  
José liked the whip sound of slapping.  
Lee just craved the whip.  
Maria's thunder skirts flew high when she danced.  
Nate was mannered and practical. He stormed precisely.

Ophelia nibbled weirdly on the tips of depressions.  
Philippe slept too late, flailing on a wronged ocean.  
Rita was a vicious flirt. She woke Philippe with rumors.  
Stan was born business, a gobbler of steel.  
Tammy crooned country, getting the words all wrong.  
Vince died before anyone could remember his name.  
Wilma opened her maw wide, flashing rot.

None of them talked about Katrina.  
She was their odd sister,  
the blood dazzler.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Do Not!

By [Stevie Smith](#)

Do not despair of man, and do not scold him,  
Who are you that you should so lightly hold him?  
Are you not also a man, and in your heart  
Are there not warlike thoughts and fear and smart?  
Are you not also afraid and in fear cruel,  
Do you not think of yourself as usual,  
Faint for ambition, desire to be loved,  
Prick at a virtuous thought by beauty moved?  
You love your wife, you hold your children dear,  
Then say not that Man is vile, but say they are.  
But they are not. So is your judgement shown  
Presumptuous, false, quite vain, merely your own  
Sadness for failed ambition set outside,  
Made a philosophy of, prinked, beautified  
In noble dress and into the world sent out  
To run with the ill it most pretends to rout.  
Oh know your own heart, that heart's not wholly evil,  
And from the particular judge the general,  
If judge you must, but with compassion see life,  
Or else, of yourself despairing, flee strife.

## The Heavenly City

By [Stevie Smith](#)

I sigh for the heavenly country,  
Where the heavenly people pass,

And the sea is as quiet as a mirror  
Of beautiful beautiful glass.

I walk in the heavenly field,  
With lilies and poppies bright,  
I am dressed in a heavenly coat  
Of polished white.

When I walk in the heavenly parkland  
My feet on the pasture are bare,  
Tall waves the grass, but no harmful  
Creature is there.

At night I fly over the housetops,  
And stand on the bright moony beams;  
Gold are all heaven's rivers,  
And silver her streams.

## **Not Waving but Drowning**

By [Stevie Smith](#)

Nobody heard him, the dead man,  
But still he lay moaning:  
I was much further out than you thought  
And not waving but drowning.

Poor chap, he always loved larking  
And now he's dead  
It must have been too cold for him his heart gave way,  
They said.

Oh, no no no, it was too cold always  
(Still the dead one lay moaning)  
I was much too far out all my life  
And not waving but drowning.

## **Declaration**

By [Tracy K. Smith](#)

*He has*

*sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people*

*He has plundered our—*

*ravaged our—*

*destroyed the lives of our—*

*taking away our—*

*abolishing our most valuable—*

*and altering fundamentally the Forms of our—*

*In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for  
Redress in the most humble terms:*

*Our repeated  
Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury.*

*We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration  
and settlement here.*

*—taken Captive*

*on the high Seas*

*to bear—*

## **Sci-Fi**

By [Tracy K. Smith](#)

There will be no edges, but curves.  
Clean lines pointing only forward.

History, with its hard spine & dog-eared  
Corners, will be replaced with nuance,

Just like the dinosaurs gave way  
To mounds and mounds of ice.

Women will still be women, but  
The distinction will be empty. Sex,

Having outlived every threat, will gratify  
Only the mind, which is where it will exist.

For kicks, we'll dance for ourselves  
Before mirrors studded with golden bulbs.

The oldest among us will recognize that glow—  
But the word *sun* will have been re-assigned

To the Standard Uranium-Neutralizing device  
Found in households and nursing homes.

And yes, we'll live to be much older, thanks  
To popular consensus. Weightless, unhinged,

Eons from even our own moon, we'll drift  
In the haze of space, which will be, once

And for all, scrutable and safe.

## Semi-Splendid

By [Tracy K. Smith](#)

You flinch. Something flickers, not fleeing your face. My  
Heart hammers at the ceiling, telling my tongue  
To turn it down. Too late. The something climbs, leaps, is  
Falling now across us like the prank of an icy, brainy  
Lord. I chose the wrong word. I am wrong for not choosing  
Merely to smile, to pull you toward me and away from  
What you think of as that other me, who wanders lost among ...  
Among whom? The many? The rare? I wish you didn't care.

I watch you watching her. Her very shadow is a rage  
That trashes the rooms of your eyes. Do you claim surprise  
At what she wants, the poor girl, pelted with despair,  
Who flits from grief to grief? Isn't it you she seeks? And  
If you blame her, know that she blames you for choosing  
Not her, but me. Love is never fair. But do we — should we — care?

## The Universe as Primal Scream

By [Tracy K. Smith](#)

5pm on the nose. They open their mouths  
And it rolls out: high, shrill and metallic.  
First the boy, then his sister. Occasionally,  
They both let loose at once, and I think  
Of putting on my shoes to go up and see

Whether it is merely an experiment  
Their parents have been conducting  
Upon the good crystal, which must surely  
Lie shattered to dust on the floor.

Maybe the mother is still proud  
Of the four pink lungs she nursed  
To such might. Perhaps, if they hit  
The magic decibel, the whole building  
Will lift-off, and we'll ride to glory  
Like Elijah. If this is it—if this is what  
Their cries are cocked toward—let the sky  
Pass from blue, to red, to molten gold,  
To black. Let the heaven we inherit approach.

Whether it is our dead in Old Testament robes,  
Or a door opening onto the roiling infinity of space.  
Whether it will bend down to greet us like a father,  
Or swallow us like a furnace. I'm ready  
To meet what refuses to let us keep anything  
For long. What teases us with blessings,  
Bends us with grief. Wizard, thief, the great  
Wind rushing to knock our mirrors to the floor,  
To sweep our short lives clean. How mean

Our racket seems beside it. My stereo on shuffle.  
The neighbor chopping onions through a wall.  
All of it just a hiccough against what may never  
Come for us. And the kids upstairs still at it,  
Screaming like the Dawn of Man, as if something  
They have no name for has begun to insist  
Upon being born.

## **Wade in the Water**

By [Tracy K. Smith](#)

*for the Geechee Gullah Ring Shouters*

One of the women greeted me.  
I love you, she said. She didn't  
Know me, but I believed her,  
And a terrible new ache  
Rolled over in my chest,  
Like in a room where the drapes  
Have been swept back. I love you,

I love you, as she continued  
Down the hall past other strangers,  
Each feeling pierced suddenly  
By pillars of heavy light.  
I love you, throughout  
The performance, in every  
Handclap, every stomp.  
I love you in the rusted iron  
Chains someone was made  
To drag until love let them be  
Unclasped and left empty  
In the center of the ring.  
I love you in the water  
Where they pretended to wade,  
Singing that old blood-deep song  
That dragged us to those banks  
And cast us in. I love you,  
The angles of it scraping at  
Each throat, shouldering past  
The swirling dust motes  
In those beams of light  
That whatever we now knew  
We could let ourselves feel, knew  
To climb. O Woods—O Dogs—  
O Tree—O Gun—O *Girl*, run—  
O Miraculous Many Gone—  
O Lord—O Lord—O Lord—  
Is this love the trouble you promised?

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Heart Butte, Montana

By [M. L. Smoker](#)

The unsympathetic wind, how she has evaded me for years now,  
leaving a guileless shell and no way to navigate. Once when I stood  
on a plateau of earth just at the moment before the dangerous,  
jutting peaks converged upon the lilting sway of grasslands, I almost  
found a way back. There, the sky, quite possibly all the elements,  
caused the rock and soil and vegetation to congregate. Their prayer  
was not new and so faint I could hardly discern. Simple remembrances,  
like a tiny, syncopated chorus calling everyone home: across  
a thousand eastward miles, and what little wind was left at my back.  
But I could not move. And then the music was gone.

All that was left were the spring time faces of mountains, gazing down,  
their last patches of snow, luminous. I dreamed of becoming snow melt,  
gliding down the slope and in to the valley. With the promise,  
an assurance, that there is always a way to become bird, tree, water again.

## The Campus on the Hill

By [W. D. Snodgrass](#)

Up the reputable walks of old established trees  
They stalk, children of the *nouveaux riches*; chimes  
Of the tall Clock Tower drench their heads in blessing:  
“I don't wanna play at your house;  
I don't like you any more.”  
My house stands opposite, on the other hill,  
Among meadows, with the orchard fences down and falling;  
Deer come almost to the door.  
You cannot see it, even in this clearest morning.  
White birds hang in the air between  
Over the garbage landfill and those homes thereto adjacent,  
Hovering slowly, turning, settling down  
Like the flakes sifting imperceptibly onto the little town  
In a waterball of glass.  
And yet, this morning, beyond this quiet scene,  
The floating birds, the backyards of the poor,  
Beyond the shopping plaza, the dead canal, the hillside lying tilted in the air,

Tomorrow has broken out today:  
Riot in Algeria, in Cyprus, in Alabama;  
Aged in wrong, the empires are declining,  
And China gathers, soundlessly, like evidence.  
What shall I say to the young on such a morning?—  
Mind is the one salvation?—also grammar?—  
No; my little ones lean not toward revolt. They  
Are the Whites, the vaguely furiously driven, who resist  
Their souls with such passivity  
As would make Quakers swear. All day, dear Lord, all day  
They wear their godhead lightly.  
They look out from their hill and say,  
To themselves, “We have nowhere to go but down;  
The great destination is to stay.”  
Surely the nations will be reasonable;  
They look at the world—don't they?—the world's way?  
The clock just now has nothing more to say.

# A Locked House

By [W. D. Snodgrass](#)

As we drove back, crossing the hill,  
The house still  
Hidden in the trees, I always thought—  
A fool's fear—that it might have caught  
Fire, someone could have broken in.  
As if things must have been  
Too good here. Still, we always found  
It locked tight, safe and sound.

I mentioned that, once, as a joke;  
No doubt we spoke  
Of the absurdity  
To fear some dour god's jealousy  
Of our good fortune. From the farm  
Next door, our neighbors saw no harm  
Came to the things we cared for here.  
What did we have to fear?

Maybe I should have thought: all  
Such things rot, fall—  
Barns, houses, furniture.  
We two are stronger than we were  
Apart; we've grown  
Together. Everything we own  
Can burn; we know what counts—some such  
Idea. We said as much.

We'd watched friends driven to betray;  
Felt that love drained away  
Some self they need.  
We'd said love, like a growth, can feed  
On hate we turn in and disguise;  
We warned ourselves. That you might despise  
Me—hate all we both loved best—  
None of us ever guessed.

The house still stands, locked, as it stood  
Untouched a good  
Two years after you went.  
Some things passed in the settlement;  
Some things slipped away. Enough's left  
That I come back sometimes. The theft  
And vandalism were our own.

Maybe we should have known.

## Piute Creek

By [Gary Snyder](#)

One granite ridge  
A tree, would be enough  
Or even a rock, a small creek,  
A bark shred in a pool.  
Hill beyond hill, folded and twisted  
Tough trees crammed  
In thin stone fractures  
A huge moon on it all, is too much.  
The mind wanders. A million  
Summers, night air still and the rocks  
Warm. Sky over endless mountains.  
All the junk that goes with being human  
Drops away, hard rock wavers  
Even the heavy present seems to fail  
This bubble of a heart.  
Words and books  
Like a small creek off a high ledge  
Gone in the dry air.

A clear, attentive mind  
Has no meaning but that  
Which sees is truly seen.  
No one loves rock, yet we are here.  
Night chills. A flick  
In the moonlight  
Slips into Juniper shadow:  
Back there unseen  
Cold proud eyes  
Of Cougar or Coyote  
Watch me rise and go.

## Ikebana

By [Cathy Song](#)

To prepare the body,  
aim for the translucent perfection  
you find in the sliced shavings  
of a pickled turnip.  
In order for this to happen,

you must avoid the sun,  
protect the face  
under a paper parasol  
until it is bruised white  
like the skin of lilies.  
Use white soap  
from a blue porcelain  
dish for this.

Restrict yourself.  
Eat the whites of things:  
tender bamboo shoots,  
the veins of the young iris,  
the clouded eye of a fish.

Then wrap the body,  
as if it were a perfumed gift,  
in pieces of silk  
held together with invisible threads  
like a kite, weighing no more  
than a handful of crushed chrysanthemums.  
Light enough to float in the wind.  
You want the effect  
of koi moving through water.

When the light leaves  
the room, twist lilacs  
into the lacquered hair  
piled high like a complicated shrine.  
There should be tiny bells  
inserted somewhere  
in the web of hair  
to imitate crickets  
singing in a hidden grove.

Reveal the nape of the neck,  
your beauty spot.  
Hold the arrangement.  
If your spine slacks  
and you feel faint,  
remember the hand-picked flower  
set in the front alcove,  
which, just this morning,  
you so skillfully wired into place.  
How poised it is!  
Petal and leaf

curving like a fan,  
the stem snipped and wedged  
into the metal base—  
to appear like a spontaneous accident.

## Self-Inquiry before the Job Interview

By [Gary Soto](#)

Did you sneeze?  
Yes, I rid myself of the imposter inside me.

Did you iron your shirt?  
Yes, I used the steam of mother's hate.

Did you wash your hands?  
Yes, I learned my hygiene from a raccoon.

I prayed on my knees, and my knees answered with pain.  
I gargled. I polished my shoes until I saw who I was.  
I inflated my résumé by employing my middle name.

I walked to my interview, early,  
The sun like a ring on an electric stove.  
I patted my hair when I entered the wind of a revolving door.  
The guard said, For a guy like you, it's the 19th floor.

The economy was up. Flags whipped in every city plaza  
In America. This I saw for myself as I rode the elevator,  
Empty because everyone had a job but me.

Did you clean your ears?  
Yes, I heard my fate in the drinking fountain's idiotic drivel.

Did you slice a banana into your daily mush?  
I added a pinch of salt, two raisins to sweeten my breath.

Did you remember your pen?  
I remembered my fingers when the elevator opened.

I shook hands that dripped like a dirty sea.  
I found a chair and desk. My name tag said my name.  
Through the glass ceiling, I saw the heavy rumps of CEOs.  
Outside my window, the sun was a burning stove,  
All of us pushing papers  
To keep it going.

# At the Carnival

By [Anne Spencer](#)

Gay little Girl-of-the-Diving-Tank,  
I desire a name for you,  
Nice, as a right glove fits;  
For you—who amid the malodorous  
Mechanics of this unlovely thing,  
Are darling of spirit and form.  
I know you—a glance, and what you are  
Sits-by-the-fire in my heart.  
My Limousine-Lady knows you, or  
Why does the slant-envy of her eye mark  
Your straight air and radiant inclusive smile?  
Guilt pins a fig-leaf; Innocence is its own adorning.  
The bull-necked man knows you—this first time  
His itching flesh sees form divine and vibrant health  
And thinks not of his avocation.  
I came incuriously—  
Set on no diversion save that my mind  
Might safely nurse its brood of misdeeds  
In the presence of a blind crowd.  
The color of life was gray.  
Everywhere the setting seemed right  
For my mood. Here the sausage and garlic booth  
Sent unholy incense skyward;  
There a quivering female-thing  
Gestured assignations, and lied  
To call it dancing;  
There, too, were games of chance  
With chances for none;  
But oh! Girl-of-the-Tank, at last!  
Gleaming Girl, how intimately pure and free  
The gaze you send the crowd,  
As though you know the dearth of beauty  
In its sordid life.  
We need you—my Limousine-Lady,  
The bull-necked man and I.  
Seeing you here brave and water-clean,  
Leaven for the heavy ones of earth,  
I am swift to feel that what makes  
The plodder glad is good; and  
Whatever is good is God.  
The wonder is that you are here;  
I have seen the queer in queer places,  
But never before a heaven-fed

Naiad of the Carnival-Tank!  
Little Diver, Destiny for you,  
Like as for me, is shod in silence;  
Years may seep into your soul  
The bacilli of the usual and the expedient;  
I implore Neptune to claim his child to-day!

## **['Joy of my life, full oft for loving you']**

By [Edmund Spenser](#)

Joy of my life, full oft for loving you  
I bless my lot, that was so lucky placed:  
But then the more your own mishap I rue,  
That are so much by so mean love embased.  
For had the equal heavens so much you graced  
In this as in the rest, ye might invent  
Some heavenly wit, whose verse could have enchased  
Your glorious name in golden monument.  
But since ye deign'd so goodly to relent  
To me your thrall, in whom is little worth,  
That little that I am shall all be spent  
In setting your immortal praises forth;  
Whose lofty argument uplifting me  
Shall lift you up unto an high degree.

## **Pome**

By [Elizabeth Spires](#)

From flowering gnarled trees  
they come, weighing down  
the branches, dropping  
with a soft sound onto  
the loamy ground. Falling  
and fallen. That's a pome.

Common as an apple. Or  
more rare. A quince or pear.  
A knife paring away soft skin  
exposes tart sweet flesh.  
And deeper in, five seeds in a core  
are there to make more pomes.

Look how it fits in my hand.  
What to do? What to do?

I could give it to you.  
Or leave it on the table  
with a note both true and untrue:  
*Ceci n'est pas un poème.*

I could paint it as a still life,  
a small window of light  
in the top right corner  
(only a dab of the whitest white),  
a place to peer in and watch it  
change and darken as pomes will do.

O I remember days....  
Climbing the branches of a tree  
ripe and heavy with pomes.  
Taking whatever I wanted.  
There were always enough then.  
Always enough.

## What Women Are Made Of

By [Bianca Lynne Spriggs](#)

*There are many kinds of open.*  
— Audre Lorde

We are all ventricle, spine, lung, larynx, and gut.  
Clavicle and nape, what lies forked in an open palm;

we are follicle and temple. We are ankle, arch,  
sole. Pore and rib, pelvis and root

and tongue. We are wishbone and gland and molar  
and lobe. We are hippocampus and exposed nerve

and cornea. Areola, pigment, melanin, and nails.  
Varicose. Cellulite. Divining rod. Sinew and tissue,

saliva and silt. We are blood and salt, clay and aquifer.  
We are breath and flame and stratosphere. Palimpsest

and bibelot and cloisonné fine lines. Marigold, hydrangea,  
and dimple. Nightlight, satellite, and stubble. We are

pinnacle, plummet, dark circles, and dark matter.  
A constellation of freckles and specters and miracles

and lashes. Both bent and erect, we are all give  
and give back. We are volta and girder. Make an incision

in our nectary and Painted Ladies sail forth, riding the back  
of a warm wind, plumed with love and things like love.

Crack us down to the marrow, and you may find us full  
of cicada husks and sand dollars and salted maple taffy

weary of welding together our daydreams. All sweet tea,  
razor blades, carbon, and patchwork quilts of *Good God!*

and *Lord have mercy!* Our hands remember how to turn  
the earth before we do. Our intestinal fortitude? Cumulonimbus

streaked with saffron light. Our foundation? Not in our limbs  
or hips; this comes first as an amen, a hallelujah, a suckling,

swaddled psalm sung at the cosmos's breast. You want to  
know what women are made of? Open wide and find out.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Hush

By [David St. John](#)

*for my son*

The way a tired Chippewa woman  
Who's lost a child gathers up black feathers,  
Black quills & leaves  
That she wraps & swaddles in a little bale, a shag  
Cocoon she carries with her & speaks to always  
As if it were the child,  
Until she knows the soul has grown fat & clever,  
That the child can find its own way at last;  
Well, I go everywhere  
Picking the dust out of the dust, scraping the breezes  
Up off the floor, & gather them into a doll  
Of you, to touch at the nape of the neck, to slip  
Under my shirt like a rag—the way  
Another man's wallet rides above his heart. As you  
Cry out, as if calling to a father you conjure

In the paling light, the voice rises, instead, in me.  
Nothing stops it, the crying. Not the clove of moon,  
Not the woman raking my back with her words. Our letters  
Close. Sometimes, you ask  
About the world; sometimes, I answer back. Nights  
Return you to me for a while, as sleep returns sleep  
To a landscape ravaged  
& familiar. The dark watermark of your absence, a hush.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Traveling through the Dark

By [William E. Stafford](#)

Traveling through the dark I found a deer  
dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.  
It is usually best to roll them into the canyon:  
that road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead.

By glow of the tail-light I stumbled back of the car  
and stood by the heap, a doe, a recent killing;  
she had stiffened already, almost cold.  
I dragged her off; she was large in the belly.

My fingers touching her side brought me the reason—  
her side was warm; her fawn lay there waiting,  
alive, still, never to be born.  
Beside that mountain road I hesitated.

The car aimed ahead its lowered parking lights;  
under the hood purred the steady engine.  
I stood in the glare of the warm exhaust turning red;  
around our group I could hear the wilderness listen.

I thought hard for us all—my only swerving—,  
then pushed her over the edge into the river.

## The Well Rising

By [William E. Stafford](#)

The well rising without sound,  
the spring on a hillside,  
the plowshare brimming through deep ground

everywhere in the field—

The sharp swallows in their swerve  
flaring and hesitating  
hunting for the final curve  
coming closer and closer—

The swallow heart from wingbeat to wingbeat  
counseling decision, decision:  
thunderous examples. I place my feet  
with care in such a world.

## **The Barnacle**

By [A. E. Stallings](#)

The barnacle is rather odd —  
It's not related to the clam  
Or limpet. It's an arthropod,  
Though one that doesn't give a damn.

Cousin to the crab and shrimp,  
When larval, it can twitch and swim,  
And make decisions — tiny imp  
That flits according to its whim.

Once grown, with nothing more to prove  
It hunkers down, and will remain  
Stuck fast. And once it does not move,  
Has no more purpose for a brain.

Its one boast is, it will not budge,  
Cemented where it chanced to sink,  
Sclerotic, stubborn as a grudge.  
Settled, it does not need to think.

