

GET LIT'S
CLASSIC SLAM

POEMS & EXCERPTS, 2014-2015



INCREASING **TEEN** LITERACY
THROUGH **CLASSICAL** POETRY!

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All Lovely Things

Conrad Aiken

All lovely things will have an ending,
All lovely things will fade and die,
And youth, that's now so bravely spending,
Will beg a penny by and by.

Fine ladies soon are all forgotten,
And goldenrod is dust when dead,
The sweetest flesh and flowers are rotten
And cobwebs tent the brightest head.

Come back, true love! Sweet youth, return!--
But time goes on, and will, unheeding,
Though hands will reach, and eyes will yearn,
And the wild days set true hearts bleeding.

Come back, true love! Sweet youth, remain!--
But goldenrod and daisies wither,
And over them blows autumn rain,
They pass, they pass, and know not whither.

Lot's Wife

Anna Akhmatova

And the just man trailed God's shining agent,
over a black mountain, in his giant track,
while a restless voice kept harrying his woman:
"It's not too late, you can still look back

at the red towers of your native Sodom,
the square where once you sang, the spinning-shed,
at the empty windows set in the tall house
where sons and daughters blessed your marriage-bed."
A single glance: a sudden dart of pain
stitching her eyes before she made a sound . . .
Her body flaked into transparent salt,
and her swift legs rooted to the ground.

Who will grieve for this woman? Does she not seem
too insignificant for our concern?
Yet in my heart I never will deny her,
who suffered death because she chose to turn.

Grief Calls Us to the Things of This World

Sherman Alexie

The morning air is all awash with angels

—Richard Wilbur, "Love Calls Us to the Things of This World"

The eyes open to a blue telephone
In the bathroom of this five-star hotel.

I wonder whom I should call? A plumber,
Proctologist, urologist, or priest?

Who is blessed among us and most deserves
The first call? I choose my father because

He's astounded by bathroom telephones.
I dial home. My mother answers. "Hey, Ma,"

I say, "Can I talk to Poppa?" She gasps,
And then I remember that my father

Has been dead for nearly a year. "Shit, Mom,"
I say. "I forgot he's dead. I'm sorry—"

How did I forget?" "It's okay," she says.
"I made him a cup of instant coffee

This morning and left it on the table—
Like I have for, what, twenty-seven years—

And I didn't realize my mistake
Until this afternoon." My mother laughs

At the angels who wait for us to pause
During the most ordinary of days

And sing our praise to forgetfulness
Before they slap our souls with their cold wings.

Those angels burden and unbalance us.
Those fucking angels ride us piggyback.

Those angels, forever falling, snare us
And haul us, prey and praying, into dust.

The Diameter of the Bomb

Yehuda Amichai

The diameter of the bomb was thirty centimeters
and the diameter of its effective range about seven meters,
with four dead and eleven wounded.

And around these, in a larger circle
of pain and time, two hospitals are scattered
and one graveyard. But the young woman
who was buried in the city she came from,
at a distance of more than a hundred kilometers,
enlarges the circle considerably,
and the solitary man mourning her death
at the distant shores of a country far across the sea
includes the entire world in the circle.

And I won't even mention the crying of orphans
that reaches up to the throne of God and
beyond, making a circle with no end and no God.

Life Doesn't Frighten Me

Maya Angelou

Shadows on the wall
Noises down the hall
Life doesn't frighten me at all

Bad dogs barking loud
Big ghosts in a cloud
Life doesn't frighten me at all

Mean old Mother Goose
Lions on the loose
They don't frighten me at all

Dragons breathing flame
On my counterpane
That doesn't frighten me at all.

I go boo
Make them shoo
I make fun
Way they run
I won't cry
So they fly
I just smile
They go wild

Life doesn't frighten me at all.

Tough guys fight
All alone at night
Life doesn't frighten me at all.

Panthers in the park
Strangers in the dark
No, they don't frighten me at all.

That new classroom where
Boys all pull my hair
(Kissy little girls
With their hair in curls)
They don't frighten me at all.

Don't show me frogs and snakes
And listen for my scream,
If I'm afraid at all
It's only in my dreams.

I've got a magic charm
That I keep up my sleeve
I can walk the ocean floor

And never have to breathe.

Life doesn't frighten me at all

Not at all

Not at all.

Life doesn't frighten me at all.

I am a Mute Iraqi with a Voice

Anonymous

I am an Iraqi
but was never asked, personally,
what was better?
Saddam threatening to destroy me if I crossed him, politically?
Or tons of deleted uranium, napalm,
bullets, explosives
and other unfamiliar concoctions,
besieging me
at some hidden corner of my street?

I am an Iraqi,
but was never asked, personally,
what I wanted?
Freedom to vote for men and women I know little about,
who may or may not better my life,
or to safely be able to step out of my house?

I am an Iraqi,
but was never asked, do I want democracy
or the tradition of my ancestry?

I am an Iraqi,
but was never asked, personally,
by those who've come to rescue me,
have we really benefited you, my dear,
since the day we came near?
Or have we simply made a mess
of your little hut?

Siren Song

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.

Green Chile

Jimmy Santiago Baca

I prefer red chile over my eggs
and potatoes for breakfast.
Red chile *ristras* decorate my door,
dry on my roof, and hang from eaves.
They lend open-air vegetable stands
historic grandeur, and gently swing
with an air of festive welcome.
I can hear them talking in the wind,
haggard, yellowing, crisp, rasping
tongues of old men, licking the breeze.

But grandmother loves green chile.

When I visit her,
she holds the green chile pepper
in her wrinkled hands.
Ah, voluptuous, masculine,
an air of authority and youth simmers
from its swan-neck stem, tapering to a flowery
collar, fermenting resinous spice.
A well-dressed gentleman at the door
my grandmother takes sensuously in her hand,
rubbing its firm glossed sides,
caressing the oily rubbery serpent,
with mouth-watering fulfillment,
fondling its curves with gentle fingers.
Its bearing magnificent and taut
as flanks of a tiger in mid-leap,
she thrusts her blade into
and cuts it open, with lust
on her hot mouth, sweating over the stove,
bandana round her forehead,
mysterious passion on her face
as she serves me green chile con carne
between soft warm leaves of corn tortillas,
with beans and rice - her sacrifice
to her little prince.
I slurp from my plate
with last bit of tortilla, my mouth burns
and I hiss and drink a tall glass of cold water.
All over New Mexico, sunburned men and women
drive rickety trucks stuffed with gunny-sacks
of green chile, from Belen, Veguita, Willard, Estancia,
San Antonio y Socorro, from fields
to roadside stands, you see them roasting green chile
in screen-sided homemade barrels, and for a dollar a bag,
we relive this old, beautiful ritual again and again.

It Happens I am a Singer of the Heart

Jimmy Santiago Baca

It happens I am a singer of the heart
and took my songs to the gutter to sing them to drunks,
recite them to addicts,
whisper them to thieves and madmen,
outstretch them like my hands
clasping prisoner's hands
through cell bars.

You see, it's these people who understand the poem's magic,
who are not invited into society,
whose opinions we denigrate as useless,
but each unlike Uppidees fight hard for their existence,
battle against armed keepers to speak, stand, and breathe.

They've known the blessing light of the poem
on their trampled hearts,
the poem's respite in a merciless society,
its sensory indulgence in their own severe deprivations,
its love and respect
away from the mockery, ridicule, and shame
that accusers heap on them.

The poem's words
scrub away the rust on their hearts
drawing out the burnished luster of their dreams,
and radiates a certain light from their bones.
As they roam the murky alleys,
it transforms their suffering into songs of celebration.

One Art

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.

One Wants a Teller at a Time Like This

Gwendolyn Brooks

One wants a teller in a time like this

One's not a man, one's not a woman grown
To bear enormous business all alone.

One cannot walk this winding street with pride
Straight-shouldered, tranquil-eyed,
Knowing one knows for sure the way back home.
One wonders if one has a home.

One is not certain if or why or how.
One wants a Teller now:

Put on your rubbers and you won't catch a cold
Here's hell, there's heaven. Go to Sunday School
Be patient, time brings all good things--(and cool
Strong balm to calm the burning at the brain?)
Behold,
Love's true, and triumphs; and God's actual.

Slim Greer in Hell (part I)

Sterling Brown

Slim Greer went to heaven;
St. Peter said, "Slim,
You been a right good boy."
An' he winked at him.

"You been travelin' rascal
In yo'day.
You kin roam once mo';
Den you come to stay.

"Put dese wings on yo' shoulders,
An' save yo' feet."
Slim grin, and he speak up,
"Thankye, Pete."

Den Peter say, "Go
To Hell an' see,
All dat is doing, and
Report to me.

"Be sure to remember
How everything go."
Slim say, "I be seein' yuh
On de late watch, bo."

Slim got to cavortin'
Swell as you choose,
Like Lindy in de Spirit
Of St. Louis Blues.

He flew an' he flew,
Till at last he hit
A hangar wid de sign readin'
DIS IS IT.

Den he parked his wings,
An' strolled aroun',
Gittin' used to his feet
On de solid ground.

Sonnet 43

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 candlelight.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love with a 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.

The Everyday

Rosario Castellanos

For love there is no heaven, love; only this day;
this sad strand of hair that falls
while you are combing before a mirror.

Those long tunnels
that we traverse panting and breathless;
the eyeless walls,
the emptiness that resound with
some hidden and senseless voice.

For love there is no respite, love. The night
does not suddenly become bearable.

And when a star breaks its chains
and you see it madly zigzag, and disappear,
not for this does the law loosen its claws.

The encounter is in darkness. The taste
of tears mixes with the kiss.

And in the embrace you clasp the memory
of that orphanhood, of that death.

Rondel of Merciless Beauty

Geoffrey Chaucer

Your two great eyes will slay me suddenly;
Their beauty shakes me who was once serene;
Straight through my heart the wound is quick and keen.

Only your word will heal the injury
To my hurt heart, while yet the wound is clean -
Your two great eyes will slay me suddenly;
Their beauty shakes me who was once serene.

Upon my word, I tell you faithfully
Through life and after death you are my queen;
For with my death the whole truth shall be seen.
Your two great eyes will slay me suddenly;
Their beauty shakes me who was once serene;
Straight through my heart the wound is quick and keen.

Cloud

Sandra Cisneros

If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper.
-Thich Nhat Hanh

Before you became a cloud, you were an ocean, roiled and
murmuring like a mouth.
You were the shadows of a cloud cross-
ing over a field of tulips.
You were the tears of a man who cried
into a plaid handkerchief.
You were the sky without a hat.
Your
heart puffed and flowered like sheets drying on a line.

And when you were a tree, you listened to the trees and the tree
things trees told you.
You were the wind in the wheels of a red
bicycle.
You were the spidery Mariatattooed on the hairless arm
of a boy in downtown Houston.
You were the rain rolling off the
waxy leaves of a magnolia tree.
A lock of straw-colored hair wedged between the mottled pages of a Victor Hugo novel.
A
crescent of soap.
A spider the color of a fingernail.
The black nets
beneath the sea of olive trees.
A skein of blue wool.
A tea saucer
wrapped in newspaper.
An empty cracker tin.
A bowl of blueber-
ries in heavy cream.
White wine in a green-stemmed glass.

And when you opened your wings to wind, across the punched-
tin sky above a prison courtyard, those condemned to death and
those condemned to life watched how smooth and sweet a white
cloud glides.

I Am

John Clare

I am---yet what I am, none cares or knows;
My friends forsake me like a memory lost:
I am the self-consumer of my woes---
They rise and vanish in oblivious host,
Like shadows in love's frenzied stifled throes
And yet I am, and live---like vapours tossed

Into the nothingness of scorn and noise,
Into the living sea of waking dreams,
Where there is neither sense of life or joys,
But the vast shipwreck of my life's esteems;
Even the dearest that I love the best
Are strange---nay, rather, stranger than the rest.

I long for scenes where man hath never trod
A place where woman never smiled or wept
There to abide with my Creator God,
And sleep as I in childhood sweetly slept,
Untroubling and untroubled where I lie
The grass below, above, the vaulted sky.

Miss Rosie

Lucille Clifton

when I watch you
wrapped up like garbage
sitting, surrounded by the smell
of too old potato peels
or
when I watch you
in your old man's shoes
with the little toe cut out
sitting, waiting for your mind
like next week's grocery
I say
when I watch you
you wet brown bag of a woman
who used to be the best looking gal in Georgia
used to be called the Georgia Rose
I stand up
through your destruction
I stand up

Introduction to Poetry

Billy Collins

I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski
across the surface of a poem
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means.