## **Fairy-tale Logic**

By [A. E. Stallings](#)

Fairy tales are full of impossible tasks:  
Gather the chin hairs of a man-eating goat,  
Or cross a sulphuric lake in a leaky boat,  
Select the prince from a row of identical masks,  
Tiptoe up to a dragon where it basks  
And snatch its bone; count dust specks, mote by mote,

Or learn the phone directory by rote.  
Always it's impossible what someone asks—

You have to fight magic with magic. You have to believe  
That you have something impossible up your sleeve,  
The language of snakes, perhaps, an invisible cloak,  
An army of ants at your beck, or a lethal joke,  
The will to do whatever must be done:  
Marry a monster. Hand over your firstborn son.

## Fishing

By [A. E. Stallings](#)

The two of them stood in the middle water,  
The current slipping away, quick and cold,  
The sun slow at his zenith, sweating gold,  
Once, in some sullen summer of father and daughter.  
Maybe he regretted he had brought her—  
She'd rather have been elsewhere, her look told—  
Perhaps a year ago, but now too old.  
Still, she remembered lessons he had taught her:  
To cast towards shadows, where the sunlight fails  
And fishes shelter in the undergrowth.  
And when the unseen strikes, how all else pales  
Beside the bright-dark struggle, the rainbow wroth,  
Life and death weighed in the shining scales,  
The invisible line pulled taut that links them both.

## The Pull Toy

By [A. E. Stallings](#)

You squeezed its leash in your fist,  
It followed where you led:  
Tick, tock, tick, tock,  
Nodding its wooden head.

Wagging a tail on a spring,  
Its wheels gearing lackety-clack,  
Dogging your heels the length of the house,  
Though you seldom glanced back.

It didn't mind being dragged  
When it toppled on its side  
Scraping its coat of primary colors:

Love has no pride.

But now that you run and climb  
And leap, it has no hope  
Of keeping up, so it sits, hunched  
At the end of its short rope

And dreams of a rummage sale  
Where it's snapped up for a song,  
And of somebody—somebody just like you—  
Stringing it along.

## Sestina: Like

By [A. E. Stallings](#)

*With a nod to Jonah Winter*

Now we're all "friends," there is no love but Like,  
A semi-demi goddess, something like  
A reality-TV star look-alike,  
Named Simile or Me Two. So we like  
In order to be liked. It isn't like  
There's Love or Hate now. Even plain "dislike"

Is frowned on: there's no button for it. Like  
Is something you can quantify: each "like"  
You gather's almost something money-like,  
Token of virtual support. "Please like  
This page to stamp out hunger." And you'd *like*  
To end hunger and climate change alike,

But it's unlikely Like does diddly. Like  
Just twiddles its unopposing thumbs-ups, like-  
Wise props up scarecrow silences. "*I'm like,*  
*So OVER him,*" I overhear. "But, like,  
He doesn't get it. Like, you know? He's like  
It's all OK. Like I don't even LIKE

Him anymore. Whatever. I'm all like ..."  
Take "like" out of our chat, we'd all alike  
Flounder, agape, gesticulating like  
A foreign film sans subtitles, fall like  
Dumb phones to mooted desuetude. Unlike  
With other crutches, um, when we use "like,"

We're not just buying time on credit: Like  
Displaces other words; crowds, cuckoo-like,  
Endangered hatchlings from the nest. (Click "like"  
If you're against extinction!) Like is like  
Invasive zebra mussels, or it's like  
Those nutria-things, or kudzu, or belike

Redundant fast food franchises, each like  
(More like) the next. Those poets who dislike  
Inversions, archaisms, who just like  
Plain English as she's spoke — why isn't "like"  
Their (literally) every other word? I'd like  
Us just to admit that's what real speech is like.

But as you like, my friend. Yes, we're alike,  
How we pronounce, say, lichen, and dislike  
Cancer and war. So like this page. Click *Like*.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## The Light the Dead See

By [Frank Stanford](#)

There are many people who come back  
After the doctor has smoothed the sheet  
Around their body  
And left the room to make his call.

They die but they live.

They are called the dead who lived through their deaths,  
And among my people  
They are considered wise and honest.

They float out of their bodies  
And light on the ceiling like a moth,  
Watching the efforts of everyone around them.

The voices and the images of the living  
Fade away.

A roar sucks them under  
The wheels of a darkness without pain.  
Off in the distance

There is someone  
Like a signalman swinging a lantern.

The light grows, a white flower.  
It becomes very intense, like music.

They see the faces of those they loved,  
The truly dead who speak kindly.

They see their father sitting in a field.  
The harvest is over and his cane chair is mended.  
There is a towel around his neck,  
The odor of bay rum.  
Then they see their mother  
Standing behind him with a pair of shears.  
The wind is blowing.  
She is cutting his hair.

The dead have told these stories  
To the living.

## **Fable for Blackboard**

By [George Starbuck](#)

Here is the grackle, people.  
Here is the fox, folks.  
The grackle sits in the bracken. The fox  
hopes.

Here are the fronds, friends,  
that cover the fox.  
The fronds get in a frenzy. The grackle  
looks.

Here are the ticks, tykes,  
that live in the leaves, loves.  
The fox is confounded,  
and God is above.

## **Sign**

By [George Starbuck](#)

Virgin, sappy, gorgeous, the right-now  
Flutters its huge prosthetics at us, flung

To the spotlights, frozen in motion, center-ice.

And the first rows, shaken with an afterslice  
That's bowled them into their seats like a big wet ciao.  
O daffy panoply O rare device

O flashing leg-iron at a whopping price  
Whipping us into ecstasies and how,  
The whole galumphing Garden swung and swung,

A rescue helicopter's bottom rung  
Glinting and spinning off, a scud of fluff,  
A slash of petals up against the bough,

A juggler's avalanche of silken stuff  
Gushing in white-hot verticals among  
Camels and axels and pyramids, oh wow,

Bewilderment is parachute enough.  
We jolt. A sidewise stutterstep in chorus.  
The other billboards flicker by before us.

Gone! with a budded petulance that stung.  
So talented! So targeted! So young!  
Such concentration on the bottom line!

We vanish down the IRT. A shine.  
A glimmer. Something. Nothing. To think twice  
Was to have lost the trick of paradise.

## Translations from the English

By [George Starbuck](#)

*for Arthur Freeman*

*Pigfoot (with Aces Under) Passes*

The heat's on the hooker.  
Drop's on the lam.  
Cops got Booker.  
Who give a damn?

The Kid's been had  
But not me yet.  
Dad's in his pad.

No sweat.

*Margaret Are You Drug*

Cool it Mag.  
Sure it's a drag  
With all that green flaked out.  
Next thing you know they'll be changing the color of bread.

But look, Chick,  
Why panic?  
Sevennyeighty years, we'll *all* be dead.

Roll with it, Kid.  
I did.  
Give it the old benefit of the doubt.

I mean leaves  
Schmeaves.  
You sure you aint just feeling sorry for yourself?

*Lamb*

Lamb, what makes you tick?  
You got a wind-up, a Battery-Powered,  
A flywheel, a plug-in, or what?  
You made out of real Reelfur?  
You fall out the window you bust?  
You shrink? Turn into a No-No?  
Zip open and have pups?

I bet you better than that.  
I bet you put out by some other outfit.  
I bet you don't do nothin.  
I bet you somethin to eat.

*Daddy Gander's New Found Runes*

Rain, rain, grow the hay.  
Grow the weeds another day.  
If I die before I wake,  
Skip it.

Little Boy Blue come blow.  
Can't Man; learning a new instrument.  
What's with the old one? Where'd you get the new one?  
Found it in a haystack Man.

Old Mother Hubbard,  
Decently covered,  
Went to her final reward.

She had to laugh.  
Manger was half  
Empty and half kennel.

Ol' Shep. At it  
Again. Livin' on  
Principal.

I fired a missile up.  
It came down maybe.  
Maybe it stayed up.  
Things aint much like they used to be.

**Note to Poetry Out Loud students:** This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.

*from* Stanzas in Meditation: Stanza 83

By Gertrude Stein

Why am I if I am uncertain reasons may inclose.  
Remain remain propose repose chose.  
I call carelessly that the door is open  
Which if they may refuse to open  
No one can rush to close.  
Let them be mine therefor.  
Everybody knows that I chose.  
Therefor if therefore before I close.  
I will therefore offer therefore I offer this.  
Which if I refuse to miss may be miss is mine.  
I will be well welcome when I come.  
Because I am coming.  
Certainly I come having come.  
These stanzas are done.

## Susie Asado

By [Gertrude Stein](#)

Sweet sweet sweet sweet sweet tea.

Susie Asado.

Sweet sweet sweet sweet sweet tea.

Susie Asado.

Susie Asado which is a told tray sure.

A lean on the shoe this means slips slips hers.

When the ancient light grey is clean it is yellow, it is a silver seller.

This is a please this is a please there are the saids to jelly. These are the wets these say the sets to leave a crown to Incy.

Incy is short for incubus.

A pot. A pot is a beginning of a rare bit of trees. Trees tremble, the old vats are in bobbles, bobbles which shade and shove and render clean, render clean must.

Drink pups.

Drink pups drink pups lease a sash hold, see it shine and a bobolink has pins. It shows a nail.

What is a nail. A nail is unison.

Sweet sweet sweet sweet sweet tea.

## Waving Goodbye

By [Gerald Stern](#)

I wanted to know what it was like before we  
had voices and before we had bare fingers and before we  
had minds to move us through our actions  
and tears to help us over our feelings,  
so I drove my daughter through the snow to meet her friend  
and filled her car with suitcases and hugged her  
as an animal would, pressing my forehead against her,  
walking in circles, moaning, touching her cheek,  
and turned my head after them as an animal would,  
watching helplessly as they drove over the ruts,  
her smiling face and her small hand just visible  
over the giant pillows and coat hangers  
as they made their turn into the empty highway.

## Anecdote of the Jar

By [Wallace Stevens](#)

I placed a jar in Tennessee,  
And round it was, upon a hill.  
It made the slovenly wilderness  
Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it,  
And sprawled around, no longer wild.  
The jar was round upon the ground  
And tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion everywhere.  
The jar was gray and bare.  
It did not give of bird or bush,  
Like nothing else in Tennessee.

## **The Emperor of Ice-Cream**

By [Wallace Stevens](#)

Call the roller of big cigars,  
The muscular one, and bid him whip  
In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.  
Let the wenches dawdle in such dress  
As they are used to wear, and let the boys  
Bring flowers in last month's newspapers.  
Let be be finale of seem.  
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

Take from the dresser of deal,  
Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet  
On which she embroidered fantails once  
And spread it so as to cover her face.  
If her horny feet protrude, they come  
To show how cold she is, and dumb.  
Let the lamp affix its beam.  
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

## **The Snow Man**

By [Wallace Stevens](#)

One must have a mind of winter  
To regard the frost and the boughs  
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

And have been cold a long time  
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,  
The spruces rough in the distant glitter

Of the January sun; and not to think

Of any misery in the sound of the wind,  
In the sound of a few leaves,

Which is the sound of the land  
Full of the same wind  
That is blowing in the same bare place

For the listener, who listens in the snow,  
And, nothing himself, beholds  
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

## **Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird**

By [Wallace Stevens](#)

### **I**

Among twenty snowy mountains,  
The only moving thing  
Was the eye of the blackbird.

### **II**

I was of three minds,  
Like a tree  
In which there are three blackbirds.

### **III**

The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.  
It was a small part of the pantomime.

### **IV**

A man and a woman  
Are one.  
A man and a woman and a blackbird  
Are one.

### **V**

I do not know which to prefer,  
The beauty of inflections  
Or the beauty of innuendoes,  
The blackbird whistling  
Or just after.

### **VI**

Icicles filled the long window  
With barbaric glass.  
The shadow of the blackbird

Crossed it, to and fro.  
The mood  
Traced in the shadow  
An indecipherable cause.

## **VII**

O thin men of Haddam,  
Why do you imagine golden birds?  
Do you not see how the blackbird  
Walks around the feet  
Of the women about you?

## **VIII**

I know noble accents  
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;  
But I know, too,  
That the blackbird is involved  
In what I know.

## **IX**

When the blackbird flew out of sight,  
It marked the edge  
Of one of many circles.

## **X**

At the sight of blackbirds  
Flying in a green light,  
Even the bawds of euphony  
Would cry out sharply.

## **XI**

He rode over Connecticut  
In a glass coach.  
Once, a fear pierced him,  
In that he mistook  
The shadow of his equipage  
For blackbirds.

## **XII**

The river is moving.  
The blackbird must be flying.

## **XIII**

It was evening all afternoon.  
It was snowing  
And it was going to snow.

The blackbird sat  
In the cedar-limbs.

## The Enigma

By [Anne Stevenson](#)

Falling to sleep last night in a deep crevasse  
between one rough dream and another, I seemed,  
still awake, to be stranded on a stony path,  
and there the familiar enigma presented itself  
in the shape of a little trembling lamb.  
It was lying like a pearl in the trough between  
one Welsh slab and another, and it was crying.

I looked around, as anyone would, for its mother.  
Nothing was there. What did I know about lambs?  
Should I pick it up? Carry it . . . where?  
What would I do if it were dying? The hand  
of my conscience fought with the claw of my fear.  
It wasn't so easy to imitate the Good Shepherd  
in that faded, framed Sunday School picture  
filtering now through the dream's daguerreotype.

With the wind fallen and the moon swollen to the full,  
small, white doubles of the creature at my feet  
flared like candles in the creases of the night  
until it looked to be alive with newborn lambs.  
Where could they all have come from?  
A second look, and the bleating lambs were birds—  
kittiwakes nesting, clustered on a cliff face,  
fixing on me their dark accusing eyes.

There was a kind of imperative not to touch them,  
yet to be *of* them, whatever they were—  
now lambs, now birds, now floating points of light—  
fireflies signaling how many lost New England summers?  
One form, now another; one configuration, now another.  
Like fossils locked deep in the folds of my brain,  
outliving a time by telling its story. Like stars.

## The Spirit Is Too Blunt an Instrument

By [Anne Stevenson](#)

The spirit is too blunt an instrument

to have made this baby.  
Nothing so unskilful as human passions  
could have managed the intricate  
exacting particulars: the tiny  
blind bones with their manipulating tendons,  
the knee and the knucklebones, the resilient  
fine meshings of ganglia and vertebrae,  
the chain of the difficult spine.

Observe the distinct eyelashes and sharp crescent  
fingernails, the shell-like complexity  
of the ear, with its firm involutions  
concentric in miniature to minute  
ossicles. Imagine the  
infinitesimal capillaries, the flawless connections  
of the lungs, the invisible neural filaments  
through which the completed body  
already answers to the brain.

Then name any passion or sentiment  
possessed of the simplest accuracy.  
No, no desire or affection could have done  
with practice what habit  
has done perfectly, indifferently,  
through the body's ignorant precision.  
It is left to the vagaries of the mind to invent  
love and despair and anxiety  
and their pain.

## **In the Past**

By [Trumbull Stickney](#)

There lies a somnolent lake  
Under a noiseless sky,  
Where never the mornings break  
Nor the evenings die.

Mad flakes of colour  
Whirl on its even face  
Iridescent and streaked with pallour;  
And, warding the silent place,

The rocks rise sheer and gray  
From the sedgeless brink to the sky  
Dull-lit with the light of pale half-day

Thro' a void space and dry.

And the hours lag dead in the air  
With a sense of coming eternity  
To the heart of the lonely boatman there:  
That boatman am I,

I, in my lonely boat,  
A waif on the somnolent lake,  
Watching the colours creep and float  
With the sinuous track of a snake.

Now I lean o'er the side  
And lazy shades in the water see,  
Lapped in the sweep of a sluggish tide  
Crawled in from the living sea;

And next I fix mine eyes,  
So long that the heart declines,  
On the changeless face of the open skies  
Where no star shines;

And now to the rocks I turn,  
To the rocks, around  
That lie like walls of a circling sun  
Wherein lie bound

The waters that feel my powerless strength  
And meet my homeless oar  
Labouring over their ashen length  
Never to find a shore.

But the gleam still skims  
At times on the somnolent lake,  
And a light there is that swims  
With the whirl of a snake;

And tho' dead be the hours i' the air,  
And dayless the sky,  
The heart is alive of the boatman there:  
That boatman am I.

## every single day

By [John Straley](#)

(After Raymond Carver's *Hummingbird*)

Suppose I said the word "springtime"  
and I wrote the words "king salmon"  
on a piece of paper  
and mailed it to you.  
When you opened it  
would you remember that afternoon we spent  
together in the yellow boat  
when the early whales were feeding  
and we caught our first fish of the year?

Or would you remember that time off Cape Flattery  
when you were a little girl:  
your father smoking, telling stories as he ran the boat,  
then the tug and zing of that very first fish  
spooling off into the gray-green world;  
you laughing and brushing back your hair  
before setting the hook?

I know I am hard to understand sometimes  
particularly when you are standing  
at the post office with only a piece of paper  
saying "king salmon" on it  
but just think of it as a promissary note  
and that electric tug, that thrill  
pulling your mind into deep water  
is how I feel about you every,  
single day.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Eating Poetry

By [Mark Strand](#)

Ink runs from the corners of my mouth.  
There is no happiness like mine.  
I have been eating poetry.

The librarian does not believe what she sees.  
Her eyes are sad

and she walks with her hands in her dress.

The poems are gone.  
The light is dim.  
The dogs are on the basement stairs and coming up.

Their eyeballs roll,  
their blond legs burn like brush.  
The poor librarian begins to stamp her feet and weep.

She does not understand.  
When I get on my knees and lick her hand,  
she screams.

I am a new man.  
I snarl at her and bark.  
I romp with joy in the bookish dark.

## After the Dinner Party

By [Adrienne Su](#)

Dropping napkins, corks, and non-compostables  
into the trash, I see that friends have mistaken  
my everyday chopsticks for disposables,

helpfully discarding them alongside inedibles:  
pork bones, shrimp shells, bitter melon.  
Among napkins and corks, they do look compostable:

off-white, wooden, warped from continual  
washing — no lacquer, no ornament. But anyone  
who thinks these chopsticks are disposable

doesn't live with chopsticks in the comfortable  
way of a favorite robe, oversized, a bit broken.  
Thin paper napkins, plastic forks, and non-compostable

takeout boxes constitute the chopstick's natural  
habitat to many I hold dear. With family or alone,  
I'll maintain that chopsticks aren't disposable,

but if I can make peace with the loss of utensils  
when breaking *bao* with guests, I'll be one of them,  
not digging in the napkins and corks. Compostable  
chopsticks are the answer: everyday *and* disposable.

# Filter

By [Suma Subramaniam](#)

I come from a country so far away  
that you may have visited only in your dreams.  
My face does not bear the pale color of my palms.  
I don't speak your language at home.  
I don't even sound like you.  
If you come to my house, you'll see my family:  
my mother in a sari,  
my father wearing a sacred thread around his body,  
and me, eating a plate of spicy biryani  
instead of a burger or pizza  
at the dinner table.  
If you, for a moment, shed your filter,  
you will also see my pockets filled with Tootsie Rolls,  
waiting to be shared with you.

# Maui's Mission

By [Robert Sullivan](#)

In the warmth of night I put feet to my plan: waited  
for my brothers to sleep. They'd spent the day  
sharpening their hooks, repairing the great net,  
filling gourds with fresh water. They'd bundled  
taro wrapped in leaves sitting below the cross seats.  
The bundles and the net would cover me,  
especially if I said the chant to slow my movement  
and my breathing. The moon became brighter  
like a big fish eye as the chant hooked me.

I was holding my grandmother's hook so tightly  
a little cut welled red between my closed knuckles.  
"Goodmorning, brothers," I called and they cussed  
and moaned until the next chant took us a further hundred  
miles and then another until my chanting made them gasp  
as we settled on a patch of ocean black with fish.  
They forgave me, not that it matters. I took the bloody hook  
and said my business to the ocean. It worked.  
The fish rose and our descent was secured.

# Analysis of Baseball

By [May Swenson](#)

It's about	Ball fits
the ball,	mitt, but
the bat,	not all
and the mitt.	the time.
Ball hits	Sometimes
bat, or it	ball gets hit
hits mitt.	(pow) when bat
Bat doesn't	meets it,
hit ball,	and sails
bat meets it.	to a place
Ball bounces	where mitt
off bat, flies	has to quit
air, or thuds	in disgrace.
ground (dud)	That's about
or it	the bases
fits mitt.	loaded,
	about 40,000
	fans exploded.
Bat waits	
for ball	
to mate.	It's about
Ball hates	the ball,
to take bat's	the bat,
bait. Ball	the mitt,
flirts, bat's	the bases
late, don't	and the fans.
keep the date.	It's done
Ball goes in	on a diamond,
(thwack) to mitt,	and for fun.
and goes out	It's about
(thwack) back	home, and it's
to mitt.	about run.

## Question

By [May Swenson](#)

Body my house  
my horse my hound  
what will I do  
when you are fallen

Where will I sleep  
How will I ride

What will I hunt

Where can I go  
without my mount  
all eager and quick  
How will I know  
in thicket ahead  
is danger or treasure  
when Body my good  
bright dog is dead

How will it be  
to lie in the sky  
without roof or door  
and wind for an eye

With cloud for shift  
how will I hide?

## **April Midnight**

By [Arthur Symons](#)

Side by side through the streets at midnight,  
Roaming together,  
Through the tumultuous night of London,  
In the miraculous April weather.

Roaming together under the gaslight,  
Day's work over,  
How the Spring calls to us, here in the city,  
Calls to the heart from the heart of a lover!

Cool to the wind blows, fresh in our faces,  
Cleansing, entrancing,  
After the heat and the fumes and the footlights,  
Where you dance and I watch your dancing.

Good it is to be here together,  
Good to be roaming,  
Even in London, even at midnight,  
Lover-like in a lover's gloaming.

You the dancer and I the dreamer,  
Children together,  
Wandering lost in the night of London,

In the miraculous April weather.

## Queens

By [J. M. Synge](#)

Seven dog-days we let pass  
Naming Queens in Glenmacnass,  
All the rare and royal names  
Wormy sheepskin yet retains,  
Etain, Helen, Maeve, and Fand,  
Golden Deirdre's tender hand,  
Bert, the big-foot, sung by Villon,  
Cassandra, Ronsard found in Lyon.  
Queens of Sheba, Meath and Connaught,  
Coifed with crown, or gaudy bonnet,  
Queens whose finger once did stir men,  
Queens were eaten of fleas and vermin,  
Queens men drew like Monna Lisa,  
Or slew with drugs in Rome and Pisa,  
We named Lucrezia Crivelli,  
And Titian's lady with amber belly,  
Queens acquainted in learned sin,  
Jane of Jewry's slender shin:  
Queens who cut the bogs of Glanna,  
Judith of Scripture, and Gloriana,  
Queens who wasted the East by proxy,  
Or drove the ass-cart, a tinker's doxy,  
Yet these are rotten — I ask their pardon —  
And we've the sun on rock and garden,  
These are rotten, so you're the Queen  
Of all the living, or have been.

## Architect's Watercolor

By [Arthur Sze](#)

An architect draws a watercolor  
depicting two people about to enter  
a meeting room, while someone  
on the stairway gazes through windows

at a park, river, skyscrapers beyond;  
he does not want to be locked  
like a carbon atom in a benzene ring  
but needs to rotate, lift off,

veer along wharves and shoreline.  
In the acoustics of this space,  
he catches a needle bounce  
off a black granite floor, wanders

from a main walkway, encounters  
prickly pear burned purple in wind.  
In the ocean gusts before dawn,  
he yearns for a Mediterranean spray

where sunlight tingles eyelashes,  
where sand releases heat  
under the stars. In the atrium,  
two violinists launch fireworks

of sound that arc, explode, dissolve  
into threads of melodic charm.  
Here slate near a pool of water  
absorbs sunlight, releases ripples

into the evening; and in this space,  
each minute is encounter:  
he steps out and makes  
footprints on a sidewalk dusted with snow.

## Happy Ideas

By [Mary Szybist](#)

*I had the happy idea to fasten a bicycle wheel*

*to a kitchen stool and watch it turn.*

—DUCHAMP

I had the happy idea to suspend some blue globes in the air  
and watch them pop.

I had the happy idea to put my little copper horse on the shelf so we could stare at each other  
all evening.

I had the happy idea to create a void in myself.

Then to call it natural.

Then to call it supernatural.

I had the happy idea to wrap a blue scarf around my head and spin.

I had the happy idea that somewhere a child was being born who was nothing like Helen or Jesus except in the sense of changing everything.

I had the happy idea that someday I would find both pleasure and punishment, that I would know them and feel them,

and that, until I did, it would be almost as good to pretend.

I had the happy idea to call myself happy.

I had the happy idea that the dog digging a hole in the yard in the twilight had his nose deep in  
mold-life.

I had the happy idea that what I do not understand is more real than what I do,

and then the happier idea to buckle myself

into two blue velvet shoes.

I had the happy idea to polish the reflecting glass and say

hello to my own blue soul. *Hello, blue soul. Hello.*

It was my happiest idea.

***Note to Poetry Out Loud students:** This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Caminito

By [Carmen Tafolla](#)

The pathways of my thoughts are cobbled with  
mesquite blocks  
and narrow-winding,  
long and aged like the streets of  
san fernando de bexar  
y la villa real de san antonio

pensive  
y callados  
cada uno con su chiste  
idiosyncrasy  
crazy turns  
that are because they are,  
centuries magic

cada uno hecho así,  
y with a careful  
capricho touch,  
así.

They curl slowly into ripples,  
earthy and cool like the Río Medina  
under the trees  
silently singing, standing still,  
and flowing, becoming,  
became  
and always as always  
still fertile, laughing, loving,  
alivianada  
Río Medina  
under the trees,  
celebrating life.

They end up in the monte, chaparral,  
llenos de burrs, spurs  
pero libres  
Running through the hills freefoot  
con aire azul  
blue breaths peacefully taken  
between each lope  
remembering venado  
remembering conejos  
remembering  
where  
we came from

## Gitanjali 35

By [Rabindranath Tagore](#)

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;  
Where knowledge is free;  
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;

Where words come out from the depth of truth;  
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;  
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;  
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action  
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

## Playthings

By [Rabindranath Tagore](#)

Child, how happy you are sitting in the dust, playing with a broken twig all the morning.  
I smile at your play with that little bit of a broken twig.  
I am busy with my accounts, adding up figures by the hour.  
Perhaps you glance at me and think, "What a stupid game to spoil your morning with!"  
Child, I have forgotten the art of being absorbed in sticks and mud-pies.  
I seek out costly playthings, and gather lumps of gold and silver.  
With whatever you find you create your glad games, I spend both my time and my strength over things I never can obtain.  
In my frail canoe I struggle to cross the sea of desire, and forget that I too am playing a game.

## All Hallows' Eve

By [Dorothea Tanning](#)

Be perfect, make it otherwise.  
Yesterday is torn in shreds.  
Lightning's thousand sulfur eyes  
Rip apart the breathing beds.  
Hear bones crack and pulverize.  
Doom creeps in on rubber treads.  
Countless overwrought housewives,  
Minds unraveling like threads,  
Try lipstick shades to tranquilize  
Fears of age and general dreads.  
Sit tight, be perfect, swat the spies,  
Don't take faucets for fountainheads.  
Drink tasty antidotes. Otherwise  
You and the werewolf: newlyweds.

## The Star

By [Ann Taylor](#) & [Jane Taylor](#)

TWINKLE, twinkle, little star,  
How I wonder what you are !

Up above the world so high,  
Like a diamond in the sky.

When the blazing sun is gone,  
When he nothing shines upon,  
Then you show your little light,  
Twinkle, twinkle, all the night.

Then the trav'ler in the dark,  
Thanks you for your tiny spark,  
He could not see which way to go,  
If you did not twinkle so.

In the dark blue sky you keep,  
And often thro' my curtains peep,  
For you never shut your eye,  
Till the sun is in the sky.

'Tis your bright and tiny spark,  
Lights the trav'ler in the dark :  
Tho' I know not what you are,  
Twinkle, twinkle, little star.

***Note to Poetry Out Loud students:** In introducing “The Star,” contestant may say “‘The Star’ by Anne Taylor and Jane Taylor” or “‘The Star’ by Anne Taylor, Jane Taylor.” Adding the word “and” between the authors’ names will not affect the accuracy score.*

## **Kitchen Fable**

By [Eleanor Ross Taylor](#)

The fork lived with the knife  
and found it hard — for years  
took nicks and scratches,  
not to mention cuts.

She who took tedium by the ears:  
nonforthcoming pickles,  
defiant stretched-out lettuce,  
sauce-gooed particles.

He who came down whack.  
His conversation, even, edged.

Lying beside him in the drawer  
she formed a crazy patina.

The seasons stacked —  
melons, succeeded by cured pork.

He dulled; he was a dull knife,  
while she was, after all, a fork.

## **Dream Journal**

By [Kareem Tayyar](#)

If you're swimming  
then you have lost something important.

If you're flying  
then your heart's been broken.

If you sit at a table before a deck of cards  
then you are afraid of getting older.

If you undress beneath a single spotlight  
then you are about to commit a crime.

If you are singing while holding a Spanish guitar  
then someone you know has passed away.

If you are preparing to leap from a balcony  
then you are mourning the loss of your childhood.

If you place your lips to the breast of a cloud  
then you have forgotten to say your prayers.

If you run three red lights in a row  
then there is a lesson you still haven't learned.

If you pull water from an old well  
then your father is preparing to call you long distance.

If you hear music playing from another house on your street  
then your sister is about to come back from the dead.

If you cup your hands as a hard rain begins  
then you are days away from falling in love.

If you find that you cannot run when you want to  
then there is a book that you need to reread.

If you awaken in a field of strawberries  
then a long journey awaits you.

If you eat the strawberries  
then you won't be going alone.

## Barter

By [Sara Teasdale](#)

Life has loveliness to sell,  
All beautiful and splendid things,  
Blue waves whitened on a cliff,  
Soaring fire that sways and sings,  
And children's faces looking up  
Holding wonder like a cup.

Life has loveliness to sell,  
Music like a curve of gold,  
Scent of pine trees in the rain,  
Eyes that love you, arms that hold,  
And for your spirit's still delight,  
Holy thoughts that star the night.

Spend all you have for loveliness,  
Buy it and never count the cost;  
For one white singing hour of peace  
Count many a year of strife well lost,  
And for a breath of ecstasy  
Give all you have been, or could be.

## Over the Roofs

By [Sara Teasdale](#)

### I

Oh chimes set high on the sunny tower  
Ring on, ring on unendingly,  
Make all the hours a single hour,  
For when the dusk begins to flower,  
The man I love will come to me! ...

But no, go slowly as you will,  
I should not bid you hasten so,  
For while I wait for love to come,

Some other girl is standing dumb,  
Fearing her love will go.

## II

Oh white steam over the roofs, blow high!  
Oh chimes in the tower ring clear and free!  
Oh sun awake in the covered sky,  
For the man I love, loves me! ...

Oh drifting steam disperse and die,  
Oh tower stand shrouded toward the south,—  
Fate heard afar my happy cry,  
And laid her finger on my mouth.

## III

The dusk was blue with blowing mist,  
The lights were spangles in a veil,  
And from the clamor far below  
Floated faint music like a wail.

It voiced what I shall never speak,  
My heart was breaking all night long,  
But when the dawn was hard and gray,  
My tears distilled into a song.

## IV

I said, "I have shut my heart  
As one shuts an open door,  
That Love may starve therein  
And trouble me no more."

But over the roofs there came  
The wet new wind of May,  
And a tune blew up from the curb  
Where the street-pianos play.

My room was white with the sun  
And Love cried out to me,  
"I am strong, I will break your heart  
Unless you set me free."

# Since There Is No Escape

By [Sara Teasdale](#)

Since there is no escape, since at the end  
My body will be utterly destroyed,  
This hand I love as I have loved a friend,  
This body I tended, wept with and enjoyed;  
Since there is no escape even for me  
Who love life with a love too sharp to bear:  
The scent of orchards in the rain, the sea  
And hours alone too still and sure for prayer—  
Since darkness waits for me, then all the more  
Let me go down as waves sweep to the shore  
In pride, and let me sing with my last breath;  
In these few hours of light I lift my head;  
Life is my lover—I shall leave the dead  
If there is any way to baffle death.

# Break, Break, Break

By [Alfred, Lord Tennyson](#)

Break, break, break,  
    On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!  
And I would that my tongue could utter  
    The thoughts that arise in me.

O, well for the fisherman's boy,  
    That he shouts with his sister at play!  
O, well for the sailor lad,  
    That he sings in his boat on the bay!

And the stately ships go on  
    To their haven under the hill;  
But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand,  
    And the sound of a voice that is still!

Break, break, break  
    At the foot of thy crags, O Sea!  
But the tender grace of a day that is dead  
    Will never come back to me.

# The Charge of the Light Brigade

By [Alfred, Lord Tennyson](#)

## I

Half a league, half a league,  
Half a league onward,  
All in the valley of Death  
    Rode the six hundred.  
“Forward, the Light Brigade!  
Charge for the guns!” he said.  
Into the valley of Death  
    Rode the six hundred.

## II

“Forward, the Light Brigade!”  
Was there a man dismayed?  
Not though the soldier knew  
    Someone had blundered.  
Theirs not to make reply,  
Theirs not to reason why,  
Theirs but to do and die.  
Into the valley of Death  
    Rode the six hundred.

## III

Cannon to right of them,  
Cannon to left of them,  
Cannon in front of them  
    Volleyed and thundered;  
Stormed at with shot and shell,  
Boldly they rode and well,  
Into the jaws of Death,  
Into the mouth of hell  
    Rode the six hundred.

## IV

Flashed all their sabres bare,  
Flashed as they turned in air  
Sabring the gunners there,  
Charging an army, while  
    All the world wondered.  
Plunged in the battery-smoke  
Right through the line they broke;  
Cossack and Russian  
Reeled from the sabre stroke  
    Shattered and sundered.

Then they rode back, but not  
Not the six hundred.

## V

Cannon to right of them,  
Cannon to left of them,  
Cannon behind them  
    Volleyed and thundered;  
Stormed at with shot and shell,  
While horse and hero fell.  
They that had fought so well  
Came through the jaws of Death,  
Back from the mouth of hell,  
All that was left of them,  
    Left of six hundred.

## VI

When can their glory fade?  
O the wild charge they made!  
    All the world wondered.  
Honour the charge they made!  
Honour the Light Brigade,  
    Noble six hundred!

# Crossing the Bar

By [Alfred, Lord Tennyson](#)

Sunset and evening star,  
    And one clear call for me!  
And may there be no moaning of the bar,  
    When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,  
    Too full for sound and foam,  
When that which drew from out the boundless deep  
    Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,  
    And after that the dark!  
And may there be no sadness of farewell,  
    When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place  
    The flood may bear me far,  
I hope to see my Pilot face to face

When I have crost the bar.

## ***from The Princess: Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal***

By [Alfred, Lord Tennyson](#)

Now sleeps the crimson petal, now the white;  
Nor waves the cypress in the palace walk;  
Nor winks the gold fin in the porphyry font.  
The firefly wakens; waken thou with me.

Now droops the milk-white peacock like a ghost,  
And like a ghost she glimmers on to me.

Now lies the Earth all Danaë to the stars,  
And all thy heart lies open unto me.

Now slides the silent meteor on, and leaves  
A shining furrow, as thy thoughts in me.

Now folds the lily all her sweetness up,  
And slips into the bosom of the lake.  
So fold thyself, my dearest, thou, and slip  
Into my bosom and be lost in me.

## **Adlestrop**

By [Edward Thomas](#)

Yes. I remember Adlestrop—  
The name, because one afternoon  
Of heat the express-train drew up there  
Unwontedly. It was late June.

The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.  
No one left and no one came  
On the bare platform. What I saw  
Was Adlestrop—only the name

And willows, willow-herb, and grass,  
And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,  
No whit less still and lonely fair  
Than the high cloudlets in the sky.

And for that minute a blackbird sang  
Close by, and round him, mistier,

Farther and farther, all the birds  
Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

## **The Brook**

By [Edward Thomas](#)

Seated once by a brook, watching a child  
Chiefly that paddled, I was thus beguiled.  
Mellow the blackbird sang and sharp the thrush  
Not far off in the oak and hazel brush,  
Unseen. There was a scent like honeycomb  
From mugwort dull. And down upon the dome  
Of the stone the cart-horse kicks against so oft  
A butterfly alighted. From aloft  
He took the heat of the sun, and from below.  
On the hot stone he perched contented so,  
As if never a cart would pass again  
That way; as if I were the last of men  
And he the first of insects to have earth  
And sun together and to know their worth.  
I was divided between him and the gleam,  
The motion, and the voices, of the stream,  
The waters running frizzled over gravel,  
That never vanish and for ever travel.  
A grey flycatcher silent on a fence  
And I sat as if we had been there since  
The horseman and the horse lying beneath  
The fir-tree-covered barrow on the heath,  
The horseman and the horse with silver shoes,  
Galloped the downs last. All that I could lose  
I lost. And then the child's voice raised the dead.  
"No one's been here before" was what she said  
And what I felt, yet never should have found  
A word for, while I gathered sight and sound.

## **The Owl**

By [Edward Thomas](#)

Downhill I came, hungry, and yet not starved;  
Cold, yet had heat within me that was proof  
Against the North wind; tired, yet so that rest  
Had seemed the sweetest thing under a roof.

Then at the inn I had food, fire, and rest,

Knowing how hungry, cold, and tired was I.  
All of the night was quite barred out except  
An owl's cry, a most melancholy cry

Shaken out long and clear upon the hill,  
No merry note, nor cause of merriment,  
But one telling me plain what I escaped  
And others could not, that night, as in I went.

And salted was my food, and my repose,  
Salted and sobered, too, by the bird's voice  
Speaking for all who lay under the stars,  
Soldiers and poor, unable to rejoice.

## **The Sorrow of True Love**

By [Edward Thomas](#)

The sorrow of true love is a great sorrow  
And true love parting blackens a bright morrow:  
Yet almost they equal joys, since their despair  
Is but hope blinded by its tears, and clear  
Above the storm the heavens wait to be seen.  
But greater sorrow from less love has been  
That can mistake lack of despair for hope  
And knows not tempest and the perfect scope  
Of summer, but a frozen drizzle perpetual  
Of drops that from remorse and pity fall  
And cannot ever shine in the sun or thaw,  
Removed eternally from the sun's law.

## **The moon now rises to her absolute rule**

By [Henry David Thoreau](#)

The moon now rises to her absolute rule,  
And the husbandman and hunter  
Acknowledge her for their mistress.  
Asters and golden reign in the fields  
And the life everlasting withers not.  
The fields are reaped and shorn of their pride  
But an inward verdure still crowns them;  
The thistle scatters its down on the pool  
And yellow leaves clothe the river—  
And nought disturbs the serious life of men.  
But behind the sheaves and under the sod

There lurks a ripe fruit which the reapers have not gathered,  
The true harvest of the year—the boreal fruit  
Which it bears forever,  
With fondness annually watering and maturing it.  
But man never severs the stalk  
Which bears this palatable fruit.

## Tall Ambrosia

By [Henry David Thoreau](#)

Among the signs of autumn I perceive  
The Roman wormwood (called by learned men  
*Ambrosia elatior*, food for gods,—  
For to impartial science the humblest weed  
Is as immortal once as the proudest flower—)  
Sprinkles its yellow dust over my shoes  
As I cross the now neglected garden.  
—We trample under foot the food of gods  
And spill their nectar in each drop of dew—  
My honest shoes, fast friends that never stray  
Far from my couch, thus powdered, countryfied,  
Bearing many a mile the marks of their adventure,  
At the post-house disgrace the Gallic gloss  
Of those well dressed ones who no morning dew  
Nor Roman wormwood ever have been through,  
Who never walk but are *transported* rather—  
For what old crime of theirs I do not gather.

## [My prime of youth is but a frost of cares]

By [Chidiock Tichborne](#)

My prime of youth is but a frost of cares,  
My feast of joy is but a dish of pain,  
My crop of corn is but a field of tares,  
And all my good is but vain hope of gain.  
The day is gone and yet I saw no sun,  
And now I live, and now my life is done.

The spring is past, and yet it hath not sprung,  
The fruit is dead, and yet the leaves are green,  
My youth is gone, and yet I am but young,  
I saw the world, and yet I was not seen,  
My thread is cut, and yet it was not spun,  
And now I live, and now my life is done.

I sought my death and found it in my womb,  
I lookt for life and saw it was a shade,  
I trode the earth and knew it was my tomb,  
And now I die, and now I am but made.  
The glass is full, and now the glass is run,  
And now I live, and now my life is done.

## Beg Approval

By [TC Tolbert](#)

Because the only view we have is the one  
that looks down on the knees. Praise perspective.  
Praise shared disdain. Praise space made by connective  
tissue; the synaptic cleft; elbowroom  
at the dinner table; polite conversation;  
lies you push through your teeth. Because dissecting  
a dog's heart won't change the way it thinks. Praise redirected  
traffic. Praise the gnarled lip that defends  
the gentle bones. Because your mother was  
a seahorse. And to think of her thin is  
to empty all the ice from the tea glasses;  
to strain the soup by driving it through your hand.  
Praise tablecloths; sway-back chairs; the plastic  
folds that protect slice after slice of cheese.

## Peach

By [Jennifer Tonge](#)

Come here's  
a peach he said  
and held it out just far  
enough to reach beyond his lap  
and off-

ered me  
a room the one  
room left he said in all  
of Thessaloniki that night  
packed with

traders  
The peach was lush  
I hadn't slept for days

it was like velvet lips a lamp  
he smiled

patted  
the bed for me  
I knew it was in fact  
the only room the only bed  
The peach

trembled  
and he said Come  
nodding to make me  
agree I wanted the peach and  
the bed

he said  
to take it see  
how nice it was and I  
thought how I could take it ginger-  
ly my

finger-  
tips only touch-  
ing only it Not in  
or out I stayed in the doorway  
watching

a fly  
He stroked the peach  
and asked where I was from  
I said the States he smiled and asked  
how long

I'd stay  
The fly had found  
the peach I said I'd leave  
for Turkey in the morning I  
wanted

so much  
to sleep and on  
a bed I thought of all  
the ways to say that word  
and that

they must

have gradient  
meanings He asked me did  
I want the peach and I said sure  
and took

it from  
his hand He asked  
then if I'd take the room  
It costs too much I said and turned  
to go

He said  
to stay a while  
and we could talk The sun  
was going down I said no thanks  
I'd head

out on  
the late train but  
could I still have the peach  
and what else could he say to that  
but yes

## November Cotton Flower

By [Jean Toomer](#)

Boll-weevil's coming, and the winter's cold,  
Made cotton-stalks look rusty, seasons old,  
And cotton, scarce as any southern snow,  
Was vanishing; the branch, so pinched and slow,  
Failed in its function as the autumn rake;  
Drouth fighting soil had caused the soil to take  
All water from the streams; dead birds were found  
In wells a hundred feet below the ground—  
Such was the season when the flower bloomed.  
Old folks were startled, and it soon assumed  
Significance. Superstition saw  
Something it had never seen before:  
Brown eyes that loved without a trace of fear,  
Beauty so sudden for that time of year.

# If You Go to Bed Hungry

By [Angela Narciso Torres](#)

If you go to bed hungry, your soul will get up and steal cold rice from the pot.  
Stop playing with fire before the moon rises or you'll pee in your sleep.

Sweeping the floor after dark sweeps wealth and good fortune out the door.  
Fork dropped: a gentleman will visit. Spoon: a bashful lady.

Bathing after you've cooked over a hot stove makes the veins swell.  
For safe passage to the guest who leaves mid-meal: turn your plate.

The adage goes: coffee stunts growth. Twelve grapes on New Year's: the opposite.  
Advice from the learned: hide a book under your pillow. Never step on. Never drop.