Anyone Lived in a Pretty How Town

e.e. cummings

anyone lived in a pretty how town
(with up so floating many bells down)
spring summer autumn winter
he sang his didn't he danced his did.

Women and men(both little and small)
cared for anyone not at all
they sowed their isn't they reaped their same
sun moon stars rain

children guessed(but only a few
and down they forgot as up they grew
autumn winter spring summer)
that noone loved him more by more

when by now and tree by leaf
she laughed his joy she cried his grief
bird by snow and stir by still
anyone's any was all to her

someones married their everyones
laughed their cryings and did their dance
(sleep wake hope and then)they
said their nevers they slept their dream

stars rain sun moon
(and only the snow can begin to explain
how children are apt to forget to remember
with up so floating many bells down)

one day anyone died i guess
(and noone stooped to kiss his face)
busy folk buried them side by side
little by little and was by was

all by all and deep by deep
and more by more they dream their sleep
noone and anyone earth by april
wish by spirit and if by yes.

Women and men(both dong and ding)
summer autumn winter spring
reaped their sowing and went their came
sun moon stars rain

Next to of Course God America I

e.e. cummings

"next to of course god america I
love you land of the pilgrims' and so forth oh
say can you see by the dawn's early my
country 'tis of centuries come and go
and are no more what of it we should worry
in every language even deafanddumb
thy sons acclaim your glorious name by gorry
by jingo by gee by gosh by gum
why talk of beauty what could be more beaut-
iful than these heroic happy dead
who rushed like lions to the roaring slaughter
they did not stop to think they died instead
then shall the voice of liberty be mute?"

He spoke. And drank rapidly a glass of water.

Somewhere I have Never Traveled, Gladly Beyond

e.e. cummings

somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond
any experience,your eyes have their silence:
in your most frail gesture are things which enclose me,
or which i cannot touch because they are too near

your slightest look easily will uncloset me
though i have closed myself as fingers,
you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens
(touching skilfully,mysteriously)her first rose

or if your wish be to close me,i and
my life will shut very beautifully,suddenly,
as when the heart of this flower imagines
the snow carefully everywhere descending;

nothing which we are to perceive in this world equals
the power of your intense fragility:whose texture
compels me with the color of its countries,
rendering death and forever with each breathing

(i do not know what it is about you that closes
and opens;only something in me understands
the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)
nobody,not even the rain,has such small hands

Fatality

Rubén Darío

The tree is happy because it is scarcely sentient;
the hard rock is happier still, it feels nothing:
there is no pain as great as being alive,
no burden heavier than that of conscious life.

To be, and to know nothing, and to lack a way,
and the dread of having been, and future terrors...
And the sure terror of being dead tomorrow,
and to suffer all through life and through the darkness,

and through what we do not know and hardly suspect...
And the flesh that tempts us with bunches of cool grapes,
and the tomb that awaits us with its funeral sprays, and not to know where we go,
nor whence we came!...

Nocturne

Rubén Darío

You that have heard the heartbeat of the night,
you that have heard, in the long, sleepless hours,
a closing door, the rumble of distant wheels,
a vague echo, a wandering sound from somewhere:

you, in the moments of mysterious silence,
when the forgotten ones issue from their prison--
in the hour of the dead, In the hour of repose--
will know how to read the bitterness in my verses.
I fill them, as one would fill a glass, with all
my grief for remote memories and black misfortunes, the nostalgia of my flower-intoxicated soul
and the pain of a heart grown sorrowful with fêtes;

with the burden of not being what I might have been, the loss of the kingdom that was awaiting me,
the thought of the instant when I might not have been born
and the dream my life has been ever since I was!

All this has come in the midst of that boundless silence
in which the night develops earthly illusions,
and I feel as if an echo of the world's heart
had penetrated and disturbed my own.

Death, Be Not Proud

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.

Golden Retrievals

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.

Bilingual / Bilingue

Rhina Espillat

My father liked them separate, one there,
one here (allá y aquí), as if aware

that words might cut in two his daughter's heart
(el corazón) and lock the alien part

to what he was—his memory, his name
(su nombre)—with a key he could not claim.

"English outside this door, Spanish inside,"
he said, "y basta." But who can divide

the world, the word (mundo y palabra) from
any child? I knew how to be dumb

and stubborn (testaruda); late, in bed,
I hoarded secret syllables I read

until my tongue (mi lengua) learned to run
where his stumbled. And still the heart was one.

I like to think he knew that, even when,
proud (orgullosa) of his daughter's pen,

he stood outside mis versos, half in fear
of words he loved but wanted not to hear.

A Considerable Speck

Robert Frost

A speck that would have been beneath my sight
On any but a paper sheet so white
Set off across what I had written there.
And I had idly poised my pen in air
To stop it with a period of ink
When something strange about it made me think,
This was no dust speck by my breathing blown,
But unmistakably a living mite
With inclinations it could call its own.
It paused as with suspicion of my pen,
And then came racing wildly on again
To where my manuscript was not yet dry;
Then paused again and either drank or smelt--
With loathing, for again it turned to fly.
Plainly with an intelligence I dealt.
It seemed too tiny to have room for feet,
Yet must have had a set of them complete
To express how much it didn't want to die.
It ran with terror and with cunning crept.
It faltered: I could see it hesitate;
Then in the middle of the open sheet
Cower down in desperation to accept
Whatever I accorded it of fate.
I have none of the tenderer-than-thou
Collectivistic regimenting love
With which the modern world is being swept.
But this poor microscopic item now!
Since it was nothing I knew evil of
I let it lie there till I hope it slept.
I have a mind myself and recognize
Mind when I meet with it in any guise
No one can know how glad I am to find
On any sheet the least display of mind.