Every rice grain that remains on your plate you'll meet again on the footpath  
to heaven. You'll have to stoop to pick each one of them up.

# The Salutation

By [Thomas Traherne](#)

These little limbs,  
    These eyes and hands which here I find,  
These rosy cheeks wherewith my life begins,  
    Where have ye been? behind  
What curtain were ye from me hid so long?  
Where was, in what abyss, my speaking tongue?

    When silent I  
    So many thousand, thousand years  
Beneath the dust did in a chaos lie,  
    How could I smiles or tears,  
Or lips or hands or eyes or ears perceive?  
Welcome ye treasures which I now receive.

    I that so long  
    Was nothing from eternity,  
Did little think such joys as ear or tongue  
    To celebrate or see:  
Such sounds to hear, such hands to feel, such feet,  
Beneath the skies on such a ground to meet.

    New burnished joys,  
    Which yellow gold and pearls excel!  
Such sacred treasures are the limbs in boys,

In which a soul doth dwell;  
Their organized joints and azure veins  
More wealth include than all the world contains.

From dust I rise,  
And out of nothing now awake;  
These brighter regions which salute mine eyes,  
A gift from God I take.  
The earth, the seas, the light, the day, the skies,  
The sun and stars are mine if those I prize.

Long time before  
I in my mother's womb was born,  
A God, preparing, did this glorious store,  
The world, for me adorn.  
Into this Eden so divine and fair,  
So wide and bright, I come His son and heir.

A stranger here  
Strange things doth meet, strange glories see;  
Strange treasures lodged in this fair world appear,  
Strange all and new to me;  
But that they mine should be, who nothing was,  
That strangest is of all, yet brought to pass.

## The Cave

By [Paul Tran](#)

Someone standing at the mouth had  
the idea to enter. To go further

than light or language could  
go. As they followed  
the idea, light and language followed

like two wolves—panting, hearing themselves  
panting. A shapeless scent  
in the damp air ...

*Keep going*, the idea said.

Someone kept going. Deeper and deeper, they saw  
others had been there. Others had left

objects that couldn't have found their way

there alone. Ocher-stained shells. Bird bones. Grounded hematite. On the walls,

as if stepping into history, someone saw  
their purpose: cows. Bulls. Bison. Deer. Horses—  
some pregnant, some slaughtered.

The wild-  
life seemed wild and alive, moving

when someone moved, casting their shadows  
on the shadows stretching  
in every direction. *Keep going,*

the idea said again. *Go ...*

Someone continued. They followed the idea so far inside that  
outside was another idea.

## Flounder

By [Natasha Trethewey](#)

*Here, she said, put this on your head.*  
She handed me a hat.  
*You 'bout as white as your dad,*  
*and you gone stay like that.*

Aunt Sugar rolled her nylons down  
around each bony ankle,  
and I rolled down my white knee socks  
letting my thin legs dangle,

circling them just above water  
and silver backs of minnows  
flitting here then there between  
the sun spots and the shadows.

*This is how you hold the pole*  
*to cast the line out straight.*  
*Now put that worm on your hook,*  
*throw it out and wait.*

She sat spitting tobacco juice  
into a coffee cup.  
Hunkered down when she felt the bite,

jerked the pole straight up

reeling and tugging hard at the fish  
that wriggled and tried to fight back.  
*A flounder, she said, and you can tell  
'cause one of its sides is black.*

*The other side is white, she said.*  
It landed with a thump.  
I stood there watching that fish flip-flop,  
switch sides with every jump.

## History Lesson

By [Natasha Trethewey](#)

I am four in this photograph, standing  
on a wide strip of Mississippi beach,  
my hands on the flowered hips

of a bright bikini. My toes dig in,  
curl around wet sand. The sun cuts  
the rippling Gulf in flashes with each

tidal rush. Minnows dart at my feet  
glinting like switchblades. I am alone  
except for my grandmother, other side

of the camera, telling me how to pose.  
It is 1970, two years after they opened  
the rest of this beach to us,

forty years since the photograph  
where she stood on a narrow plot  
of sand marked *colored*, smiling,

her hands on the flowered hips  
of a cotton meal-sack dress.

## Battlefield

By [Mark Turcotte](#)

Back when I used to be Indian  
I am standing outside the  
pool hall with my sister.

She strawberry blonde. Stale sweat  
and beer through the  
open door. A warrior leans on his stick,  
fingers blue with chalk.  
Another bends to shoot.  
His braids brush the green  
felt, swinging to the beat  
of the jukebox. We move away.  
Hank Williams falls again  
in the backseat of a Cadillac.  
I look back.  
A wind off the distant hills lifts my shirt,  
brings the scent  
of wounded horses.

## Flies Buzzing

By [Mark Turcotte](#)

somewhere in america, in a certain state of grace . . .

*Patti Smith*

As a child I danced  
to the heartfelt, savage  
rhythm  
of the Native, the  
American Indian,  
in the Turtle Mountains,  
in the Round Hall,  
in the greasy light of  
kerosene lamps.

As a child I danced  
among the long, jangle legs of  
the men, down  
beside the whispering moccasin women,  
in close circles  
around the Old Ones,  
who sat at the drum,  
their heads tossed, backs arched  
in ancient prayer.

As a child I danced away from the fist,  
I danced toward the rhythms of life,  
I danced into dreams, into  
the sound of flies buzzing.  
A deer advancing but clinging to the forest wall,

the old red woman rocking in her tattered shawl,  
the young women bent, breasts  
drooping to the mouths of their young, the heat  
hanging heavy on the tips of our tongues,  
until the Sun  
burned the sky black, the moon  
made us silvery blue and  
all of the night sounds, all of the night sounds

folded together with the buzzing  
still in our heads,  
becoming a chant of ghosts,  
of *Crazy Horse* and *Wovoka*  
and all the Endless Others,  
snaking through the weaving through the trees  
like beams of ribbons of light,  
singing, *we shall live again we shall live,*

until the Sun and the Sun and the Sun and I  
awaken,  
still a child, still dancing  
toward the rhythm of life.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Hunger for Something

By [Chase Twichell](#)

Sometimes I long to be the woodpile,  
cut-apart trees soon to be smoke,  
or even the smoke itself,

sinewy ghost of ash and air, going  
wherever I want to, at least for a while.

Neither inside nor out,  
neither lost nor home, no longer  
a shape or a name, I'd pass through

all the broken windows of the world.  
It's not a wish for consciousness to end.

It's not the appetite an army has  
for its own emptying heart,

but a hunger to stand now and then  
alone on the death-grounds,  
where the dogs of the self are feeding.

## Self-Portrait

By [Chase Twichell](#)

I know I promised to stop  
talking about her,  
but I was talking to myself.  
The truth is, she's a child  
who stopped growing,  
so I've always allowed her  
to tag along, and when she brings  
her melancholy close to me  
I comfort her. Naturally  
you're curious; you want to know  
how she became a gnarled branch  
veiled in diminutive blooms.  
But I've told you all I know.  
I was sure she had secrets,  
but she had no secrets.  
I had to tell her mine.

## Alpha Step

By [Jack Underwood](#)

A change to my usual sleeping position,  
earth holding me close  
like I'm something that it loves.  
I feel a murmur through the hedgerow,  
old gods thawing from the permafrost.  
Only a matter of time  
before an Empire falls  
into the hands of an idiot  
and there are more ways of saying things  
than things worth saying;  
only a matter of love to steer the wind,  
which batters us daily, this only life  
that climbs beyond unfashionable  
beginnings, leaving us leaving it,  
breathless software, a bite taken out  
of the grand old narrative,

while our ghosts refuel midair.  
Deep time. Lovely time.  
The human print will not survive.  
I mean like, woo, there it was.

## Totem Pole

By [Jack Underwood](#)

I put an animal on an animal  
which I put onto the animal I had already stacked  
on top of my first animal and stood back  
to appraise my work only  
it looked much too short despite the number  
of animals I had gathered, and I felt tired and silly  
and disappointed, slumping to my knees, rocking  
back onto my bum, then lying down to stare  
into the hoary sky until my eyeballs softened  
and I was forced by the consistent light  
to close them and listen to the animals taking  
a surprisingly long time to disorganize themselves.

## The Luggage

By [Constance Urdang](#)

Travel is a vanishing act  
Only to those who are left behind.  
What the traveler knows  
Is that he accompanies himself,  
Unwieldy baggage that can't be checked,  
Stolen, or lost, or mistaken.  
So one took, past outposts of empire,  
"Calmly as if in the British Museum,"  
Not only her Victorian skirts,  
Starched shirtwaists, and umbrella, but her faith  
In the civilizing mission of women,  
Her backaches and insomnia, her innocent valor;  
Another, friend of witch-doctors,  
Living on native chop,  
Trading tobacco and hooks for fish and fetishes,  
Heralded her astonishing arrival  
Under shivering stars  
By calling, "It's only me!" A third,  
Intent on savage customs, and to demonstrate  
That a woman could travel as easily as a man,

Carried a handkerchief damp with wifely tears  
And only once permitted a tribal chieftain  
To stroke her long, golden hair.

## Reflections on History in Missouri

By [Constance Urdang](#)

This old house lodges no ghosts!  
Those swaggering specters who found their way  
Across the Atlantic  
Were left behind  
With their old European grudges  
In the farmhouses of New England  
And Pennsylvania  
Like so much jettisoned baggage  
Too heavy  
To lug over the Piedmont.

The flatlands are inhospitable  
To phantoms. Here  
Shadows are sharp and arbitrary  
Not mazy, obscure,  
Cowering in corners  
Behind scary old boots in a cupboard  
Or muffled in empty coats, deserted  
By long-dead cousins  
(Who appear now and then  
But only in photographs  
Already rusting at the edges)—

Setting out in the creaking wagon  
Tight-lipped, alert to move on,  
The old settlers had no room  
For illusions.  
Their dangers were real.  
Now in the spare square house  
Their great-grandchildren  
Tidy away the past  
Until the polished surfaces  
Reflect not apparitions, pinched,  
Parched, craving, unsatisfied,  
But only their own faces.

# To Live with a Landscape

By [Constance Urdang](#)

1

Take your boulevards, your Locust Street,  
Your Chestnut, Pine, your Olive,  
Take your Forest Park and Shaw's Garden,  
Your avenues that lead past street-corner violence,  
Past your West End, past your Limit,  
To shabby suburban crime,  
Vandalism in the parking-lot,  
Abductions from the shopping mall—  
Like making the same mistake over and over  
On the piano or typewriter keys,  
Always hitting the wrong note—  
How "very alive, very American"  
They are, how chockful of metaphysics,  
Hellbent to obliterate the wilderness.

2

Learn to live with sycamores,  
Their sad, peeling trunks, scabbed all over  
With shabby patches, their enormous leaves  
In dingy shades of ochre and dun  
Rattling like castanets, their roots  
Thick as a man's leg, crawling  
Like enormous worms out of the broken pavements,  
Continually thrusting themselves up  
From pools of shade they make,  
Sculpturing the street  
With dappled dark and light  
As glaucoma, a disease of the eye,  
Makes the world more beautiful  
With its mysterious rainbows.

3

Already in Iowa the monarchs are emerging,  
Signaling with their tawny wings;  
In regalia of burnt orange and umber  
The spangled imperial procession  
Meanders along the democratic roadsides,  
Across straight state lines,  
Over rivers and artificial lakes  
And the loneliness of middle America

On the way to Mexico.  
The tiny wind of their passing  
Is not even recorded  
As a disturbance in the atmosphere.

4

Driving back into the American past,  
Homesick for forests, flowers without names, vast savannahs,  
Lowlands or mountains teeming with game,  
Bluffs crowned with cottonwoods, mudbanks  
Where crocodiles might sun themselves;  
Finding instead the remains of strange picnics,  
Replications of old selves, a cacophony of changes  
Like a room crowded with chairs  
In which no one can sit, as if history were furniture  
Grown splintered and shabby;  
Studying a picturesque rustic architecture  
To master its splendid abstractions,  
Shady verandas and porches,  
Or the republican simplicity of a cow.

## Deliberate

By [Amy Uyematsu](#)

So by sixteen we move in packs  
learn to strut and slide  
in deliberate lowdown rhythm  
talk in a syn/co/pa/ted beat  
because we want so bad  
to be cool, never to be mistaken  
for white, even when we leave  
these rowdier L.A. streets—  
remember how we paint our eyes  
like gangsters  
flash our legs in nylons  
sassy black high heels  
or two inch zippered boots  
stack them by the door at night  
next to Daddy's muddy gardening shoes.

# Sanctuary

By [Jean Valentine](#)

*People pray to each other. The way I say "you" to someone else,  
respectfully, intimately, desperately. The way someone says  
"you" to me, hopefully, expectantly, intensely ...  
—Huub Oosterhuis*

You     who I don't know     I don't know how to talk to you

—What is it like for you there?

Here ... well, wanting solitude; and talk; friendship—  
The uses of solitude. To imagine; to hear.  
Learning braille. To imagine other solitudes.  
But they will not be mine;  
to wait, in the quiet; not to scatter the voices—

What are you afraid of?

What will happen. All this leaving. And meetings, yes. But death.  
What happens when you die?

“... not scatter the voices,”

Drown out. Not make a house, out of my own words. To be quiet in  
another throat; other eyes; listen for what it is like there. What  
word. What silence. Allowing. Uncertain: to drift, in the  
restlessness ... Repose. To run like water—

What is it like there, right now?

Listen: the crowding of the street; the room. Everyone hunches in  
against the crowding; holding their breath: against dread.

What do you dread?

What happens when you die?

What do you dread, in this room, now?

Not listening. Now. Not watching. Safe inside my own skin.  
To die, not having listened. Not having asked ... To have scattered  
life.

Yes I know: the thread you have to keep finding, over again, to

follow it back to life; I know. Impossible, sometimes.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## **Edgar Allan Poe Is Reached at the Baltimore Harbor by the Shadows That Pursue Him**

By [Fernando Valverde](#)

Translated By Carolyn Forché

*And the cloud that took the form  
(When the rest of Heaven was blue)  
Of a demon in my view—  
—Edgar Allan Poe*

They always followed you.

Disdainful dogs,  
they made you lose your balance.

You had to shout  
blasphemies into shadows  
trying to put out the din of their barking.

Other times  
it was advisable to talk and try to calm them,  
whispers could be more convincing  
and stop them on any corner,  
so as to continue alone.

Solitude is a walk through the streets of Baltimore.

You could never free yourself,  
those shadows were growing,  
crows perched on the statues  
with eyes fixed on the emptiness of a demon who dreams.

To you,  
who were on the edge of a dismal midnight  
watching specters of dying embers on the ground.

To you,  
who tasted sorrow,  
who drank it like an exquisite liqueur,  
I come close

and I look at you trying to find you on the other side of the stone  
carved by misfortune,  
the same as happens with beauty.

Never again will the silver bells ring,  
the ships that now arrive at the port of Baltimore  
are filled with people too frightened to speak.

They bring a stone in place of the heart,  
they do not sense these shadows that wander the streets,  
these shadows that are neither men nor women nor beasts,  
perhaps dogs or birds or words in the beaks of the birds  
or in their jaws.

When they pass they are nothing more than the sea breeze  
from which they come.

There is a silence now  
about silence  
in the shadows.

They bite like words  
in place of the heart.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## **For the Nefarious**

By [Mai Der Vang](#)

From a recessed hollow  
Rumble, I unearth as a creature

Conceived to be relentless.  
Depend on me to hunt you

Until you find yourself  
Counting all the uncorked

Nightmares you digested.  
I will let you know the burning

Endorsed by the effort of  
Matches. And you will claw

Yourself inward, toward a  
Conference of heat as the steam

Within you surrenders, caves  
You into a cardboard scar.

Even what will wreck you  
Are your mother's chapped lips.

Even to drip your confession  
Of empty rooms. I know about

Your recipe of rain, your apiary  
Ways. Trust me to be painful.

## Monument

By [Mai Der Vang](#)

*For Pos Moua*

What is the name for an antelope  
who grazes inside a dream

then vanishes into the  
nebula's brush.

What is the face  
for refurbishing grammar

at each comma's lip.  
Whose identity never

remembers the shape of beige.  
What is the word

for how to conjure  
the sigh of a line hushed

beneath the flap of a thousand  
shifting plumes.

What is the body of a  
garden where a crescent

despairs, drifts beneath  
the melt of amber.

The season is always growing  
out its hooves.

One cradlesong  
of your leaving is not larger

than the forest of your arrival.  
*To make you a noun forever.*

A loss of you  
cannot be equal to the loss of you.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Trying to See Auras at the Airport

By [Angela C. Trudell Vasquez](#)

Recycled over and over  
people born look like parents,  
grandparents, sister or brother,  
or perhaps a throwback  
from an earlier ancestor,  
the hawk nose, a hard ridged forehead,  
the cleft in the chin or a blue birthmark  
on the arm, the stomach,  
the dainty fresh bum of a newborn  
each unique like a snowflake never  
can you guess what's on their mind  
sometimes I can feel what they're feeling  
detect it like hairs on the back of my arms,  
together we live, talk, walk the same sidewalks,  
to die buried in a foreign cemetery  
for others to sit upon ponder their  
own light, why am I free, what must I do,  
does someone love me like I do,  
new skin gives way to wrinkles,  
hair fades to gray, bones grow strong  
then decay, strength seeps every time  
one pees, sleeps, ages, loves,  
muscles grow then shrink the body  
a temporary vessel destination unknown.

April 28, 2002

# The Morning-Watch

By [Henry Vaughn](#)

O joys! infinite sweetness! with what flow'rs  
And shoots of glory my soul breaks and buds!  
All the long hours  
Of night, and rest,  
Through the still shrouds  
Of sleep, and clouds,  
This dew fell on my breast;  
Oh, how it bloods  
And spirits all my earth! Hark! In what rings  
And hymning circulations the quick world  
Awakes and sings;  
The rising winds  
And falling springs,  
Birds, beasts, all things  
Adore him in their kinds.  
Thus all is hurl'd  
In sacred hymns and order, the great chime  
And symphony of nature. Prayer is  
The world in tune,  
A spirit voice,  
And vocal joys  
Whose echo is heav'n's bliss.  
O let me climb  
When I lie down! The pious soul by night  
Is like a clouded star whose beams, though said  
To shed their light  
Under some cloud,  
Yet are above,  
And shine and move  
Beyond that misty shroud.  
So in my bed,  
That curtain'd grave, though sleep, like ashes, hide  
My lamp and life, both shall in thee abide.

# The Water-fall

By [Henry Vaughn](#)

With what deep murmurs through time's silent stealth  
Doth thy transparent, cool, and wat'ry wealth  
Here flowing fall,  
And chide, and call,  
As if his liquid, loose retinue stay'd

Ling'ring, and were of this steep place afraid;  
The common pass  
Where, clear as glass,  
All must descend  
Not to an end,  
But quicken'd by this deep and rocky grave,  
Rise to a longer course more bright and brave.

Dear stream! dear bank, where often I  
Have sate and pleas'd my pensive eye,  
Why, since each drop of thy quick store  
Runs thither whence it flow'd before,  
Should poor souls fear a shade or night,  
Who came, sure, from a sea of light?  
Or since those drops are all sent back  
So sure to thee, that none doth lack,  
Why should frail flesh doubt any more  
That what God takes, he'll not restore?

O useful element and clear!  
My sacred wash and cleanser here,  
My first consigner unto those  
Fountains of life where the Lamb goes!  
What sublime truths and wholesome themes  
Lodge in thy mystical deep streams!  
Such as dull man can never find  
Unless that Spirit lead his mind  
Which first upon thy face did move,  
And hatch'd all with his quick'ning love.  
As this loud brook's incessant fall  
In streaming rings restagnates all,  
Which reach by course the bank, and then  
Are no more seen, just so pass men.  
O my invisible estate,  
My glorious liberty, still late!  
Thou art the channel my soul seeks,  
Not this with cataracts and creeks.

## **Whenever you see a tree**

By [Padma Venkatraman](#)

Think  
how many long years  
this tree waited as a seed  
for an animal or bird or wind or rain

to maybe carry it to maybe the right spot  
where again it waited months for seasons to change  
until time and temperature were fine enough to coax it  
to swell and burst its hard shell so it could send slender roots  
to clutch at grains of soil and let tender shoots reach toward the sun  
Think how many decades or centuries it thickened and climbed and grew  
taller and deeper never knowing if it would find enough water or light  
or when conditions would be right so it could keep on spreading leaves  
adding blossoms and dancing  
Next time  
you see  
a tree  
think  
how  
much  
hope  
it holds

## The Clouded Morning

By [Jones Very](#)

The morning comes, and thickening clouds prevail,  
Hanging like curtains all the horizon round,  
Or overhead in heavy stillness sail;  
So still is day, it seems like night profound;  
Scarce by the city's din the air is stirred,  
And dull and deadened comes its every sound;  
The cock's shrill, piercing voice subdued is heard,  
By the thick folds of muffling vapors drowned.  
Dissolved in mists the hills and trees appear,  
Their outlines lost and blended with the sky;  
And well-known objects, that to all are near,  
No longer seem familiar to the eye,  
But with fantastic forms they mock the sight,  
As when we grope amid the gloom of night.

## You, If No One Else

By [Tino Villanueva](#)

Listen, you  
who transformed your anguish  
into healthy awareness,  
put your voice  
where your memory is.

You who swallowed  
the afternoon dust,  
defend everything you understand  
with words.  
You, if no one else,  
will condemn with your tongue  
the erosion each disappointment brings.

You, who saw the images  
of disgust growing,  
will understand how time  
devours the destitute;  
you, who gave yourself  
your own commandments,  
know better than anyone  
why you turned your back  
on your town's toughest limits.

Don't hush,  
don't throw away  
the most persistent truth,  
as our hard-headed brethren  
sometimes do.  
Remember well  
what your life was like: cloudiness,  
and slick mud  
after a drizzle;  
flimsy windows the wind  
kept rattling  
in winter, and that  
unheated slab dwelling  
where coldness crawled  
up in your clothes.

Tell how you were able to come  
to this point, to unbar  
History's doors  
to see your early years,  
your people, the others.  
Name the way  
rebellion's calm spirit has served you,  
and how you came  
to unlearn the lessons  
of that teacher,  
your land's omnipotent defiler.

# The Spire

By [Ellen Bryant Voigt](#)

In the Bavarian steeple, on the hour,  
two figures emerge from their scalloped house  
carrying sledges that they clap, in turn,  
against the surface of the bell. By legend  
they are summer and winter, youth and age,  
as though the forces of plenty and of loss  
played equally on the human soul, extracted  
easily the same low bronze note spreading  
upward from the encumbrance of the village,  
past alluvial fields to the pocked highland  
where cattle shift their massive heads  
at this dissonance, this faint redundant  
pressure in the ears, in the air.

From the village, the mountain seems  
a single stone, a single blank completion.  
Seeing the summit pierce the abstract heavens,  
we reconstruct the valley on the mountain—  
a shepherd propped against his crook, birds  
enthralled on a branch, the branch feathering  
the edge of the canvas—transposing  
such forms as can extend the flawed earth  
and embody us, intact, unaltering, among  
the soft surprising trees of childhood,  
mimosa, honey locust and willow.

Wood in the midst of woods, the village  
houses are allied in a formal shape  
beside a stream, the streets concluding  
at the monument. Again the ravishing moment  
of the bell: the townspeople, curious  
or accustomed, stop to count the strokes,  
odd or even—the confectioner counting out  
the lavender candies for his customer,  
the butcher, the greengrocer, the surgeon  
and the constable—as the housewife  
stands on the stoop, shaking her mop,  
and sees the dust briefly veil the air,  
an algebra of swirling particles.

## [Sleeping sister of a farther sky]

By [Karen Volkman](#)

Sleeping sister of a farther sky,  
dropped from zenith like a tender tone,  
the lucid apex of a scale unknown  
whose whitest whisper is an opaque cry

of measureless frequency, the spectral sigh  
you breath, bright hydrogen and brighter zone  
of fissured carbon, consummated moan  
and ceaseless rapture of a brilliant why.

Will nothing wake you from your livid rest?  
Essence of ether and astral stone  
the stunned polarities your substance weaves

in one bright making, like a dream of leaves  
in the tree's mind, summered. Or as a brooding bone  
roots constellations in the body's nest.

## DetoNation

By [Ocean Vuong](#)

There's a joke that ends with — *huh?*  
It's the bomb saying here is your father.

Now here is your father inside  
your lungs. Look how lighter

the earth is — afterward.  
To even write the word *father*

is to carve a portion of the day  
out of a bomb-bright page.

There's enough light to drown in  
but never enough to enter the bones

& stay. *Don't stay here*, he said, *my boy*  
*broken by the names of flowers. Don't cry*

*anymore*. So I ran into the night.  
The night: my shadow growing

toward my father.

## Toy Boat

By [Ocean Vuong](#)

*For Tamir Rice*

yellow plastic  
black sea

eye-shaped shard  
on a darkened map

no shores now  
to arrive — or  
depart  
no wind but  
this waiting which  
moves you

as if the seconds  
could be entered  
& never left

toy boat — oarless  
each wave  
a green lamp  
outlasted

toy boat  
toy leaf dropped  
from a toy tree  
waiting

waiting  
as if the sp-  
arrows  
thinning above you  
are not  
already pierced  
by their own names

***Note to Poetry Out Loud students:*** This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.

# Their Bodies

By [David Wagoner](#)

*To the students of anatomy  
at Indiana University*

That gaunt old man came first, his hair as white  
As your scoured tables. Maybe you'll recollect him  
By the scars of steelmill burns on the backs of his hands,  
On the nape of his neck, on his arms and sinewy legs,  
And her by the enduring innocence  
Of her face, as open to all of you in death  
As it would have been in life: she would memorize  
Your names and ages and pastimes and hometowns  
If she could, but she can't now, so remember her.

They believed in doctors, listened to their advice,  
And followed it faithfully. You should treat them  
One last time as they would have treated you.  
They had been kind to others all their lives  
And believed in being useful. Remember somewhere  
Their son is trying hard to believe you'll learn  
As much as possible from them, as *he* did,  
And will do your best to learn politely and truly.

They gave away the gift of those useful bodies  
Against his wish. (They had their own ways  
Of doing everything, always.) If you're not certain  
Which ones are theirs, be gentle to everybody.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

# Inside Out

By [Diane Wakoski](#)

I walk the purple carpet into your eye  
carrying the silver butter server  
but a truck rumbles by,  
                    leaving its black tire prints on my foot  
and old images       the sound of banging screen doors on hot  
                    afternoons and a fly buzzing over the Kool-Aid spilled on  
                    the sink  
flicker, as reflections on the metal surface.

Come in, you said,  
inside your paintings, inside the blood factory, inside the  
old songs that line your hands, inside  
eyes that change like a snowflake every second,  
inside spinach leaves holding that one piece of gravel,  
inside the whiskers of a cat,  
inside your old hat, and most of all inside your mouth where you  
grind the pigments with your teeth, painting  
with a broken bottle on the floor, and painting  
with an ostrich feather on the moon that rolls out of my mouth.

You cannot let me walk inside you too long inside  
the veins where my small feet touch  
bottom.  
You must reach inside and pull me  
like a silver bullet  
from your arm.

# The Season of Phantasmal Peace

By Derek Walcott

Then all the nations of birds lifted together  
the huge net of the shadows of this earth  
in multitudinous dialects, twittering tongues,  
stitching and crossing it. They lifted up  
the shadows of long pines down trackless slopes,  
the shadows of glass-faced towers down evening streets,  
the shadow of a frail plant on a city sill—  
the net rising soundless as night, the birds' cries soundless, until  
there was no longer dusk, or season, decline, or weather,  
only this passage of phantasmal light  
that not the narrowest shadow dared to sever.

And men could not see, looking up, what the wild geese drew,  
what the ospreys trailed behind them in silvery ropes  
that flashed in the icy sunlight; they could not hear  
battalions of starlings waging peaceful cries,  
bearing the net higher, covering this world  
like the vines of an orchard, or a mother drawing  
the trembling gauze over the trembling eyes  
of a child fluttering to sleep;

it was the light  
that you will see at evening on the side of a hill  
in yellow October, and no one hearing knew  
what change had brought into the raven's cawing,

the killdeer's screech, the ember-circling chough  
such an immense, soundless, and high concern  
for the fields and cities where the birds belong,  
except it was their seasonal passing, Love,  
made seasonless, or, from the high privilege of their birth,  
something brighter than pity for the wingless ones  
below them who shared dark holes in windows and in houses,  
and higher they lifted the net with soundless voices  
above all change, betrayals of falling suns,  
and this season lasted one moment, like the pause  
between dusk and darkness, between fury and peace,  
but, for such as our earth is now, it lasted long.

## Semblance: Screens

By [Liz Waldner](#)

A moth lies open and lies

like an old bleached beech leaf,  
a lean-to between window frame and sill.  
Its death protects a collection of tinier deaths  
and other dirt beneath.  
Although the white paint is water-stained,  
on it death is dirt, and hapless.

The just-severed tiger lily  
is drinking its glass of water, I hope.  
This hope is sere.  
This hope is severe.  
What you ruin ruins you, too  
and so you hope for favor.  
I mean I do.

The underside of a ladybug  
wanders the window. I wander  
the continent, my undercarriage not as evident,  
so go more perilously, it seems to me.  
But I am only me; to you it seems clear  
I mean to disappear, and am mean  
and project on you some ancient fear.

If I were a bug, I hope I wouldn't be  
this giant winged thing, spindly like a crane fly,  
skinny-legged like me, kissing the cold ceiling,  
fumbling for the face of the other, seeking.

It came in with me last night when I turned on the light.

I lay awake, afraid it would touch my face.

It wants out. I want out, too.  
I thought you a way through.

Arms wide for wings,  
your suffering mine, twinned.  
Screen. Your unbelief drives me in,  
doubt for dirt, white sheet for sill—  
You don't stay other enough or still  
enough to be likened to.

## **The Lighthouse Keeper**

By [Mark Waldron](#)

On occasion, when the mood takes him  
as it so often does, he will put down

his papers, get up from his kindly old chair,  
and leave for a while the sweeping beam

to sow its charitable seed — that seed which,  
when falling on the ground

of a helmsman's fertile consciousness,  
ought germinate in it a cautious vigilance.

He descends then, the long corkscrew of  
the stairs and opens at their base the metal door

so that he may take a closer look at what might  
be beyond his tower's environs. There he always

finds the churning world, she laps at him from  
every side with no respite, and spatters him

with spray. Thanks to a certain modulation,  
a tone which he adopted long ago

when he still wore shorts and buckled shoes,  
there is no danger here from neither shark

nor crocodile, not in this sea stuffed as it is

like a dressing-up box with whimsy.

Indeed, were there such creatures hidden  
neath the sliver-thin surface of the waves,

they'd have no teeth but only soft gray gums  
and goofy grins, and they'd be giggling

knowingly at the whole thing. And so it is  
that as he gazes out, he cannot help

but wonder what it is he might be warning of  
with the light that turns atop his tower,

because that tower is itself in fact the only  
hazard anywhere on which a ship might rip her

wooden skin and haemorrhage her lumpy  
blood that's made of all the gasping sailormen.

## Childhood

By [Margaret Walker](#)

When I was a child I knew red miners  
dressed raggedly and wearing carbide lamps.  
I saw them come down red hills to their camps  
dyed with red dust from old Ishkooda mines.  
Night after night I met them on the roads,  
or on the streets in town I caught their glance;  
the swing of dinner buckets in their hands,  
and grumbling undermining all their words.

I also lived in low cotton country  
where moonlight hovered over ripe haystacks,  
or stumps of trees, and croppers' rotting shacks  
with famine, terror, flood, and plague near by;  
where sentiment and hatred still held sway  
and only bitter land was washed away.

## Lineage

By [Margaret Walker](#)

My grandmothers were strong.  
They followed plows and bent to toil.

They moved through fields sowing seed.  
They touched earth and grain grew.  
They were full of sturdiness and singing.  
My grandmothers were strong.

My grandmothers are full of memories  
Smelling of soap and onions and wet clay  
With veins rolling roughly over quick hands  
They have many clean words to say.  
My grandmothers were strong.  
Why am I not as they?

## Cloud of Feelings

By [Nikki Wallschlaeger](#)

I want to hold a cloud but it's made of air  
a smog of tweets makes a world go round,  
  
the confusion of clouds predicting a storm  
think nothing of it, bombs are natural now,  
  
explosives wrapped in their hollowed brows  
exploiting crisis and pushing the inevitable,  
  
bluebirds know it's a new day, they whistle  
without confusion, listen, how do we speak  
  
to light at the end of the holographic tunnel,  
my first smoking question of a new season  
  
to begrudge feelings we once had, released,  
the future reading books and understanding  
  
tweeting, unbreathable air, and the confusion  
of so much suffering and sovereign comfort,  
  
exploring the rites of violence, an old feeling  
publicized and burning, cyclones, heilstorms  
  
slapping the drafts, think nothing of it, birds—  
get out of their way, the powerful are talking,  
  
don't breathe the confusion, sideswiped in  
holographic traffic, a question for bluebirds:

if you, dear birdsong, took away our clouds  
of feelings would anyone notice send tweet

## American Income

By [Afaa Michael Weaver](#)

The survey says all groups can make more money  
if they lose weight except black men...men of other colors  
and women of all colors have more gold, but black men  
are the summary of weight, a lead thick thing on the scales,  
meters spinning until they ring off the end of the numbering  
of accumulation, how things grow heavy, fish on the  
ends of lines that become whales, then prehistoric sea life  
beyond all memories, the billion days of human hands  
working, doing all the labor one can imagine, hands  
now the population of cactus leaves on a papyrus moon  
waiting for the fire, the notes from all their singing gone  
up into the salt breath of tears of children that dry, rise  
up to be the crystalline canopy of promises, the infinite  
gone fishing days with the apologies for not being able to love  
anymore, gone down inside earth somewhere where  
women make no demands, have fewer dreams of forever,  
these feet that marched and ran and got cut off, these hearts  
torn out of chests by nameless thieves, this thrashing  
until the chaff is gone out and black men know the gold  
of being the dead center of things, where pain is the gateway  
to Jerusalems, Bodhi trees, places for meditation and howling,  
keeping the weeping heads of gods in their eyes.

## Stepping Stones

By [Albert Wendt](#)

Our islands are Tagaloalagi's stepping stones across Le Vasa Loloa  
small and frail but courageous enough to bear his weight and mana

high enough to keep us above the drowning and learning  
how to navigate by the stars currents and the ferocity of storms

Point and sail in any direction as long as you know  
how to return home

You have to navigate the space between the borders  
of your skin and the intelligence of the tongueless horizon

and learn the language of touch   of signs and pain  
of what isn't and what may be in the circle of the tides

that will stretch until you understand the permanent silence  
at the end of your voyage

and our islands are your anchor and launching site  
for the universes that repeat and repeat

like the long waves of our ocean   like Tagaloaalagi's  
compulsive scrutiny of what is to come and fear

## **Dakota Homecoming**

By [Gwen Nell Westerman](#)

We are so honored that  
    you are here, they said.  
We know that this is  
    your homeland, they said.  
The admission price  
    is five dollars, they said.  
Here is your button  
    for the event, they said.  
It means so much to us that  
    you are here, they said.  
We want to write  
    an apology letter, they said.  
Tell us what to say.

## **An Autumn Sunset**

By [Edith Wharton](#)

I

Leaguered in fire  
The wild black promontories of the coast extend  
Their savage silhouettes;  
The sun in universal carnage sets,  
And, halting higher,  
The motionless storm-clouds mass their sullen threats,  
Like an advancing mob in sword-points penned,  
That, balked, yet stands at bay.  
Mid-zenith hangs the fascinated day  
In wind-lustrated hollows crystalline,

A wan Valkyrie whose wide pinions shine  
Across the ensanguined ruins of the fray,  
And in her hand swings high o'erhead,  
Above the waster of war,  
The silver torch-light of the evening star  
Wherewith to search the faces of the dead.

## II

Lagooned in gold,  
Seem not those jetty promontories rather  
The outposts of some ancient land forlorn,  
Uncomforted of morn,  
Where old oblivions gather,  
The melancholy unconsoling fold  
Of all things that go utterly to death  
And mix no more, no more  
With life's perpetually awakening breath?  
Shall Time not ferry me to such a shore,  
Over such sailless seas,  
To walk with hope's slain importunities  
In miserable marriage? Nay, shall not  
All things be there forgot,  
Save the sea's golden barrier and the black  
Close-crouching promontories?  
Dead to all shames, forgotten of all glories,  
Shall I not wander there, a shadow's shade,  
A spectre self-destroyed,  
So purged of all remembrance and sucked back  
Into the primal void,  
That should we on the shore phantasmal meet  
I should not know the coming of your feet?

## Experience

By [Edith Wharton](#)

## I

Like Crusoe with the bootless gold we stand  
Upon the desert verge of death, and say:  
"What shall avail the woes of yesterday  
To buy to-morrow's wisdom, in the land  
Whose currency is strange unto our hand?  
In life's small market they had served to pay

Some late-found rapture, could we but delay  
Till Time hath matched our means to our demand.”

But otherwise Fate wills it, for, behold,  
Our gathered strength of individual pain,  
When Time’s long alchemy hath made it gold,  
Dies with us—hoarded all these years in vain,  
Since those that might be heir to it the mould  
Renew, and coin themselves new griefs again.

## II

O Death, we come full-handed to thy gate,  
Rich with strange burden of the mingled years,  
Gains and renunciations, mirth and tears,  
And love’s oblivion, and remembering hate,  
Nor know we what compulsion laid such freight  
Upon our souls—and shall our hopes and fears  
Buy nothing of thee, Death? Behold our wares,  
And sell us the one joy for which we wait.  
Had we lived longer, like had such for sale,  
With the last coin of sorrow purchased cheap,  
But now we stand before thy shadowy pale,  
And all our longings lie within thy keep—  
Death, can it be the years shall naught avail?

“Not so,” Death answered, “they shall purchase sleep.”

## Life

By [Edith Wharton](#)

Life, like a marble block, is given to all,  
A blank, inchoate mass of years and days,  
Whence one with ardent chisel swift essays  
Some shape of strength or symmetry to call;  
One shatters it in bits to mend a wall;  
One in a craftier hand the chisel lays,  
And one, to wake the mirth in Lesbia’s gaze,  
Carves it apace in toys fantastical.

But least is he who, with enchanted eyes  
Filled with high visions of fair shapes to be,  
Muses which god he shall immortalize  
In the proud Parian’s perpetuity,

Till twilight warns him from the punctual skies  
That the night cometh wherein none shall see.

## A Hymn to the Evening

By [Phillis Wheatley](#)

Soon as the sun forsook the eastern main  
The pealing thunder shook the heav'nly plain;  
Majestic grandeur! From the zephyr's wing,  
Exhales the incense of the blooming spring.  
Soft purl the streams, the birds renew their notes,  
And through the air their mingled music floats.  
Through all the heav'ns what beauteous dies are spread!  
But the west glories in the deepest red:  
So may our breasts with ev'ry virtue glow,  
The living temples of our God below!  
Fill'd with the praise of him who gives the light,  
And draws the sable curtains of the night,  
Let placid slumbers sooth each weary mind,  
At morn to wake more heav'nly, more refin'd;  
So shall the labours of the day begin  
More pure, more guarded from the snares of sin.  
Night's leaden sceptre seals my drowsy eyes,  
Then cease, my song, till fair *Aurora* rise.

## On Virtue

By [Phillis Wheatley](#)

O thou bright jewel in my aim I strive  
To comprehend thee. Thine own words declare  
Wisdom is higher than a fool can reach.  
I cease to wonder, and no more attempt  
Thine height t'explore, or fathom thy profound.  
But, O my soul, sink not into despair,  
*Virtue* is near thee, and with gentle hand  
Would now embrace thee, hovers o'er thine head.  
Fain would the heaven-born soul with her converse,  
Then seek, then court her for her promised bliss.

Auspicious queen, thine heavenly pinions spread,  
And lead celestial *Chastity* along;  
Lo! now her sacred retinue descends,  
Arrayed in glory from the orbs above.  
Attend me, *Virtue*, thro' my youthful years!

O leave me not to the false joys of time!  
But guide my steps to endless life and bliss.  
*Greatness*, or *Goodness*, say what I shall call thee,  
To give an higher appellation still,  
Teach me a better strain, a nobler lay,  
O Thou, enthroned with Cherubs in the realms of day!

## To S. M. A Young African Painter, On Seeing His Works

By [Phillis Wheatley](#)

TO show the lab'ring bosom's deep intent,  
And thought in living characters to paint,  
When first thy pencil did those beauties give,  
And breathing figures learnt from thee to live,  
How did those prospects give my soul delight,  
A new creation rushing on my sight?  
Still, wond'rous youth! each noble path pursue,  
On deathless glories fix thine ardent view:  
Still may the painter's and the poet's fire  
To aid thy pencil, and thy verse conspire!  
And may the charms of each seraphic theme  
Conduct thy footsteps to immortal fame!  
High to the blissful wonders of the skies  
Elate thy soul, and raise thy wishful eyes.  
Thrice happy, when exalted to survey  
That splendid city, crown'd with endless day,  
Whose twice six gates on radiant hinges ring:  
Celestial Salem blooms in endless spring.  
Calm and serene thy moments glide along,  
And may the muse inspire each future song!  
Still, with the sweets of contemplation bless'd,  
May peace with balmy wings your soul invest!  
But when these shades of time are chas'd away,  
And darkness ends in everlasting day,  
On what seraphic pinions shall we move,  
And view the landscapes in the realms above?  
There shall thy tongue in heav'nly murmurs flow,  
And there my muse with heav'nly transport glow:  
No more to tell of Damon's tender sighs,  
Or rising radiance of Aurora's eyes,  
For nobler themes demand a nobler strain,  
And purer language on th' ethereal plain.  
Cease, gentle muse! the solemn gloom of night  
Now seals the fair creation from my sight.

**To —**

By [Sarah Helen Whitman](#)

Vainly my heart had with thy sorceries striven:  
It had no refuge from thy love,—no Heaven  
But in thy fatal presence;—from afar  
It owned thy power and trembled like a star  
O'erfraught with light and splendor. Could I deem  
How dark a shadow should obscure its beam?—  
Could I believe that pain could ever dwell  
Where thy bright presence cast its blissful spell?  
Thou wert my proud palladium;—could I fear  
The avenging Destinies when thou wert near?—  
*Thou* wert my Destiny;—thy song, thy fame,  
The wild enchantments clustering round thy name,  
Were my soul's heritage, its royal dower;  
Its glory and its kingdom and its power!

## **I Hear America Singing**

By [Walt Whitman](#)

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,  
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,  
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,  
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,  
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand singing on the  
steamboat deck,  
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,  
The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the morning, or at noon intermission  
or at sundown,  
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or  
washing,  
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,  
The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young fellows, robust, friendly,  
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

## **A Noiseless Patient Spider**

By [Walt Whitman](#)

A noiseless patient spider,  
I mark'd where on a little promontory it stood isolated,  
Mark'd how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,  
It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself,  
Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.

And you O my soul where you stand,  
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,  
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them,  
Till the bridge you will need be form'd, till the ductile anchor hold,  
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul.

## **When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer**

By [Walt Whitman](#)

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,  
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,  
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,  
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,  
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,  
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,  
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,  
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

## **In School-days**

By [John Greenleaf Whittier](#)

Still sits the school-house by the road,  
A ragged beggar sleeping;  
Around it still the sumachs grow,  
And blackberry-vines are creeping.