All I Gotta Do

Nikki Giovanni

all i gotta do
is sit and wait
sit and wait
and it's gonna find
me
all i gotta do
is sit and wait
if i can learn how

what i need to do
is sit and wait
cause i'm a woman
sit and wait
what i gotta do
is sit and wait
cause i'm a woman
it'll find me

you get yours
and i'll get mine
if i learn
to sit and wait
you got yours
i want mine
and i'm gonna get it
cause i gotta get it
cause i need to get it
if i learn how

thought about calling
for it on the phone
asked for a delivery
but they didn't have it
thought about going
to the store to get it
walked to the corner
but they didn't have it

called your name
in my sleep
sitting and waiting
thought you would awake me
called your name
lying in my bed
but you didn't have it
offered to go get it
but you didn't have it
so i'm sitting

all i know
is sitting and waiting
waiting and sitting
cause i'm a woman
all i know
is sitting and waiting
cause i gotta wait
wait for it to find
me

My First Memory (of Librarians)

Nikki Giovanni

This is my first memory:

A big room with heavy wooden tables that sat on a creaky
wood floor

A line of green shades—bankers' lights—down the center
Heavy oak chairs that were too low or maybe I was simply
too short

For me to sit in and read
So my first book was always big

In the foyer up four steps a semi-circle desk presided
To the left side the card catalogue
On the right newspapers draped over what looked like
a quilt rack
Magazines face out from the wall

The welcoming smile of my librarian
The anticipation in my heart
All those books—another world—just waiting
At my fingertips.

from Faust

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

I want frenzied excitements, gratifications that are painful,
love and hatred violently mixed,
anguish that enlivens, inspiriting trouble.
Cured of my thirst to know at last,
I'll never again shun anything
distressful;
from now on my wish is to undergo all that men everywhere undergo, their whole portion,
make mine their heights and depths,
their weal and woe,
everything human embrace in my
single person,
and so enlarge my soul to encompass
all humanity,
and shipwreck with them when all shipwreck finally.

... What am I, then, if it can never be: the realization of all human possibility,
that crown my soul so avidly reaches for?

Imagination does Not Exist

Hafiz

You should come close to me tonight wayfarer
for i will be celebrating you

your beauty still causes me madness
keeps the neighbours complaining
when i start shouting in the middle of the night
because i cant bear all this joy

i will be giving birth to suns
i will be holding forests upside down
gently shaking soft animals from trees and burrows
into my lap

what you conceive as imagination
does not exist for me

whatever you can do in a dream
or on your minds-canvas

my hands can pull-alive-from my coat pocket

but lets not talk about my divine world

for what i most want to know tonight is

all about
you.

Those Winter Sundays

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?

And if I Awaken in Los Angeles

Joy Harjo

And if I Awaken in Los Angeles
I will find a crazy boy teetering there
on the sidewalk against morning traffic,
too far gone to even ask for a quarter.
I will hear his mother call for him,
her spirit confused by the taste
of sadness,
and though she searches for him
everywhere,
she will never find him here.
And if I awaken in Los Angeles
I will hear the lost beloved one
sing Billie Holiday in my ear-- she lives in a parallel universe,
is kind to rats and does
no harm to anyone.

And if I awaken in Los Angeles I will know
that I am not the only dreamer.
I will appear in the vision of a dove
who perches on the balcony
of the apartment.
In his translation I am the human with a store
of birdseed. He is the sun.
I am a fruitful planet.

And if I awaken in Los Angeles
I will not have to get up and say my prayers
to the east, and look out over the city of millions,
past the heads of palm trees, through foggy breezes--
because I will be a prayer as I perform the rituals
of being a human.
There will
be no difference
between
near and far.
This morning I have too much to do to awaken.
I say my prayers, feed the birds,
then head to the refrigerator and forget.

from The Cure at Troy

Seamus Heaney

Human beings suffer,
they torture one another,
they get hurt and get hard.
No poem or play or song
can fully right a wrong
inflicted or endured.

The innocent in gaols
beat on their bars together.
A hunger-striker's father
stands in the graveyard dumb.
The police widow in veils
faints at the funeral home.

History says, Don't hope
on this side of the grave.
But then, once in a lifetime
the longed for tidal wave
of justice can rise up,
and hope and history rhyme.

So hope for a great sea-change
on the far side of revenge.
Believe that a further shore
is reachable from here.
Believe in miracles
and cures and healing wells.

Call the miracle self-healing:
The utter self-revealing
double-take of feeling.
If there's fire on the mountain
Or lightning and storm
And a god speaks from the sky

That means someone is hearing
the outcry and the birth-cry
of new life at its term.
It means once in a lifetime
That justice can rise up
And hope and history rhyme.

Postscript

Seamus Heaney

And some time make the time to drive out west
Into County Clare, along the Flaggy Shore,
In September or October, when the wind
And the light are working off each other
So that the ocean on one side is wild
With foam and glitter, and inland among stones
The surface of a slate-grey lake is lit
By the earthed lightening of flock of swans,
Their feathers roughed and ruffling, white on white,
Their fully-grown headstrong-looking heads
Tucked or cresting or busy underwater.
Useless to think you'll park or capture it
More thoroughly. You are neither here nor there,
A hurry through which known and strange things pass
As big soft buffetings come at the car sideways
And catch the heart off guard and blow it open

Invictus

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.

Black Rage

Lauryn Hill

Black rage is founded on two-thirds a person
Rapings and beatings and suffering that worsens,
Black human packages tied up with strings,
Black rage can come from all these kinds of things.
Black rage is founded on blatant denial
Squeezed economics, subsistence survival,
Deafening silence and social control.
Black rage is founded on wounds in the soul!

When the dogs bite, when the beatings,
When I'm feeling sad
I simply remember all these kinds of things and then I don't fear so bad!

Black rage is founded: who fed us self hatred
Lies and abuse while we waited and waited?
Spiritual treason, this grid and its cages
Black rage was founded on these kinds of things.
Black rage is founded on draining and draining,
Threatening your freedom to stop your complaining.
Poisoning your water while they say it's raining,
Then call you mad for complaining, complaining
Old time bureaucracy drugging the youth,
Black rage is founded on blocking the truth!
Murder and crime, compromise and distortion,
Sacrifice, sacrifice, who makes this fortune?
Greed, falsely called progress,
Such human contortion,
Black rage is founded on these kinds of things

So when the dog bites
And the ceilings
And I'm feeling mad,
I simply remember all these kinds of things and then I don't fear so bad!

Free enterprise, is it myth or illusion?
Forcing you back into purposed confusion.
Black human trafficking or blood transfusion?
Black rage is founded on these kinds of things.
Victims of violence both psyche and body
Life out of context is living ungodly.
Politics, politics
Greed falsely called wealth
Black rage is founded on denying of self!
Black human packages tied and subsistence
Having to justify very existence
Try if you must but you can't have my soul
Black rage is founded on ungodly control
So when the dog bites
And the beatings

And I'm feeling so sad
I simply remember all these kinds of things and then I don't feel so bad!