Within, the master's desk is seen,  
Deep scarred by raps official;  
The warping floor, the battered seats,  
The jack-knife's carved initial;

The charcoal frescos on its wall;  
Its door's worn sill, betraying  
The feet that, creeping slow to school,  
Went storming out to playing!

Long years ago a winter sun  
Shone over it at setting;  
Lit up its western window-panes,  
And low eaves' icy fretting.

It touched the tangled golden curls,

And brown eyes full of grieving,  
Of one who still her steps delayed  
When all the school were leaving.

For near her stood the little boy  
Her childish favor singled:  
His cap pulled low upon a face  
Where pride and shame were mingled.

Pushing with restless feet the snow  
To right and left, he lingered;—  
As restlessly her tiny hands  
The blue-checked apron fingered.

He saw her lift her eyes; he felt  
The soft hand's light caressing,  
And heard the tremble of her voice,  
As if a fault confessing.

"I'm sorry that I spelt the word:  
I hate to go above you,  
Because,"—the brown eyes lower fell,—  
"Because, you see, I love you!"

Still memory to a gray-haired man  
That sweet child-face is showing.  
Dear girl! the grasses on her grave  
Have forty years been growing!

He lives to learn, in life's hard school,  
How few who pass above him  
Lament their triumph and his loss,  
Like her,—because they love him.

## **Advice to a Prophet**

By [Richard Wilbur](#)

When you come, as you soon must, to the streets of our city,  
Mad-eyed from stating the obvious,  
Not proclaiming our fall but begging us  
In God's name to have self-pity,

Spare us all word of the weapons, their force and range,  
The long numbers that rocket the mind;  
Our slow, unreckoning hearts will be left behind,

Unable to fear what is too strange.

Nor shall you scare us with talk of the death of the race.  
How should we dream of this place without us?—  
The sun mere fire, the leaves untroubled about us,  
A stone look on the stone's face?

Speak of the world's own change. Though we cannot conceive  
Of an undreamt thing, we know to our cost  
How the dreamt cloud crumbles, the vines are blackened by frost,  
How the view alters. We could believe,

If you told us so, that the white-tailed deer will slip  
Into perfect shade, grown perfectly shy,  
The lark avoid the reaches of our eye,  
The jack-pine lose its knuckled grip

On the cold ledge, and every torrent burn  
As Xanthus once, its gliding trout  
Stunned in a twinkling. What should we be without  
The dolphin's arc, the dove's return,

These things in which we have seen ourselves and spoken?  
Ask us, prophet, how we shall call  
Our natures forth when that live tongue is all  
Dispelled, that glass obscured or broken

In which we have said the rose of our love and the clean  
Horse of our courage, in which beheld  
The singing locust of the soul unshelled,  
And all we mean or wish to mean.

Ask us, ask us whether with the worldless rose  
Our hearts shall fail us; come demanding  
Whether there shall be lofty or long standing  
When the bronze annals of the oak-tree close.

## **A Barred Owl**

By [Richard Wilbur](#)

The warping night air having brought the boom  
Of an owl's voice into her darkened room,  
We tell the wakened child that all she heard  
Was an odd question from a forest bird,  
Asking of us, if rightly listened to,

“Who cooks for you?” and then “Who cooks for you?”

Words, which can make our terrors bravely clear,  
Can also thus domesticate a fear,  
And send a small child back to sleep at night  
Not listening for the sound of stealthy flight  
Or dreaming of some small thing in a claw  
Borne up to some dark branch and eaten raw.

## Looking into History

By [Richard Wilbur](#)

### I.

Five soldiers fixed by Mathew Brady's eye  
Stand in a land subdued beyond belief.  
Belief might lend them life again. I try  
Like orphaned Hamlet working up his grief

To see my spellbound fathers in these men  
Who, breathless in their amber atmosphere,  
Show but the postures men affected then  
And the hermit faces of a finished year.

The guns and gear and all are strange until  
Beyond the tents I glimpse a file of trees  
Verging a road that struggles up a hill.  
They're sycamores.

The long-abated breeze

Flares in those boughs I know, and hauls the sound  
Of guns and a great forest in distress.  
Fathers, I know my cause, and we are bound  
Beyond that hill to fight at Wilderness.

### II.

But trick your eyes with Birnam Wood, or think  
How fire-cast shadows of the bankside trees  
Rode on the back of Simois to sink  
In the wide waters. Reflect how history's

Changes are like the sea's, which mauls and mulls  
Its salvage of the world in shifty waves,  
Shrouding in evergreen the oldest hulls  
And yielding views of its confounded graves

To the new moon, the sun, or any eye  
That in its shallow shoreward vision sees  
The pebbles charging with a deathless cry  
And carageen memorials of trees.

### III.

Now, old man of the sea,  
I start to understand:  
The will will find no stillness  
Back in a stilled land.

The dead give no command  
And shall not find their voice  
Till they be mustered by  
Some present fatal choice.

Let me now rejoice  
In all impostures, take  
The shape of lion or leopard,  
Boar, or watery snake,

Or like the comber break,  
Yet in the end stand fast  
And by some fervent fraud  
Father the waiting past,

Resembling at the last  
The self-established tree  
That draws all waters toward  
Its live formality.

## Love Calls Us to the Things of This World

By [Richard Wilbur](#)

The eyes open to a cry of pulleys,  
And spirited from sleep, the astounded soul  
Hangs for a moment bodiless and simple  
As false dawn.

Outside the open window  
The morning air is all awash with angels.

Some are in bed-sheets, some are in blouses,

Some are in smocks: but truly there they are.  
Now they are rising together in calm swells  
Of halcyon feeling, filling whatever they wear  
With the deep joy of their impersonal breathing;

Now they are flying in place, conveying  
The terrible speed of their omnipresence, moving  
And staying like white water; and now of a sudden  
They swoon down into so rapt a quiet  
That nobody seems to be there.

The soul shrinks

From all that it is about to remember,  
From the punctual rape of every blessed day,  
And cries,  
“Oh, let there be nothing on earth but laundry,  
Nothing but rosy hands in the rising steam  
And clear dances done in the sight of heaven.”

Yet, as the sun acknowledges  
With a warm look the world's hunks and colors,  
The soul descends once more in bitter love  
To accept the waking body, saying now  
In a changed voice as the man yawns and rises,  
“Bring them down from their ruddy gallows;  
Let there be clean linen for the backs of thieves;  
Let lovers go fresh and sweet to be undone,  
And the heaviest nuns walk in a pure floating  
Of dark habits,  
keeping their difficult balance.”

## Friendship After Love

By [Ella Wheeler Wilcox](#)

After the fierce midsummer all ablaze  
Has burned itself to ashes, and expires  
In the intensity of its own fires,  
There come the mellow, mild, St. Martin days  
Crowned with the calm of peace, but sad with haze.  
So after Love has led us, till he tires  
Of his own throes, and torments, and desires,  
Comes large-eyed friendship: with a restful gaze,  
He beckons us to follow, and across  
Cool verdant vales we wander free from care.  
Is it a touch of frost lies in the air?

Why are we haunted with a sense of loss?  
We do not wish the pain back, or the heat;  
And yet, and yet, these days are incomplete.

## Speak

By [Phillip B. Williams](#)

A storm and so a gift.  
    Its swift approach  
        lifts gravel from the road.  
A fence is flattened in  
    the course of the storm's  
        worse attempt at language —  
thunder's umbrage. A tree  
    is torn apart,  
        blown upward through a bedroom  
window. A boy winnows  
    through the pile  
        of shards for the sharpest parts  
from the blown-apart  
    glass. He has  
        a bag that holds found edges  
jagged as a stag's  
    horns or smooth as  
        a single pane smashed into  
smaller panes that he sticks  
    his hand into  
        to make blood web across  
his ache-less skin flexing  
    like fish gills  
        O-lipped for a scream  
it cannot make.  
    He wants to feel  
        what his friends have felt,  
the slant of fear on their faces  
    he could never  
        recreate, his body configured  
without pain. When his skin's  
    pouting welts  
        don't rake a whimper  
from his mouth, he runs  
    outside, arms up  
        for the storm, aluminum  
baseball bat held out  
    to the sky

until lightning with an electric  
tongue makes his viscera  
luminescent;  
the boy's first word for pain  
is the light's  
new word for home.

## Vision in Which the Final Blackbird Disappears

By [Phillip B. Williams](#)

A monstrosity in the alley.  
A many-bodied movement grouped  
for terror, their flights' brief shadows  
on the kitchen curtains, on the street's  
reliquaries of loose squares and hustle.  
Some minds are groomed for defiance. The youngest  
calls out his territory with muscular vowels  
where street light spills peculiar, his hand  
a chorus of heat and recoil. "Could have been  
a doctor" say those who knew and did not  
know him, though he never wanted to know  
what gargles endlessly in a body — wet hives,  
planets unspooled from their throbbing shapes.  
There are many ways to look at this.  
He got what he wished against. He got  
wings on his shoes for a sacrifice. The postulate  
that stars turn a blind eye to the cobalt corners  
of rooms is incorrect. Light only helps or ruins sight.  
Daylight does cruel things to a boy's face.

## Danse Russe

By [William Carlos Williams](#)

If I when my wife is sleeping  
and the baby and Kathleen  
are sleeping  
and the sun is a flame-white disc  
in silken mists  
above shining trees,—  
if I in my north room  
dance naked, grotesquely  
before my mirror  
waving my shirt round my head  
and singing softly to myself:

“I am lonely, lonely.  
I was born to be lonely,  
I am best so!”  
If I admire my arms, my face,  
my shoulders, flanks, buttocks  
against the yellow drawn shades,—

Who shall say I am not  
the happy genius of my household?

## Queen-Anne's Lace

By [William Carlos Williams](#)

Her body is not so white as  
anemone petals nor so smooth—nor  
so remote a thing. It is a field  
of the wild carrot taking  
the field by force; the grass  
does not raise above it.  
Here is no question of whiteness,  
white as can be, with a purple mole  
at the center of each flower.  
Each flower is a hand's span  
of her whiteness. Wherever  
his hand has lain there is  
a tiny purple blemish. Each part  
is a blossom under his touch  
to which the fibres of her being  
stem one by one, each to its end,  
until the whole field is a  
white desire, empty, a single stem,  
a cluster, flower by flower,  
a pious wish to whiteness gone over—  
or nothing.

## To Elise

By [William Carlos Williams](#)

The pure products of America  
go crazy—  
mountain folk from Kentucky

or the ribbed north end of  
Jersey

with its isolate lakes and

valleys, its deaf-mutes, thieves  
old names  
and promiscuity between

devil-may-care men who have taken  
to railroading  
out of sheer lust of adventure—

and young slatterns, bathed  
in filth  
from Monday to Saturday

to be tricked out that night  
with gauds  
from imaginations which have no

peasant traditions to give them  
character  
but flutter and flaunt

sheer rags—succumbing without  
emotion  
save numbed terror

under some hedge of choke-cherry  
or viburnum—  
which they cannot express—

Unless it be that marriage  
perhaps  
with a dash of Indian blood

will throw up a girl so desolate  
so hemmed round  
with disease or murder

that she'll be rescued by an  
agent—  
reared by the state and

sent out at fifteen to work in  
some hard-pressed  
house in the suburbs—

some doctor's family, some Elsie—  
voluptuous water  
expressing with broken

brain the truth about us—  
her great  
ungainly hips and flopping breasts

addressed to cheap  
jewelry  
and rich young men with fine eyes

as if the earth under our feet  
were  
an excrement of some sky

and we degraded prisoners  
destined  
to hunger until we eat filth

while the imagination strains  
after deer  
going by fields of goldenrod in

the stifling heat of September  
Somehow  
it seems to destroy us

It is only in isolate flecks that  
something  
is given off

No one  
to witness  
and adjust, no one to drive the car

## **Ex Libris**

By [Eleanor Wilner](#)

By the stream, where the ground is soft  
and gives, under the slightest pressure—even  
the fly would leave its footprint here  
and the paw of the shrew the crescent  
of its claws like the strokes of a chisel  
in clay; where the lightest chill, lighter

than the least rumor of winter, sets the reeds  
to a kind of speaking, and a single drop of rain  
leaves a crater to catch the first silver  
glint of sun when the clouds slide away  
from each other like two tired lovers,  
and the light returns, pale, though brightened  
by the last chapter of late autumn:  
copper, rusted oak, gold aspen, and the red  
pages of maple, the wind leafing through to the end  
the annals of beech, the slim volumes  
of birch, the elegant script of the ferns ...

for the birds, it is all  
notations for a coda, for the otter  
an invitation to the river,  
and for the deer—a dream  
in which to disappear, light-footed  
on the still open book of earth,  
adding the marks of their passage,  
adding it all in, waiting only  
for the first thick flurry of snowflakes  
for cover, soft cover that carries  
no title, no name.

## High Noon at Los Alamos

By [Eleanor Wilner](#)

To turn a stone  
with its white squirming  
underneath, to pry the disc  
from the sun's eclipse—white heat  
coiling in the blinded eye: to these malign  
necessities we come  
from the dim time of dinosaurs  
who crawled like breathing lava  
from the earth's cracked crust, and swung  
their tiny heads above the lumbering tons  
of flesh, brains no bigger than a fist  
clenched to resist the white flash  
in the sky the day the sun-flares  
pared them down to relics for museums,  
turned glaciers back, seared Sinai's  
meadows black—the ferns withered, the swamps  
were melted down to molten mud, the cells  
uncoupled, recombined, and madly

multiplied, huge trees toppled to the ground,  
the slow life there abandoned hope,  
a caterpillar stiffened in the grass.  
Two apes, caught in the act of coupling,  
made a mutant child  
who woke to sunlight wondering, his mother  
torn by the huge new head  
that forced the narrow birth canal.

As if compelled to repetition  
and to unearth again  
white fire at the heart of matter—fire  
we sought and fire we spoke,  
our thoughts, however elegant, were fire  
from first to last—like sentries set to watch  
at Argos for the signal fire  
passed peak to peak from Troy  
to Nagasaki, triumphant echo of the burning  
city walls and prologue to the murders  
yet to come—we scan the sky  
for that bright flash,  
our eyes stared white from watching  
for the signal fire that ends  
the epic—a cursed line  
with its caesura, a pause  
to signal peace, or a rehearsal  
for the silence.

## Without Regret

By [Eleanor Wilner](#)

Nights, by the light of whatever would burn:  
tallow, tinder and the silken rope  
of wick that burns slow, slow  
we wove the baskets from the long gold strands  
of wheat that were another silk: worm soul  
spun the one, yellow seed in the dark soil, the other.

The fields lay fallow, swollen with frost,  
expectant winter. Mud clung to the edges  
of our gowns; we had hung back like shadows  
on the walls of trees and watched. In the little circles  
that our tapers threw, murdered men rose red  
in their clanging armor, muttered  
words that bled through the bars

of iron masks: *the lord*  
*who sold us to the glory fields, lied.*

Trumpets without tongues, we wove lilies  
into the baskets. When they asked us  
what we meant by these, we'd say "mary, mary"  
and be still. We lined the baskets on the sill  
in the barn, where it is always dusk  
and the cows smell sweet. Now the snow

sifts through the trees, dismembered  
lace, the white dust of angels, angels.  
And the ringing of keys that hang  
in bunches at our waists, and the sound of silk  
whispering, whispering.  
There is nothing in the high windows  
but swirling snow,

the glittering milk of winter.  
The halls grow chill. The candles flicker.  
Let them wait who will and think what they want.  
The lord has gone with the hunt, and the snow,  
the snow grows thicker. Well he will keep  
till spring thaw comes. Head, hand, and heart—  
baskets of wicker, baskets of straw.

## **Black Matters**

By [Keith S. Wilson](#)

after D.H. Lawrence

shall i tell you, then, that we exist?  
there came a light, blue and white careening.  
the police like wailing angels  
to bitter me.

and so this:  
dark matter is hypothetical. know  
that it cannot be seen

in the gunpowder of a flower,  
in a worm that raisins on the concrete,  
in a man that wills himself not to speak.

gags, oh gags.

for a shadow cannot breathe.  
it deprives them of nothing. pride

is born in the black and then dies in it.  
i hear our shadow, low treble  
of the clasping of our hands.

dark matter is invisible.  
we infer it: how light bends around a black body,  
and still you do not see black halos, even here,

my having told you plainly where they are.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## **And I wonder where you are**

By [Tanaya Winder](#)

Sacred stars blanket a nighttime sky,  
each light reminds us of the preciousness of life.  
Your memory lives along the Milky Way,  
each twinkle saying don't forget my name.

It's an epidemic, a sickness of the earth,  
a war we enter as soon as we are birthed.  
Indigenous women, girls, our two-spirit, too.  
When did this world start disappearing you?

## **Being**

By [Tanaya Winder](#)

Wake up, greet the sun, and pray.  
Burn cedar, sweet grass, sage—  
sacred herbs to honor the lives we've been given,  
for we have been gifted these ways since the beginning of time.  
Remember, when you step into the arena of your life,  
think about those who stand beside you, next to, and with you.  
Your ancestors are always in your corner, along with your people.  
When we enter this world we are born hungry,  
our spirits long for us to live out our traditions  
that have been passed down for generations.  
Prayer, ceremony, dance, language—our ways of being.  
Never forget you were put on this earth for a reason—

honor your ancestors.  
Be a good relative.

## **The Darker Sooner**

By [Catherine Wing](#)

Then came the darker sooner,  
came the later lower.  
We were no longer a sweeter-here  
happily-ever-after. We were after ever.  
We were farther and further.  
More was the word we used for harder.  
Lost was our standard-bearer.  
Our gods were fallen faster,  
and fallen larger.  
The day was duller, duller  
was disaster. Our charge was error.  
Instead of leader we had louder,  
instead of lover, never. And over this river  
broke the winter's black weather.

## **Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight**

By [Yvor Winters](#)

Reptilian green the wrinkled throat,  
Green as a bough of yew the beard;  
He bent his head, and so I smote;  
Then for a thought my vision cleared.

The head dropped clean; he rose and walked;  
He fixed his fingers in the hair;  
The head was unabashed and talked;  
I understood what I must dare.

His flesh, cut down, arose and grew.  
He bade me wait the season's round,  
And then, when he had strength anew,  
To meet him on his native ground.

The year declined; and in his keep  
I passed in joy a thriving yule;  
And whether waking or in sleep,  
I lived in riot like a fool.

He beat the woods to bring me meat.  
His lady, like a forest vine,  
Grew in my arms; the growth was sweet;  
And yet what thoughtless force was mine!

By practice and conviction formed,  
With ancient stubbornness ingrained,  
Although her body clung and swarmed,  
My own identity remained.

Her beauty, lithe, unholy, pure,  
Took shapes that I had never known;  
And had I once been insecure,  
Had grafted laurel in my bone.

And then, since I had kept the trust,  
Had loved the lady, yet was true,  
The knight withheld his giant thrust  
And let me go with what I knew.

I left the green bark and the shade,  
Where growth was rapid, thick, and still;  
I found a road that men had made  
And rested on a drying hill.

## Tasting Braille

By [Kathi Wolfe](#)

People can ... read Braille with their lips and their tongue ...  
— David J. Linden, *The Kojo Nnamdi Show*

Whitman is a foot-long sub  
of grass-fed beef,  
Falstaff, a fat onion ring,  
Ophelia, a wailing wine.  
Judas Iscariot's kiss  
turns my lips against themselves.  
Emily D makes my tongue  
want to fly a kite.  
The tongues of angels,  
I cannot swallow.

**Note to Poetry Out Loud students:** This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.

# My Standard Response

By [Karenne Wood](#)

I.

The first question is always phrased this way:  
“So. How much Indian *are* you?”

II.

We did not live in tepees.  
We did not braid our hair.  
We did not fringe our shirts.  
We did not wear war bonnets.  
We did not chase the buffalo.  
We did not carry shields.  
We were never Plains Indians.  
We tried to ride,  
but we kept falling off of our dogs.

III.

A local official came to our office to ask our help with a city event. He had a splendid idea, he said. To kick off the event and show everyone in town that our tribe was still around, we should go up to the bluff overlooking the city and make a big smoke signal. Then they would know we were here.  
Who ever heard of smoke signals in the forests? I imagined us upon the bluff, lighting one of those firestarter bricks. We haven’t made fire since the Boy Scouts took over. And how would the citizens know it was us? They’d probably call the fire department.

IV.

As they ask, they think, *yes,*  
*I can see it in her face. High cheekbones*  
(whatever those are) *and dark hair.*

Here’s a thought: don’t we all have  
high cheekbones? If we didn’t,  
our faces would cave in.  
(But I do have a colonized nose.)

I’m sick of explaining myself.

“You know,” I finally say,  
“It doesn’t matter to my people.”  
I ride off to my ranch-style home.  
Time to weave a basket, or something.

## football dreams

By [Jacqueline Woodson](#)

No one was faster  
than my father on the football field.  
No one could keep him  
from crossing the line. Then  
touching down again.  
Coaches were watching the way he moved,  
his easy stride, his long arms reaching  
up, snatching the ball from its soft pockets  
of air.

My father dreamed football dreams,  
and woke up to a scholarship  
at Ohio State University.  
Grown now  
living the big-city life  
in Columbus  
just sixty miles  
from Nelsonville  
and from there  
Interstate 70 could get you  
on your way west to Chicago  
Interstate 77 could take you south  
but my father said  
no colored Buckeye in his right mind  
would ever want to go there.

*From Columbus, my father said,  
you could go just about  
anywhere*

## genetics

By [Jacqueline Woodson](#)

My mother has a gap between  
her two front teeth. So does Daddy Gunnar.  
Each child in this family has the same space  
connecting us.

Our baby brother, Roman, was born pale as dust.  
His soft brown curls and eyelashes stop  
people on the street.  
*Whose angel child is this?* they want to know.

When I say, *My brother*, the people  
wear doubt  
thick as a cape  
until we smile  
and the cape falls.

## Occasional Poem

By [Jacqueline Woodson](#)

Ms. Marcus says that an occasional poem is a poem  
written about something  
important  
or special  
that's gonna happen  
or already did.  
*Think of a specific occasion, she says—and write about it.*

*Like what?!* Lamont asks.  
He's all slouched down in his seat.  
*I don't feel like writing about no occasion.*

*How about your birthday?* Ms. Marcus says.  
*What about it? Just a birthday. Comes in June and it ain't*  
*June,* Lamont says. *As a matter of fact,*  
*he says, it's January and it's snowing.*  
Then his voice gets real low and he says  
*And when it's January and all cold like this*  
*feels like June's a long, long ways away.*

The whole class looks at Ms. Marcus.  
Some of the kids are nodding.  
Outside the sky looks like it's made out of metal  
and the cold, cold air is rattling the windowpanes  
and coming underneath them too.

I seen Lamont's coat.  
It's gray and the sleeves are too short.  
It's down but it looks like a lot of the feathers fell out  
a long time ago.  
Ms. Marcus got a nice coat.  
It's down too but real puffy so  
maybe when she's inside it  
she can't even tell January from June.

*Then write about January,* Ms. Marcus says, *that's*

*an occasion.*

But she looks a little bit sad when she says it  
Like she's sorry she ever brought the whole  
occasional poem thing up.

I was gonna write about Mama's funeral  
but Lamont and Ms. Marcus going back and forth  
zapped all the ideas from my head.

I guess them arguing  
on a Tuesday in January's an occasion  
So I guess this is an occasional poem.

## Home and the Homeless

By [Elizabeth Woody](#)

The buildings are worn.  
The trees are strong and ancient.  
They bend against the grid of electric lines.  
The windows are broken  
by the homeless and the cold past.  
I am home on the yard  
that spreads mint, pales the Victorian roses,  
takes into it the ravaged lilac tree.  
The black bulk of plastic lies about  
stopping unwanted weeds for the Landlord.  
Tattered, the cedar tree is chipped to dry heaps of recklessness.  
The unwanted spreads by the power of neglect.  
The wear of traffic says that we are out of time,  
must hurry.

Age, the creak in the handmade screen door fades behind itself.

## Illumination

By [Elizabeth Woody](#)

The irresistible and benevolent light  
brushes through the angel-wing begonias,  
the clippings of ruddy ears for the living room.  
Intimate motes, debris of grounded, forlorn walks,  
speckle through the vitreous quality of blush.  
As fluid lulls turn like trout backs, azure-tipped fins  
oscillate in the shallows, the clear floating  
is dizziness.

Tender events are meeting halves and wholes of affinity,  
the recurrence of whimsy and parallel streams  
flush away the blockage of malaise.

Incessant gratitude, pliable kindness smolders  
in the husk of these sweet accumulations:  
abalone shells, the thoughtful carvings from friends,  
the stone of another's pocket, the photo of mystified  
moon over water, the smiles of worn chairs.

Austere hopes find pleasure in lately cherished flowers.  
The blooms are articulate deluge, hues of delicacy.  
Petals parted dim renderings, the viable imprint  
of the blood-hot beam of light with reformed courage.  
Beveling the finish to suppression, the blade of choice  
brings the flourish of dividing while adequately doubling  
worth by two. Multiplying. The luminescent burning of space.  
The heat is a domicile as abandoned as red roses budding  
their ascension from stem.

The sun has its own drum contenting itself with the rose  
heart it takes into continual rumbling. The connection  
of surface and hand. The great head of dark clouds finds  
its own place of unraveled repercussions and disruption,  
elsewhere, over the tall, staunch mountains of indemnity.

## Goldfish

By [Koon Woon](#)

The goldfish in my bowl  
turns into a carp each night.  
Swimming in circles in the day,  
regal, admired by emperors,  
but each night, while I sleep,  
it turns into silver, a dagger  
cold and sharp, couched at one spot,  
enough to frighten cats.

The rest of the furniture  
squats in the cold and dark,  
complains of being a lone man's  
furnishings, and plots a revolt.  
I can hear myself snore, but not  
their infidelity. Sometimes I wake  
with a start; silently they move back

into their places.

I have been unpopular with myself,  
pacing in my small, square room.  
But my uncle said, "Even in a palace,  
you can but sleep in one room."  
With this I become humble as a simple  
preacher, saying, "I have no powers;  
they emanate from God."  
With this I sleep soundly,

Fish or no fish, dagger or no dagger.  
When I wake, my fish is gold,  
it pleases me with a trail of bubbles.  
My furniture has been loyal all night,  
waiting to provide me comfort.  
There was no conspiracy against a poor man.  
With this I consider myself king.

## Floating Island

By [Dorothy Wordsworth](#)

Harmonious Powers with Nature work  
On sky, earth, river, lake, and sea:  
Sunshine and storm, whirlwind and breeze  
All in one duteous task agree.

Once did I see a slip of earth,  
By throbbing waves long undermined,  
Loosed from its hold; — *how* no one knew  
But all might see it float, obedient to the wind.

Might see it, from the mossy shore  
Dissevered float upon the Lake,  
Float, with its crest of trees adorned  
On which the warbling birds their pastime take.

Food, shelter, safety there they find  
There berries ripen, flowerets bloom;  
There insects live their lives — and die:  
A peopled *world* it is; in size a tiny room.

And thus through many seasons' space  
This little Island may survive  
But Nature, though we mark her not,

Will take away — may cease to give.

Perchance when you are wandering forth  
Upon some vacant sunny day  
Without an object, hope, or fear,  
Thither your eyes may turn — the Isle is passed away.

Buried beneath the glittering Lake!  
Its place no longer to be found,  
Yet the lost fragments shall remain,  
To fertilize some other ground.

## **I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud**

By [William Wordsworth](#)

I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host, of golden daffodils;  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine  
And twinkle on the milky way,  
They stretched in never-ending line  
Along the margin of a bay:  
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,  
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they  
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:  
A poet could not but be gay,  
In such a jocund company:  
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought  
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.

# Lines Written in Early Spring

By [William Wordsworth](#)

I heard a thousand blended notes,  
While in a grove I sate reclined,  
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts  
Bring sad thoughts to the mind.

To her fair works did Nature link  
The human soul that through me ran;  
And much it grieved my heart to think  
What man has made of man.

Through primrose tufts, in that green bower,  
The periwinkle trailed its wreaths;  
And 'tis my faith that every flower  
Enjoys the air it breathes.

The birds around me hopped and played,  
Their thoughts I cannot measure:—  
But the least motion which they made  
It seemed a thrill of pleasure.

The budding twigs spread out their fan,  
To catch the breezy air;  
And I must think, do all I can,  
That there was pleasure there.

If this belief from heaven be sent,  
If such be Nature's holy plan,  
Have I not reason to lament  
What man has made of man?

# Nuns Fret Not at Their Convent's Narrow Room

By [William Wordsworth](#)

Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room;  
And hermits are contented with their cells;  
And students with their pensive citadels;  
Maids at the wheel, the weaver at his loom,  
Sit blithe and happy; bees that soar for bloom,  
High as the highest Peak of Furness-fells,  
Will murmur by the hour in foxglove bells:  
In truth the prison, into which we doom  
Ourselves, no prison is: and hence for me,

In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound  
Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground;  
Pleased if some Souls (for such there needs must be)  
Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,  
Should find brief solace there, as I have found.

## Surprised by Joy

By [William Wordsworth](#)

Surprised by joy—impatient as the Wind  
I turned to share the transport—Oh! with whom  
But Thee, long buried in the silent Tomb,  
That spot which no vicissitude can find?  
Love, faithful love, recalled thee to my mind—  
But how could I forget thee?—Through what power,  
Even for the least division of an hour,  
Have I been so beguiled as to be blind  
To my most grievous loss!—That thought's return  
Was the worst pang that sorrow ever bore,  
Save one, one only, when I stood forlorn,  
Knowing my heart's best treasure was no more;  
That neither present time, nor years unborn  
Could to my sight that heavenly face restore.

## The Tables Turned

By [William Wordsworth](#)

Up! up! my Friend, and quit your books;  
Or surely you'll grow double:  
Up! up! my Friend, and clear your looks;  
Why all this toil and trouble?

The sun above the mountain's head,  
A freshening lustre mellow  
Through all the long green fields has spread,  
His first sweet evening yellow.

Books! 'tis a dull and endless strife:  
Come, hear the woodland linnet,  
How sweet his music! on my life,  
There's more of wisdom in it.

And hark! how blithe the throstle sings!  
He, too, is no mean preacher:

Come forth into the light of things,  
Let Nature be your teacher.

She has a world of ready wealth,  
Our minds and hearts to bless—  
Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health,  
Truth breathed by cheerfulness.

One impulse from a vernal wood  
May teach you more of man,  
Of moral evil and of good,  
Than all the sages can.

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;  
Our meddling intellect  
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:—  
We murder to dissect.

Enough of Science and of Art;  
Close up those barren leaves;  
Come forth, and bring with you a heart  
That watches and receives.

## **The World Is Too Much With Us**

By [William Wordsworth](#)

The world is too much with us; late and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;—  
Little we see in Nature that is ours;  
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!  
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;  
The winds that will be howling at all hours,  
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;  
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;  
It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be  
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;  
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,  
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;  
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;  
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

# Clear Night

By [Charles Wright](#)

Clear night, thumb-top of a moon, a back-lit sky.  
Moon-fingers lay down their same routine  
On the side deck and the threshold, the white keys and the black keys.  
Bird hush and bird song. A cassia flower falls.

I want to be bruised by God.  
I want to be strung up in a strong light and singled out.  
I want to be stretched, like music wrung from a dropped seed.  
I want to be entered and picked clean.

And the wind says “What?” to me.  
And the castor beans, with their little earrings of death, say “What?” to me.  
And the stars start out on their cold slide through the dark.  
And the gears notch and the engines wheel.

# Auto-Lullaby

By [Franz Wright](#)

Think of a sheep  
knitting a sweater;  
think of your life  
getting better and better.

Think of your cat  
asleep in a tree;  
think of that spot  
where you once skinned your knee.

Think of a bird  
that stands in your palm.  
Try to remember  
the Twenty-first Psalm.

Think of a big pink horse  
galloping south;  
think of a fly, and  
close your mouth.

If you feel thirsty, then  
drink from your cup.  
The birds will keep singing  
until they wake up.

# To Myself

By [Franz Wright](#)

You are riding the bus again  
burrowing into the blackness of Interstate 80,  
the sole passenger

with an overhead light on.  
And I am with you.  
I'm the interminable fields you can't see,

the little lights off in the distance  
(in one of those rooms we are  
living) and I am the rain

and the others all  
around you, and the loneliness you love,  
and the universe that loves you specifically, maybe,

and the catastrophic dawn,  
the nicotine crawling on your skin—  
and when you begin

to cough I won't cover my face,  
and if you vomit this time I will hold you:  
everything's going to be fine

I will whisper.  
It won't always be like this.  
I am going to buy you a sandwich.

# Beginning

By [James Wright](#)

The moon drops one or two feathers into the field.  
The dark wheat listens.  
Be still.  
Now.

There they are, the moon's young, trying  
Their wings.  
Between trees, a slender woman lifts up the lovely shadow  
Of her face, and now she steps into the air, now she is gone  
Wholly, into the air.  
I stand alone by an elder tree, I do not dare breathe  
Or move.

I listen.  
The wheat leans back toward its own darkness,  
And I lean toward mine.

## **A Blessing**

By [James Wright](#)

Just off the highway to Rochester, Minnesota,  
Twilight bounds softly forth on the grass.  
And the eyes of those two Indian ponies  
Darken with kindness.  
They have come gladly out of the willows  
To welcome my friend and me.  
We step over the barbed wire into the pasture  
Where they have been grazing all day, alone.  
They ripple tensely, they can hardly contain their happiness  
That we have come.  
They bow shyly as wet swans. They love each other.  
There is no loneliness like theirs.  
At home once more,  
They begin munching the young tufts of spring in the darkness.  
I would like to hold the slenderer one in my arms,  
For she has walked over to me  
And nuzzled my left hand.  
She is black and white,  
Her mane falls wild on her forehead,  
And the light breeze moves me to caress her long ear  
That is delicate as the skin over a girl's wrist.  
Suddenly I realize  
That if I stepped out of my body I would break  
Into blossom.

## **Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota**

By [James Wright](#)

Over my head, I see the bronze butterfly,  
Asleep on the black trunk,  
Blowing like a leaf in green shadow.  
Down the ravine behind the empty house,  
The cowbells follow one another  
Into the distances of the afternoon.  
To my right,  
In a field of sunlight between two pines,

The droppings of last year's horses  
Blaze up into golden stones.  
I lean back, as the evening darkens and comes on.  
A chicken hawk floats over, looking for home.  
I have wasted my life.

## Youth

By [James Wright](#)

Strange bird,  
His song remains secret.  
He worked too hard to read books.  
He never heard how Sherwood Anderson  
Got out of it, and fled to Chicago, furious to free himself  
From his hatred of factories.  
My father toiled fifty years  
At Hazel-Atlas Glass,  
Caught among girders that smash the kneecaps  
Of dumb honyaks.  
Did he shudder with hatred in the cold shadow of grease?  
Maybe. But my brother and I do know  
He came home as quiet as the evening.

He will be getting dark, soon,  
And loom through new snow.  
I know his ghost will drift home  
To the Ohio River, and sit down, alone,  
Whittling a root.  
He will say nothing.  
The waters flow past, older, younger  
Than he is, or I am.

## The Healing Improvisation of Hair

By [Jay Wright](#)

If you undo your do you would  
be strange. Hair has been on my mind.  
I used to lean in the doorway  
and watch my stony woman wind  
the copper through the black, and play  
with my understanding, show me she could  
take a cup of river water,  
and watch it shimmy, watch it change,  
turn around and become ash bone.

Wind in the cottonwoods wakes me  
to a day so thin its breastbone  
shows, so paid out it shakes me free  
of its blue dust. I will arrange  
that river water, bottom juice.  
I conjure my head in the stream  
and ride with the silk feel of it  
as my woman bathes me, and shaves  
away the scorn, sponges the grit  
of solitude from my skin, laves  
the salt water of self-esteem  
over my feathering body.  
How like joy to come upon me  
in remembering a head of hair  
and the way water would caress  
it, and stress beauty in the flair  
and cut of the only witness  
to my dance under sorrow's tree.  
This swift darkness is spring's first hour.

I carried my life, like a stone,  
in a ragged pocket, but I  
had a true weaving song, a sly  
way with rhythm, a healing tone.

## **After a Rainstorm**

By [Robert Wrigley](#)

Because I have come to the fence at night,  
the horses arrive also from their ancient stable.  
They let me stroke their long faces, and I note  
in the light of the now-merging moon

how they, a Morgan and a Quarter, have been  
by shake-guttered raindrops  
spotted around their rumps and thus made  
Appaloosas, the ancestral horses of this place.

Maybe because it is night, they are nervous,  
or maybe because they too sense  
what they have become, they seem  
to be waiting for me to say something

to whatever ancient spirits might still abide here,  
that they might awaken from this strange dream,

in which there are fences and stables and a man  
who doesn't know a single word they understand.

## Figure

By [Robert Wrigley](#)

You want a piece of me  
to see, from the flesh of me,  
a flesh from within me  
no one's ever seen, not me,  
nor the mother or the lovers of me.  
A piece that will have been me  
but then no longer me,  
instead a synecdoche of me,

or possibly metonymy,  
a figure of speech of me,  
in contiguity or association with me,  
a part for the whole of me,  
a sliver that once was me,  
so you might perceive the end of me.

## Might Have Been July, Might Have Been December

By [Robert Wrigley](#)

More oblique the eagle's angle  
than the osprey's precipitous fall,  
but rose up both and under them dangled  
a trout, the point of it all.

Festooned, a limb on each one's  
favored tree either side of the river,  
with chains of bone and lace of skin  
the river's wind made shiver.

Sat under them both, one in December,  
one in July, in diametrical seasonal airs,  
and once arrived home, as I remember,  
with a thin white fish rib lodged in my hair.

## Coyote, with Mange

By [Mark Wunderlich](#)

Oh, Unreadable One, why

have you done this to your dumb creature?  
Why have you chosen to punish the coyote

rummaging for chicken bones in the dung heap,  
shucked the fur from his tail  
and fashioned it into a scabby cane?

Why have you denuded his face,  
tufted it, so that when he turns he looks  
like a slow child unhinging his face in a smile?

The coyote shambles, crow-hops, keeps his head low,  
and without fur, his now visible pizzle  
is a sad red protuberance,

his hind legs the backward image  
of a bandy-legged grandfather, stripped.  
Why have you unhoused this wretch

from his one aesthetic virtue,  
taken from him that which kept him  
from burning in the sun like a man?

Why have you pushed him from his world into mine,  
stopped him there and turned his ear  
toward my warning shout?

## **I Find no Peace**

By [Sir Thomas Wyatt](#)

I find no peace, and all my war is done.  
I fear and hope. I burn and freeze like ice.  
I fly above the wind, yet can I not arise;  
And nought I have, and all the world I season.  
That loseth nor locketh holdeth me in prison  
And holdeth me not—yet can I scape no wise—  
Nor letteth me live nor die at my device,  
And yet of death it giveth me occasion.  
Without eyen I see, and without tongue I plain.  
I desire to perish, and yet I ask health.  
I love another, and thus I hate myself.  
I feed me in sorrow and laugh in all my pain;  
Likewise displeaseth me both life and death,  
And my delight is causer of this strife.

# They Flee From Me

By [Sir Thomas Wyatt](#)

They flee from me that sometime did me seek  
With naked foot, stalking in my chamber.  
I have seen them gentle, tame, and meek,  
That now are wild and do not remember  
That sometime they put themselves in danger  
To take bread at my hand; and now they range,  
Busily seeking with a continual change.

Thanked be fortune it hath been otherwise  
Twenty times better; but once in special,  
In thin array after a pleasant guise,  
When her loose gown from her shoulders did fall,  
And she me caught in her arms long and small;  
Therewithall sweetly did me kiss  
And softly said, "Dear heart, how like you this?"

It was no dream: I lay broad waking.  
But all is turned thorough my gentleness  
Into a strange fashion of forsaking;  
And I have leave to go of her goodness,  
And she also, to use newfangledness.  
But since that I so kindly am served  
I would fain know what she hath deserved.

# Cold Blooded Creatures

By [Elinor Wylie](#)

Man, the egregious egoist,  
(In mystery the twig is bent,)  
Imagines, by some mental twist,  
That he alone is sentient

Of the intolerable load  
Which on all living creatures lies,  
Nor stoops to pity in the toad  
The speechless sorrow of its eyes.

He asks no questions of the snake,  
Nor plumbs the phosphorescent gloom  
Where lidless fishes, broad awake,  
Swim staring at a night-mare doom.

# Full Moon

By [Elinor Wylie](#)

My bands of silk and miniver  
Momently grew heavier;  
The black gauze was beggarly thin;  
The ermine muffled mouth and chin;  
I could not suck the moonlight in.

Harlequin in lozenges  
Of love and hate, I walked in these  
Striped and ragged rigmaroles;  
Along the pavement my footsoles  
Trod warily on living coals.

Shouldering the thoughts I loathed,  
In their corrupt disguises clothed,  
Morality I could not tear  
From my ribs, to leave them bare  
Ivory in silver air.

There I walked, and there I raged;  
The spiritual savage caged  
Within my skeleton, raged afresh  
To feel, behind a carnal mesh,  
The clean bones crying in the flesh.

# Valentine

By [Elinor Wylie](#)

Too high, too high to pluck  
My heart shall swing.  
A fruit no bee shall suck,  
No wasp shall sting.

If on some night of cold  
It falls to ground  
In apple-leaves of gold  
I'll wrap it round.

And I shall seal it up  
With spice and salt,  
In a carven silver cup,  
In a deep vault.

Before my eyes are blind  
And my lips mute,  
I must eat core and rind  
Of that same fruit.

Before my heart is dust  
At the end of all,  
Eat it I must, I must  
Were it bitter gall.

But I shall keep it sweet  
By some strange art;  
Wild honey I shall eat  
When I eat my heart.

O honey cool and chaste  
As clover's breath!  
Sweet Heaven I shall taste  
Before my death.

## **Metamorphosis**

By [Jenny Xie](#)

Nowhere in those kerosene years  
could she find a soft-headed match.

The wife crosses over an ocean, red-faced and cheerless.  
Trades the flat pad of a stethoscope for a dining hall spatula.

Life is two choices, she thinks:  
you hatch a life, or you pass through one.

Photographs of a child swaddled in layers arrive by post.  
Money doesn't, to her embarrassment.

Over time, she grows out her hair. Then she sprouts nerves.  
The wife was no fool, but neither did she wander.

She lives inside a season of thrift, which stretches on.  
Her sorrow has thickness and a certain sheen.

The wife knows to hurry when she washes.  
When she cooks, she licks spoons slowly.

Every night, she made a dish with ground pork.

Paired with a dish that was fibrous.

## Chocolate

By [Jinhao Xie](#)

Your grandmother's grave nestles  
in the nest of mountains' thick hair.  
You try to name every tree that looks  
like your grandmother. A hurricane  
found underneath your seat is your uncle's  
reckless driving technique. He tries to kill  
time by outrunning patience. Your mother  
holds you down in the back seat,  
prevents you from flying  
out the window. Too soon, she says,  
to meet your grandmother this way.

Summer rests his head on your shoulder,  
thirsts on your teenage sweat; a young love bursts  
on twines and twigs. Green Beetle parks  
by the foot of the hill. It's summer. Everything melts.  
Chocolate your mother lies about buying  
makes a puddle on the seat. Don't lick it.

## The Forecast

By [Wendy Xu](#)

Distrust this season breeds  
in me whole  
blue worlds, am second  
to leafy nouns,  
pinned back darkening lip  
of the night,  
untrustworthy sidewalk glazed  
and sleeping there,  
peachy trees, a line drawn from one  
brow of a star down  
and planted, each pillow  
little shimmer, little wilt startled  
from out the arranging field  
moonlit pale behind  
no foxes, in me finding the fragrant  
new crisis, not dead still  
where I love you in feast

and pledge, worlds rolling first  
on crookedly  
and on.