Death is Nothing at All

Henry Scott Holland

Death is nothing at all. It does not count. I have only slipped away into the next room. Nothing has happened. Everything remains exactly as it was. I am I, and you are you, and the old life that we lived so fondly together is untouched, unchanged. Whatever we were to each other, that we are still. Call me by the old familiar name. Speak of me in the easy way which you always used. Put no difference into your tone. Wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow. Laugh as we always laughed at the little jokes that we enjoyed together. Play, smile, think of me, pray for me. Let my name be ever the household word that it always was. Let it be spoken without an effort, without the ghost of a shadow upon it. Life means all that it ever meant. It is the same as it ever was. There is absolute and unbroken continuity. What is this death but a negligible accident? Why should I be out of mind because I am out of sight? I am but waiting for you, for an interval, somewhere very near, just round the corner. All is well.

Harlem Sweeties

Langston Hughes

Have you dug the spill
Of Sugar Hill?
Cast your gims
On this sepia thrill:
Brown sugar lassie,
Caramel treat,
Honey-gold baby
Sweet enough to eat.
Peach-skinned girlie,
Coffee and cream,
Chocolate darling
Out of a dream.
Walnut tinted
Or cocoa brown,
Pomegranate-lipped
Pride of the town.
Rich cream-colored
To plum-tinted black,
Feminine sweetness
In Harlem's no lack.
Glow of the quince
To blush of the rose.
Persimmon bronze
To cinnamon toes.
Blackberry cordial,
Virginia Dare wine—
All those sweet colors
Flavor Harlem of mine!
Walnut or cocoa,
Let me repeat:
Caramel, brown sugar,
A chocolate treat.
Molasses taffy,
Coffee and cream,
Licorice, clove, cinnamon
To a honey-brown dream.
Ginger, wine-gold,
Persimmon, blackberry,
All through the spectrum
Harlem girls vary—
So if you want to know beauty's
Rainbow-sweet thrill,
Stroll down luscious,
Delicious, *fine* Sugar Hill.

Life is Fine

Langston Hughes

I went down to the river,
I set down on the bank.
I tried to think but couldn't,
So I jumped in and sank.

I came up once and hollered!
I came up twice and cried!
If that water hadn't a-been so cold
I might've sunk and died.

But it was Cold in that water! It was cold!

I took the elevator
Sixteen floors above the ground.
I thought about my baby
And thought I would jump down.

I stood there and I hollered!
I stood there and I cried!
If it hadn't a-been so high
I might've jumped and died.

But it was High up there! It was high!

So since I'm still here livin',
I guess I will live on.
I could've died for love--
But for livin' I was born

Though you may hear me holler,
And you may see me cry--
I'll be dogged, sweet baby,
If you gonna see me die.

Life is fine! Fine as wine! Life is fine!

Note on Commercial Theatre

Langston Hughes

You've taken my blues and gone—
You sing 'em on Broadway
And you sing 'em in Hollywood Bowl,
And you mix 'em up with symphonies
And you fixed 'em
So they don't sound like me.
Yep, you done taken my blues and gone.

You also took my spirituals and gone.
You put me in Macbeth and Carmen Jones
And all kinds of Swing Mikados
And in everything but what's about me—
But someday somebody'll
Stand up and talk 'bout me,
And write about me—
Black and beautiful—
And sing about me,
And put on plays about me!
I reckon it'll be
Me myself!

Yes, it'll be me.

from Their Eyes were Watching God

Zora Neale Hurston

She had found a jewel down inside herself and she had wanted to walk where people could see her and gleam it around. But she had been set in the market-place to sell. Been set for still-bait. When God had made The Man, he made him out of stuff that sung all the time and glittered all over. Then after that some angels got jealous and chopped him into millions of pieces, but still he glittered and himmed. So they beat him down to nothing but sparks but each little spark had a shine and a song. So they covered each one over with mud. And the lonesomeness in the sparks make them hunt for one another, but the mud is deaf and dumb. Like all the other tumbling mud-balls, Janie had tried to show her shine.

The Bear

Galway Kinnell

1

In late winter
I sometimes glimpse bits of steam
coming up from
some fault in the old snow
and bend close and see it is lung-colored
and put down my nose
and know
the chilly, enduring odor of bear.

2

I take a wolf's rib and whittle
it sharp at both ends
and coil it up
and freeze it in blubber and place it out
on the fairway of the bears.

And when it has vanished
I move out on the bear tracks,
roaming in circles
until I come to the first, tentative, dark
splash on the earth.

And I set out
running, following the splashes
of blood wandering over the world.
At the cut, gashed resting places
I stop and rest,
at the crawl-marks
where he lay out on his belly
to overpass some stretch of bauchy ice
I lie out
dragging myself forward with bear-knives in my fists.

3

On the third day I begin to starve,
at nightfall I bend down as I knew I would
at a turd sopped in blood,
and hesitate, and pick it up,
and thrust it in my mouth, and gnash it down,
and rise
and go on running.

4

On the seventh day,
living by now on bear blood alone,
I can see his upturned carcass far out ahead, a scraggled,
steamy hulk,
the heavy fur riffling in the wind.

I come up to him
and stare at the narrow-spaced, petty eyes,
the dismayed
face laid back on the shoulder, the nostrils
flared, catching
perhaps the first taint of me as he
died.

I hack
a ravine in his thigh, and eat and drink,
and tear him down his whole length
and open him and climb in
and close him up after me, against the wind,
and sleep.

5

And dream
of lumbering flatfooted
over the tundra,
stabbed twice from within,
splattering a trail behind me,
splattering it out no matter which way I lurch,
no matter which parabola of bear-transcendence,
which dance of solitude I attempt,
which gravity-clutched leap,
which trudge, which groan.

6

Until one day I totter and fall—
fall on this
stomach that has tried so hard to keep up,
to digest the blood as it leaked in,
to break up
and digest the bone itself: and now the breeze
blows over me, blows off
the hideous belches of ill-digested bear blood
and rotted stomach
and the ordinary, wretched odor of bear,

blows across
my sore, lolled tongue a song
or screech, until I think I must rise up
and dance. And I lie still.

7

I awaken I think. Marshlights
reappear, geese
come trailing again up the flyway.
In her ravine under old snow the dam-bear
lies, licking
lumps of smeared fur

and drizzly eyes into shapes
with her tongue. And one
hairy-soled trudge stuck out before me,
the next groaned out,
the next,
the next,
the rest of my days I spend
wandering: wondering
what, anyway,
was that sticky infusion, that rank flavor of blood, that poetry, by which I lived?

If

Rudyard Kipling

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!

A Fable

Etheridge Knight

Once upon a today and yesterday and nevermore there were 7 men and women all locked / up in prison cells. Now these 7 men and women were innocent of any crimes; they were in prison because their skins were black. Day after day, the prisoners paced their cells, pining for their freedom. And the non-black jailers would laugh at the prisoners and beat them with sticks and throw their food on the floor. Finally, prisoner #1 said, "I will educate myself and emulate the non-colored people. That is the way to freedom—c'mon, you guys, and follow me." "Hell, no," said prisoner #2. "The *only* way to get free is to pray to my god and he will deliver you like he delivered Daniel from the lion's den, so unite and follow me." "Bullshit," said prisoner #3. "The *only* way / out is thru this tunnel i've been quietly digging, so c'mon, and follow me." "Uh-uh," said prisoner #4, "that's too risky. The only right / way is to follow all the rules and don't make the non-colored people angry, so c'mon brothers and sisters and unite behind me." "Fuck you!" said prisoner #5, "The *only* way / out is to shoot our way out, if all of you get / together behind me." "No," said prisoner #6, "all of you are incorrect; you have not analyzed the political situation by my scientific method and historical meemeejeebee. All we have to do is wait long enough and the bars will bend from their own inner rot. That is the *only* way." "Are all of you crazy," cried prisoner #7. "I'll get out by myself, by ratting on the rest of you to the non-colored people. That is the way, that is the *only* way!" "No-no," they / all cried, "come and follow me. I have the / way, the only way to freedom." And so they argued, and to this day they are still arguing; and to this day they are still in their prison cells, their stomachs / trembling with fear.

For Black Poets Who Think of Suicide

Etheridge Knight

Black Poets should live – not leap
from steel bridges (like the white boys do).
Black Poets should live – not lay
their necks on railroad tracks (like the white boys do.)
Black Poets should seek – but not search too much
in sweet dark caves, nor hunt for snipe
Down psychic trails (like the white boys do).

For Black Poets belong to Black People. Are
The flutes of Black Lovers. Are
the organs of Black Sorrows. Are
the Trumpets of Black Warriors.
Let All Black Poets die as Trumpets,
And be buried in the dust of marching feet.

You and I are Disappearing

Yusef Komunyakaa

The cry I bring down from the hills
belongs to a girl still burning inside my head. At daybreak
she burns like a piece of paper.
She burns like foxfire in a thigh-shaped valley.
A skirt of flames dances around her

at dusk.

We stand with our hands
hanging at our sides,
while she burns
like a sack of dry ice.
She burns like oil on water.
She burns like a cattail torch
dipped in gasoline.
She glows like the fat tip
of a banker's cigar,
silent as quicksilver.
A tiger under a rainbow
at nightfall.

She burns like a shot glass of vodka.
She burns like a field of poppies
at the edge of a rain forest.
She rises like dragonsmoke
to my nostrils.
She burns like a burning bush
driven by a godawful wind.

Dust

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.

The Elephant is Slow to Mate

D. H. Lawrence

The elephant, the huge old beast,
is slow to mate;
he finds a female, they show no haste
they wait

for the sympathy in their vast shy hearts
slowly, slowly to rouse
as they loiter along the river-beds
and drink and browse

and dash in panic through the brake
of forest with the herd,
and sleep in massive silence, and wake
together, without a word.

So slowly the great hot elephant hearts
grow full of desire,
and the great beasts mate in secret at last,
hiding their fire.

Oldest they are and the wisest of beasts
so they know at last
how to wait for the loneliest of feasts
for the full repast.

They do not snatch, they do not tear;
their massive blood
moves as the moon-tides, near, more near
till they touch in flood.

Animals are Passing from our Lives

Philip Levine

It's wonderful how I jog
on four honed-down ivory toes
my massive buttocks slipping
like oiled parts with each light step.

I'm to market. I can smell
the sour, grooved block, I can smell
the blade that opens the hole
and the pudgy white fingers

that shake out the intestines
like a hankie. In my dreams
the snouts drool on the marble,
suffering children, suffering flies,

suffering the consumers
who won't meet their steady eyes
for fear they could see. The boy
who drives me along believes

that any moment I'll fall
on my side and drum my toes
like a typewriter or squeal
and shit like a new housewife

discovering television,
or that I'll turn like a beast
cleverly to hook his teeth
with my teeth. No. Not this pig.

The Simple Truth

Philip Levine

I bought a dollar and a half's worth of small red potatoes,
took them home, boiled them in their jackets
and ate them for dinner with a little butter and salt.
Then I walked through the dried fields
on the edge of town. In middle June the light
hung on in the dark furrows at my feet,
and in the mountain oaks overhead the birds
were gathering for the night, the jays and mockers
squawking back and forth, the finches still darting
into the dusty light. The woman who sold me
the potatoes was from Poland; she was someone
out of my childhood in a pink spangled sweater and sunglasses
praising the perfection of all her fruits and vegetables
at the road-side stand and urging me to taste
even the pale, raw sweet corn trucked all the way,
she swore, from New Jersey. "Eat, eat" she said,
"Even if you don't I'll say you did."

Some things

you know all your life. They are so simple and true
they must be said without elegance, meter and rhyme,
they must be laid on the table beside the salt shaker,
the glass of water, the absence of light gathering
in the shadows of picture frames, they must be
naked and alone, they must stand for themselves.
My friend Henri and I arrived at this together in 1965
before I went away, before he began to kill himself,
and the two of us to betray our love. Can you taste
what I'm saying? It is onions or potatoes, a pinch
of simple salt, the wealth of melting butter, it is obvious,
it stays in the back of your throat like a truth
you never uttered because the time was always wrong,
it stays there for the rest of your life, unspoken,
made of that dirt we call earth, the metal we call salt,
in a form we have no words for, and you live on it.

The Children's Hour

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 banditi,
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!

Last Night as I was Sleeping

Antonio Machado

Last night as I was sleeping,
I dreamt—marvelous error!—
that a spring was breaking
out in my heart.
I said: Along which secret aqueduct,
Oh water, are you coming to me,
water of a new life
that I have never drunk?

Last night as I was sleeping,
I dreamt—marvelous error!—
that I had a beehive
here inside my heart.
And the golden bees
were making white combs
and sweet honey
from my old failures.