## Ill-Advised Love Poem

By [John Yau](#)

Come live with me  
And we will sit

Upon the rocks  
By shallow rivers

Come live with me  
And we will plant acorns

In each other's mouth  
It would be our way

Of greeting the earth  
Before it shoves us

Back into the snow  
Our interior cavities

Brimming with  
Disagreeable substances

Come live with me  
Before winter stops

To use the only pillow  
The sky ever sleeps on

Our interior cavities  
Brimming with snow

Come live with me  
Before spring

Swallows the air  
And birds sing

# Adam's Curse

By [William Butler Yeats](#)

We sat together at one summer's end,  
That beautiful mild woman, your close friend,  
And you and I, and talked of poetry.  
I said, 'A line will take us hours maybe;  
Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,  
Our stitching and unstitching has been naught.  
Better go down upon your marrow-bones  
And scrub a kitchen pavement, or break stones  
Like an old pauper, in all kinds of weather;  
For to articulate sweet sounds together  
Is to work harder than all these, and yet  
Be thought an idler by the noisy set  
Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen  
The martyrs call the world.'

And thereupon  
That beautiful mild woman for whose sake  
There's many a one shall find out all heartache  
On finding that her voice is sweet and low  
Replied, 'To be born woman is to know—  
Although they do not talk of it at school—  
That we must labour to be beautiful.'  
I said, 'It's certain there is no fine thing  
Since Adam's fall but needs much labouring.  
There have been lovers who thought love should be  
So much compounded of high courtesy  
That they would sigh and quote with learned looks  
Precedents out of beautiful old books;  
Yet now it seems an idle trade enough.'

We sat grown quiet at the name of love;  
We saw the last embers of daylight die,  
And in the trembling blue-green of the sky  
A moon, worn as if it had been a shell  
Washed by time's waters as they rose and fell  
About the stars and broke in days and years.

I had a thought for no one's but your ears:  
That you were beautiful, and that I strove  
To love you in the old high way of love;  
That it had all seemed happy, and yet we'd grown  
As weary-hearted as that hollow moon.

# The Lake Isle of Innisfree

By [William Butler Yeats](#)

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,  
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;  
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,  
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,  
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;  
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,  
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day  
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;  
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,  
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

# The Second Coming

By [William Butler Yeats](#)

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.  
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out  
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*  
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert  
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.  
The darkness drops again; but now I know  
That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

## **The Sorrow of Love**

By [William Butler Yeats](#)

The brawling of a sparrow in the eaves,  
The brilliant moon and all the milky sky,  
And all that famous harmony of leaves,  
Had blotted out man's image and his cry.

A girl arose that had red mournful lips  
And seemed the greatness of the world in tears,  
Doomed like Odysseus and the labouring ships  
And proud as Priam murdered with his peers;

Arose, and on the instant clamorous eaves,  
A climbing moon upon an empty sky,  
And all that lamentation of the leaves,  
Could but compose man's image and his cry.

## **To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Nothing**

By [William Butler Yeats](#)

Now all the truth is out,  
Be secret and take defeat  
From any brazen throat,  
For how can you compete,  
Being honor bred, with one  
Who were it proved he lies  
Were neither shamed in his own  
Nor in his neighbors' eyes;  
Bred to a harder thing  
Than Triumph, turn away  
And like a laughing string  
Whereon mad fingers play  
Amid a place of stone,  
Be secret and exult,  
Because of all things known  
That is most difficult.

## **When You Are Old**

By [William Butler Yeats](#)

When you are old and grey and full of sleep,  
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,  
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look

Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;

How many loved your moments of glad grace,  
And loved your beauty with love false or true,  
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,  
And loved the sorrows of your changing face;

And bending down beside the glowing bars,  
Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled  
And paced upon the mountains overhead  
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

## **Bel Canto**

By [Jane Yeh](#)

The opera  
In her head

Runs with no interval,  
A lot of people singing tunelessly

About the same things.  
An overheard

Comment like  
A rotting peach.

The overzealous  
Cockatoo of her impatience,

Flap flap. The slab  
Of blue behind her

Is a sea of  
Her doubts. The squirrel

In her stomach  
Trying to get out—

They say you have to be  
Twice as good. They say

There are pills  
For everything now. Enamel

Eyes to see all  
The better with, my

Dear. Fur coat  
For your tongue—

## Poem Toward People

By [Ariel Yelen](#)

I've always been obsessed with people—  
whether or not I know them. Obsessed  
by our knowledge of each other, the quality

of connection, our friendship or non-friendship,  
its relation to other connections. Obsessed  
by the way a new connection can change pre-existing

ones, reorder them, renew them, fine-tune  
or disappear them. By the light pressure  
of an other's existence, which in turn grows

me. Obsessed by memory and lack of memory  
for the way things were—I don't think I'd recognize  
you if I saw you on the street, though in the past

so obsessed I thought almost everyone  
was you. Obsessed with leaving people  
so I can obsess about them again.

By thinking with and through people, dead  
and alive, without whom I'd be a different person,  
think different thoughts. Even obsessed

with the version of me I don't know, walking around  
having met different people, thinking different  
thoughts, moving in a different direction, away

from people and toward the self,  
or the desert, or the sea, or the god, or the page, or the mountain,  
or the canyon, or the forest, or the dark.

# Lazy

By [David Yezzi](#)

I don't say things I don't want to say  
or chew the fat with fat cats just because.

With favor-givers who want favors back,  
I tend to pass on going for the ask.

I send, instead, a series of regrets,  
slip the winding snares that people lay.

The unruffledness I feel as a result,  
the lank repose, the psychic field of rye

swayed in wavy air, is my respite  
among the shivaree of clanging egos

on the packed commuter train again tonight.  
Sapping and demeaning—it takes a lot

to get from bed to work and back to bed.  
I barely go an hour before I'm caught

wincing at the way that woman laughs  
or he keeps clucking at his magazine.

And my annoyance fills me with annoyance.  
It's laziness that lets them seem unreal

—a radio with in-and-out reception  
blaring like hell when it finally hits a station.

The song that's on is not the one I'd hoped for,  
so I wait distractedly for what comes next.

# Say Grace

By [Emily Jungmin Yoon](#)

In my country our shamans were women  
and our gods multiple until white people brought  
an ecstasy of rosaries and our cities today  
glow with crosses like graveyards. As a child  
in Sunday school I was told I'd go to hell  
if I didn't believe in God. Our teacher was a woman

whose daughters wanted to be nuns and I asked  
*What about babies and what about Buddha*, and she said  
*They're in hell too* and so I memorized prayers  
and recited them in front of women  
I did not believe in. *Deliver us from evil.*  
*O sweet Virgin Mary, amen.* O sweet. O sweet.  
In this country, which calls itself Christian,  
what is sweeter than hearing *Have mercy*  
*on us*. From those who serve different gods. O  
clement, O loving, O God, O God, amidst ruins,  
amidst waters, fleeing, fleeing. *Deliver us from evil.*  
O sweet, O sweet. In this country,  
point at the moon, at the stars, point at the way the lake lies,  
with a hand full of feathers,  
and they will look at the feathers. And kill you for it.  
If a word for religion they don't believe in is magic  
so be it, let us have magic. Let us have  
our own mothers and scarves, our spirits,  
our shamans and our sacred books. Let us keep  
our stars to ourselves and we shall pray  
to no one. Let us eat  
what makes us holy.

## In Little Rock

By [Jake Adam York](#)

Perhaps, this morning, we're there,  
normal and soon forgotten, as news is  
when it's passed over breakfast, like love,  
something that's always cast, too  
heavy to hold for long. We breathe it in,  
the bacon, the coffee. We listen to the little  
quavers as the local tongues, water over rock,  
rise and fall, like stones skipping soft  
into the white that smoothed them. The women  
speak like grandmothers, softly  
opening their mouths, opening  
and drawing advice from themselves,  
like biscuits, and offering in kindness  
a little more than anyone could ask, more  
than anyone can take. I know their pitying.  
It looks like patience, the look on everyone's  
faces as the peddler shuffles in his blindness,  
black hand held open, everyone awaiting  
the hiss of door, the whisper in everyone's

throats, breaking from patience into pleasure.

## Key to the Dollar Store

By [Al Young](#)

Just tell me who the hell am I?  
What powers did I, do I hold?  
What right have I to say “my”  
or “mine” or “me” — all honey-  
glazed, all bullet-proofed and  
worshipful of any gangster “I”?

The key to the Dollar Store  
hangs on my belt. Yes, “my”  
again. And what of roof, of bread,  
of loving laughter? What’s in?  
My vinyl favorite Booker Little,  
vintage, soothes me. He jars  
our ears with trumpet joy and  
stuff freed folks stash in cabinets.

Never one to make too much of  
why we love and what, I love my  
powers. I might put you in my will.

## Elegy on Toy Piano

By [Dean Young](#)

*For Kenneth Koch*

You don't need a pony  
to connect you to the unseeable  
or an airplane to connect you to the sky.

Necessary it is to love to live  
and there are many manuals  
but in all important ways  
one is on one's own.

You need not cut off your hand.  
No need to eat a bouquet.  
Your head becomes a peach pit.  
Your tongue a honeycomb.

Necessary it is to live to love,  
to charge into the burning tower  
then charge back out  
and necessary it is to die.  
Even for the trees, even for the pony  
connecting you to what can't be grasped.

The injured gazelle falls behind the  
herd. One last wild enjambment.

Because of the sores in his mouth,  
the great poet struggles with a dumpling.  
His work has enlarged the world  
but the world is about to stop including him.  
He is the tower the world runs out of.

When something becomes ash,  
there's nothing you can do to turn it back.  
About this, even diamonds do not lie.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Cadillac Moon

By [Kevin Young](#)

Crashing  
again—Basquiat  
sends fenders

& letters headlong  
into each other  
the future. Fusion.

AAAAAAAAAAAA.

Big Bang. The Big  
Apple, Atom's  
behind him—

no sirens  
in sight. His career  
of careening

since—at six—

playing stickball  
a car stole

his spleen. Blind  
sided. Move  
along folks—nothing

to see here. Driven,  
does two Caddys  
colliding, biting

the dust he's begun  
to snort. Hit  
& run. Red

Cross—the pill-pale  
ambulance, inside  
out, he hitched

to the hospital.  
Joy ride. Hot  
wired. O the rush

before the wreck—

each Cadillac,  
a Titanic,  
an iceberg that's met

its match—cabin  
flooded  
like an engine,

drawing even  
dark Shine  
from below deck.

FLATS FIX. Chop

shop. Body work  
while-u-wait. *In situ*  
*the spleen*

*or lien, anterior view—*  
removed. Given  
Gray's Anatomy

by his mother for recovery—

*151. Reflexion of spleen  
turned forwards  
& to the right, like*

*pages of a book—*  
Basquiat pulled  
into orbit

with tide, the moon  
gold as a tooth,  
a hubcap gleaming,

gleaned—Shine  
swimming for land,  
somewhere solid

to spin his own obit.

## **Eddie Priest's Barbershop & Notary**

By [Kevin Young](#)

Closed Mondays

is music is men  
off early from work is waiting  
for the chance at the chair  
while the eagle claws holes  
in your pockets keeping  
time by the turning  
of rusty fans steel flowers with  
cold breezes is having nothing  
better to do than guess at the years  
of hair matted beneath the soiled caps  
of drunks the pain of running  
a fisted comb through stubborn  
knots is the dark dirty low  
down blues the tender heads  
of sons fresh from cornrows all  
wonder at losing half their height  
is a mother gathering hair for good  
luck for a soft wig is the round  
difficulty of ears the peach

faced boys asking Eddie  
to cut in parts and arrows  
wanting to have their names read  
for just a few days and among thin  
jazz is the quick brush of a done  
head the black flood around  
your feet grandfathers  
stopping their games of ivory  
dominoes just before they reach the bone  
yard is winking widowers announcing  
*cut it clean off I'm through courting*  
*and hair only gets in the way* is the final  
spin of the chair a reflection of  
a reflection that sting of wintergreen  
tonic on the neck of a sleeping snow  
haired man when you realize it is  
your turn you are next

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## **I am Trying to Break Your Heart**

By [Kevin Young](#)

I am hoping  
to hang your head

on my wall  
in shame—

the slightest taxidermy  
thrills me. Fish

forever leaping  
on the living-room wall—

paperweights made  
from skulls

of small animals.  
I want to wear

your smile on my sleeve  
& break

your heart like a horse  
or its leg. Weeks of being

bucked off, then  
all at once, you're mine—

Put me down.

I want to call you *thine*

to tattoo *mercy*  
along my knuckles. *I assassin*

*down the avenue*  
I hope

to have you forgotten  
by noon. To know you

by your knees  
palsied by prayer.

Loneliness is a science—

consider the taxidermist's  
tender hands

trying to keep from losing  
skin, the bobcat grin

of the living.

## Negative

By [Kevin Young](#)

Wake to find everything black  
what was white, all the vice  
versa—white maids on TV, black

sitcoms that star white dwarfs  
cute as pearl buttons. Black Presidents,  
Black Houses. White horse

candidates. All bleach burns  
clothes black. Drive roads

white as you are, white songs

on the radio stolen by black bands  
like secret pancake recipes, white back-up  
singers, ball-players & boxers all

white as tar. Feathers on chickens  
dark as everything, boiling in the pot  
that called the kettle honky. Even

whites of the eye turn dark, pupils  
clear & changing as a cat's.  
Is this what we've wanted

& waited for? to see snow  
covering everything black  
as Christmas, dark pages written

white upon? All our eclipses bright,  
dark stars shooting across pale  
sky, glowing like ash in fire, shower

every skin. Only money keeps  
green, still grows & burns like grass  
under dark daylight.

## **Ode to the Hotel Near the Children's Hospital**

By [Kevin Young](#)

Praise the restless beds  
Praise the beds that do not adjust  
that won't lift the head to feed  
or lower for shots  
or blood  
or raise to watch the tinny TV  
Praise the hotel TV that won't quit  
its murmur & holler  
Praise the room service  
that doesn't exist  
just the slow delivery to the front desk  
of cooling pizzas  
& brown bags leaky  
greasy & clear  
Praise the vending machines  
Praise the change

Praise the hot water  
& the heat  
or the loud cool  
that helps the helpless sleep.

Praise the front desk  
who knows to wake  
Rm 120 when the hospital rings  
Praise the silent phone  
Praise the dark drawn  
by thick daytime curtains  
after long nights of waiting,  
awake.

Praise the waiting & then praise the nothing  
that's better than bad news  
Praise the wakeup call  
at 6 am  
Praise the sleeping in  
Praise the card hung on the door  
like a whisper  
lips pressed silent  
Praise the stranger's hands  
that change the sweat of sheets  
Praise the checking out

Praise the going home  
to beds unmade  
for days  
Beds that won't resurrect  
or rise  
that lie there like a child should  
sleeping, tubeless

Praise this mess  
that can be left

## Ode to the Midwest

By [Kevin Young](#)

*The country I come from  
Is called the Midwest  
—Bob Dylan*

I want to be doused

in cheese

& fried. I want  
to wander

the aisles, my heart's  
supermarket stocked high

as cholesterol. I want to die  
wearing a sweatsuit—

I want to live  
forever in a Christmas sweater,

a teddy bear nursing  
off the front. I want to write

a check in the express lane.  
I want to scrape

my driveway clean

myself, early, before  
anyone's awake—

that'll put em to shame—  
I want to see what the sun

sees before it tells  
the snow to go. I want to be

the only black person I know.

I want to throw  
out my back & not

complain about it.  
I wanta drive

two blocks. Why walk—

I want love, n stuff—

I want to cut  
my sutures myself.

I want to jog  
down to the river

& make it my bed—

I want to walk  
its muddy banks

& make me a withdrawal.

I tried jumping in,  
found it frozen—

I'll go home, I guess,  
to my rooms where the moon

changes & shines  
like television.

*Note to Poetry Out Loud students: This poem begins with an epigraph that must be recited. Omitting the epigraph will affect your accuracy score.*

## Pietà

By [Kevin Young](#)

I hunted heaven  
for him.

No dice.

Too uppity,  
it was. Not enough

music, or dark dirt.

I begged the earth empty  
of him. Death

believes in us whether  
we believe

or not. For a long while  
I watch the sound

of a boy bouncing a ball

down the block

take its time  
to reach me. Father,

find me when  
you want. I'll wait.

## Mysticism for Beginners

By [Adam Zagjewski](#)

Translated by Clare Cavanagh

The day was mild, the light was generous.  
The German on the café terrace  
held a small book on his lap.  
I caught sight of the title:  
*Mysticism for Beginners*.  
Suddenly I understood that the swallows  
patrolling the streets of Montepulciano  
with their shrill whistles,  
and the hushed talk of timid travelers  
from Eastern, so-called Central Europe,  
and the white herons standing—yesterday? the day before?—  
like nuns in fields of rice,  
and the dusk, slow and systematic,  
erasing the outlines of medieval houses,  
and olive trees on little hills,  
abandoned to the wind and heat,  
and the head of the *Unknown Princess*  
that I saw and admired in the Louvre,  
and stained-glass windows like butterfly wings  
sprinkled with pollen,  
and the little nightingale practicing  
its speech beside the highway,  
and any journey, any kind of trip,  
are only mysticism for beginners,  
the elementary course, prelude  
to a test that's been  
postponed.

# Try to Praise the Mutilated World

By [Adam Zagjewski](#)

Translated by Clare Cavanagh

Try to praise the mutilated world.  
Remember June's long days,  
and wild strawberries, drops of rosé wine.  
The nettles that methodically overgrow  
the abandoned homesteads of exiles.  
You must praise the mutilated world.  
You watched the stylish yachts and ships;  
one of them had a long trip ahead of it,  
while salty oblivion awaited others.  
You've seen the refugees going nowhere,  
you've heard the executioners sing joyfully.  
You should praise the mutilated world.  
Remember the moments when we were together  
in a white room and the curtain fluttered.  
Return in thought to the concert where music flared.  
You gathered acorns in the park in autumn  
and leaves eddied over the earth's scars.  
Praise the mutilated world  
and the gray feather a thrush lost,  
and the gentle light that strays and vanishes  
and returns.

## Saguaros

By [Javier Zamora](#)

It was dusk for kilometers and bats in the lavender sky,  
like spiders when a fly is caught, began to appear.

And there, not the promised land, but barbwire and barbwire  
with nothing growing under it. I tried to fly that dusk

after a bat said *la sangre del saguaro nos seduce*. Sometimes  
I wake and my throat is dry, so I drive to botanical gardens

to search for red fruit clutched to saguaros, the ones at dusk  
I threw rocks at for the sake of slashing hunger.

But I never find them here. These bats say *speak English only*.  
Sometimes in my car, that viscous red syrup

clings to my throat, and it's a tender seed toward my survival:

I also scraped needles first, then carved those tall torsos

for water, then spotlights drove me and thirty others dashing  
into palos verdes, green-striped trucks surrounded us,

our empty bottles rattled and our breath spoke with rust.  
When the trucks left, a cold cell swallowed us.

## Flowers

By [Cynthia Zarin](#)

This morning I was walking upstairs  
from the kitchen, carrying your  
beautiful flowers, the flowers you

brought me last night, calla lilies  
and something else, I am not  
sure what to call them, white flowers,

of course you had no way of knowing  
it has been years since I bought  
white flowers—but now you have

and here they are again. I was carrying  
your flowers and a coffee cup  
and a soft yellow handbag and a book

of poems by a Chinese poet, in  
which I had just read the words “come  
or go but don't just stand there

in the doorway,” as usual I was  
carrying too many things, you  
would have laughed if you saw me.

It seemed especially important  
not to spill the coffee as I usually  
do, as I turned up the stairs,

inside the whorl of the house as if  
I were walking up inside the lilies.  
I do not know how to hold all

the beauty and sorrow of my life.

## **Smoke in Our Hair**

By [Ofelia Zepeda](#)

The scent of burning wood holds  
the strongest memory.  
Mesquite, cedar, piñon, juniper,  
all are distinct.  
Mesquite is dry desert air and mild winter.  
Cedar and piñon are colder places.  
Winter air in our hair is pulled away,  
and scent of smoke settles in its place.  
We walk around the rest of the day  
with the aroma resting on our shoulders.  
The sweet smell holds the strongest memory.  
We stand around the fire.  
The sound of the crackle of wood and spark  
is ephemeral.  
Smoke, like memories, permeates our hair,  
our clothing, our layers of skin.  
The smoke travels deep  
to the seat of memory.  
We walk away from the fire;  
no matter how far we walk,  
we carry this scent with us.  
New York City, France, Germany—  
we catch the scent of burning wood;  
we are brought home.

## **“They buried their son last winter”**

By [Serhiy Zhadan](#)

Translated by John Hennessy and Ostap Kin

They buried their son last winter.  
Strange weather for winter—rain, thunder.  
They buried him quietly—everybody’s busy.  
Who did he fight for? I asked. We don’t know, they say.  
He fought for someone, they say, but who—who knows?  
Will it change anything, they say, what’s the point now?

I would have asked him myself, but now—there's no need.  
And he wouldn't reply—he was buried without his head.

It's the third year of war; they're repairing the bridges.  
I know so many things about you, but who'd listen?  
I know, for example, the song you used to sing.  
I know your sister. I always had a thing for her.  
I know what you were afraid of, and why, even.  
Who you met that winter, what you told him.  
The sky gleams, full of ashes, every night now.  
You always played for a neighboring school.  
But who did you fight for?

To come here every year, to weed dry grass.  
To dig the earth every year—heavy, lifeless.  
To see the calm after tragedy every year.  
To insist you didn't shoot at us, at your people.  
The birds disappear behind waves of rain.  
To ask forgiveness for your sins.  
But what do I know about your sins?  
To beg the rain to finally stop.  
It's easier for birds, who know nothing of salvation, the soul.