Last night as I was sleeping,
I dreamt—marvelous error!—
that a fiery sun was giving
light inside my heart.
It was fiery because I felt
warmth as from a hearth,
and sun because it gave light
and brought tears to my eyes.

Last night as I slept,
I dreamt—marvelous error!—
that it was God I had
here inside my heart.

The Fair Singer

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.

O Word I Love to Sing

Claude McKay

O word I love to sing! thou art too tender
For all the passions agitating me;
For all my bitterness thou art too tender,
I cannot pour my red soul into thee.

O haunting melody! thou art too slender,
Too fragile like a globe of crystal glass;
For all my stormy thoughts thou art too slender,
The burden from my bosom will not pass.

O tender word! O melody so slender!
O tears of passion saturate with brine,
O words, unwilling words, ye can not render
My hatred for the foe of me and mine.

Ashes of Life

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Love has gone and left me and the days are all alike;
Eat I must, and sleep I will, — and would that night were here!
But ah! — to lie awake and hear the slow hours strike!
Would that it were day again! — with twilight near!

Love has gone and left me and I don't know what to do;
This or that or what you will is all the same to me;
But all the things that I begin I leave before I'm through, —
There's little use in anything as far as I can see.

Love has gone and left me, — and the neighbors knock and borrow,
And life goes on forever like the gnawing of a mouse, —
And to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow
There's this little street and this little house.

I Shall Forget You Presently, My Dear

Edna St. Vincent Millay

I shall forget you presently, my dear,
So make the most of this, your little day,
Your little month, your little half a year,
Ere I forget, or die, or move away,
And we are done forever; by and by
I shall forget you, as I said, but now,
If you entreat me with your loveliest lie
I will protest you with my favorite vow.

I would indeed that love were longer-lived,
And oaths were not so brittle as they are,
But so it is, and nature has contrived
To struggle on without a break thus far,—
Whether or not we find what we are seeking
Is idle, biologically speaking.

For a Daughter Who Leaves

Janice Mirikitani

A woman weaves
her daughter's wedding
slippers that will carry
her steps into a new life.
The mother weeps alone
into her jeweled sewing box
slips red thread
around its spool,
the same she used to stitch
her daughter's first silk jacket
embroidered with turtles
that would bring luck, long life.
She remembers all the steps
taken by her daughter's
unbound quick feet:
dancing on the stones
of the yard among yellow
butterflies and white breasted sparrows.
And she grew, legs strong
body long, mind
independent.
Now she captures all eyes
with her hair combed smooth
and her hips gently
swaying like bamboo.
The woman
spins her thread
from the spool of her heart,
knotted to her daughter's
departing
wedding slippers.

Rufous

Penelope La Montagne

When people ask me what's new, I tell them
I have a hummingbird nest in my pear tree.
My theory of everything defines this as perfection,
a reward for good living, the ultimate gift
where nature chooses you back, makes your
yard the home place of the tiniest New World bird.
The little rufous who crowns the lichen ball
senses the nectar in me and does a wing ballet
inches from my face as I sit on the slider and rock.
My heart quickens so as to true up to that racing beat.
There is a kind of tantra in this.
Only straight one can I see the ruby drop on her throat.
All the love inside me is well met
in the whir and thrum of that manic little heart.

They was Girls Together

Cherrie Moraga

It was a poem
that curled the girls'
knuckles 'round
chainlink
white bone splitting
through clenched brown
fists. It was
a poem

that held the two women
in the grip
of a rhetoric they found
both their grown mouths shaping
with voices thin
as November air.

"I thought you had my back!"
It was
a poem

that enveloped
their tiny Brooklyn-blocked world
made love to their innocence
and fresh sharp-stabbed
sense of betrayal.

They was girls together *
trying to do the impossible:
love.

It was a poem
that forgave them

their failure

from Song of Solomon

Toni Morrison

You think dark is just one color, but it ain't. There's five or six kinds of black. Some silk, some woolly. Some just empty. Some like fingers. And it don't stay still. It moves and changes from one kind of black to another. Saying something is like pitch black is like saying something is green. What kind of green? Green like my bottles? Green like a grasshopper? Green like a cucumber, lettuce, or green like the sky is just before it breaks loose to storm? Well, night black is the same way. May as well be a rainbow.

Grasshoppers are Very Intelligent

Ogden Nash

Ah woe, woe, man was created to live by the sweat of his
 Brow,
And it doesn't make any difference if your brow was moist
 Yesterday and the day before, you've still got to get it
 Moist again right now,
And you know deep in your heart that you will have to
 Continue keeping it dewy
Right up to the time that somebody at the club says, I suppose
 We ought to go to what's-his-name's funeral, who won
 The fifth at Bowie?
That's a nasty outlook to face,
But it's what you get for belonging to the human race.
So far as I know, mankind is the only section of creation
That is doomed to either pers- or ex-piration.
Look at the birds flying around, and listen to them as their
 Voices in song they hoist;
No wonder they sing so much, they haven't got any blows,
 And if they had they couldn't be bothered keeping them
 Moist.
And bees don't do anything either, bees just have a reputation
 For industry because they are sharp enough to buzz,
And people hear a bee buzzing and don't realize that buzzing
 Isn't any trouble for a bee so they think it is doing more
 Than it actually does,
So next time you are about to expend some enthusiasm on the
 Bee's wonderful industrial powers,
Just remember that that wonderful bee would die laughing if
 You asked it to change places with you and get its brow
 Moist while you went around spending the day smelling
 Flowers.

Ode to My Suit

Pablo Neruda

Every morning, suit,
you are waiting on a chair
to be filled
by my vanity, my love,
my hope, my body.
Still
only half awake
I leave the shower
to shrug into your sleeves,
my legs seek
the hollow of your legs,
and thus embraced
by your unfailing loyalty
I take my morning walk,
work my way into my poetry;
from my windows I see
the things,
men, women,
events and struggles
constantly shaping me,
constantly confronting me,
setting my hands to the task,
opening my eyes, creasing my lips,
and in the same way,
suit,
I am shaping you,
poking out your elbows,
wearing you threadbare,
and so your life grows
in the image of my own.
In the wind
you flap and hum
as if you were my soul,
in bad moments
you cling
to my bones,
abandoned, at nighttime
darkness and dream
people with their phantoms
your wings and mine.
I wonder
whether some day
an enemy
bullet
will stain you with my blood,
for then
you would die with me,
but perhaps
it will be

less dramatic,
simple,
and you will grow ill,
suit,
with me, with my body,
and together
we will be lowered
into the earth.
That's why
every day
I greet you
with respect and then
you embrace me and I forget you,
because we are one being
and shall be always
in the wind, through the night,
the streets and the struggle,
one body,
maybe, maybe, one day, still.

Poema XIV

Pablo Neruda

Every day you play with the light of the universe.
Subtle visitor, you arrive in the flower and the water.
You are more than this white head that I hold tightly
as a cluster of fruit, every day, between my hands.

You are like nobody since I love you.
Let me spread you out among yellow garlands.
Who writes your name in letters of smoke among the stars of the south?
Oh let me remember you as you were before you existed.

Suddenly the wind howls and bangs at my shut window.
The sky is a net crammed with shadowy fish.
Here all the winds let go sooner or later, all of them.
The rain takes off her clothes.

The birds go by, fleeing.
The wind. The wind.
I can contend only against the power of men.
The storm whirls dark leaves
and turns loose all the boats that were moored last night to the sky.

You are here. Oh, you do not run away.
You will answer me to the last cry.
Cling to me as though you were frightened.
Even so, at one time a strange shadow ran through your eyes.

Now, now too, little one, you bring me honeysuckle,
and even your breasts smell of it.
While the sad wind goes slaughtering butterflies
I love you, and my happiness bites the plum of your mouth.

How you must have suffered getting accustomed to me,
my savage, solitary soul, my name that sends them all running.
So many times we have seen the morning star burn, kissing our eyes,
and over our heads the gray light unwind in turning fans.

My words rained over you, stroking you.
A long time I have loved the sunned mother-of-pearl of your body.
I go so far as to think that you own the universe.
I will bring you happy flowers from the mountains, bluebells,
dark hazels, and rustic baskets of kisses.

I want
to do with you what spring does with the cherry trees.

Valentine for Ernest Mann

Naomi Shihab Nye

You can't order a poem like you order a taco.
Walk up to the counter, say, "I'll take two"
and expect it to be handed back to you
on a shiny plate.

Still, I like your spirit.
Anyone who says, "Here's my address,
write me a poem," deserves something in reply.
So I'll tell you a secret instead:
poems hide. In the bottoms of our shoes,
they are sleeping. They are the shadows
drifting across our ceilings the moment
before we wake up. What we have to do
is live in a way that lets us find them.

Once I knew a man who gave his wife
two skunks for a valentine.
He couldn't understand why she was crying.
"I thought they had such beautiful eyes."
And he was serious. He was a serious man
who lived in a serious way. Nothing was ugly
just because the world said so. He really
liked those skunks. So, he re-invented them
as valentines and they became beautiful.
At least, to him. And the poems that had been hiding
in the eyes of skunks for centuries
crawled out and curled up at his feet.

Maybe if we re-invent whatever our lives give us
we find poems. Check your garage, the odd sock
in your drawer, the person you almost like, but not quite.
And let me know.

The Daughter Goes to Camp

Sharon Olds

In the taxi alone, home from the airport,
I could not believe you were gone. My palm kept
creeping over the smooth plastic
to find your strong meaty little hand and
squeeze it, find your narrow thigh in the
noble ribbing of the corduroy,
straight and regular as anything in nature, to
find the slack cool cheek of a
child in the heat of a summer morning—
nothing, nothing, waves of bawling
hitting me in hot flashes like some
change of life, some boiling wave
rising in me toward your body, toward
where it should have been on the seat, your
brow curved like a cereal bowl, your
eyes dark with massed crystals like the
magnified scales of a butterfly's wing, the
delicate feelers of your limp hair,
floods of blood rising in my face as I
tried to reassemble the hot
gritty molecules in the car, to
make you appear like a holograph
on the back seat, pull you out of nothing
as I once did—but you were really gone,
the cab glossy as a slit caul out of
which you had slipped, the air glittering
electric with escape as it does in the room at a birth.

Green, Green is My Sister's House

Mary Oliver

Don't you dare climb that tree
or even try, they said, or you will be
sent away to the hospital of the
very foolish, if not the other one.
And I suppose, considering my age,
it was fair advice.

But the tree is a sister to me, she
lives there alone in a green cottage
high in the air and I know what
would happen, she'd clap her green hands,
she'd shake her green hair, she'd
welcome me. Truly

I try to be good but sometimes
a person just has to break out and
act like the wild and springy thing
one used to be. It's impossible not
to remember *wild* and want it back. So

if someday you can't find me you might
look into that tree or-of course
it's possible-under it.

The Journey

Mary Oliver

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice--
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.

"Mend my life!"

each voice cried.

But you didn't stop.

You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations--
though their melancholy
was terrible.

It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.

But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice,
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do--
determined to save
the only life you could save.

When Death Comes

Mary Oliver

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

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

when death comes
like an iceberg between the shoulder blades,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Applicant

Sylvia Plath

First, are you our sort of a person?
Do you wear
A glass eye, false teeth or a crutch,
A brace or a hook,
Rubber breasts or a rubber crotch,
Stitches to show something's missing? No, no? Then
How can we give you a thing?
Stop crying.
Open your hand.
Empty? Empty. Here is a hand
To fill it and willing
To bring teacups and roll away headaches
And do whatever you tell it.
Will you marry it?
It is guaranteed
To thumb shut your eyes at the end
And dissolve of sorrow.
We make new stock from the salt.
I notice you are stark naked.
How about this suit—
Black and stiff, but not a bad fit.
Will you marry it?
It is waterproof, shatterproof, proof
Against fire and bombs through the roof.
Believe me, they'll bury you in it.
Now your head, excuse me, is empty.
I have the ticket for that.
Come here, sweetie, out of the closet.
Well, what do you think of that ?
Naked as paper to start
But in twenty-five years she'll be silver,
In fifty, gold.
A living doll, everywhere you look.
It can sew, it can cook,
It can talk, talk , talk.
It works, there is nothing wrong with it.
You have a hole, it's a poultice.
You have an eye, it's an image.
My boy, it's your last resort.
Will you marry it, marry it, marry it.

One Perfect Rose

Dorothy Parker

A single flow'r he sent me, since we met.
All tenderly his messenger he chose;
Deep-hearted, pure, with scented dew still wet -
One perfect rose.

I knew the language of the floweret;
'My fragile leaves,' it said, 'his heart enclose.'
Love long has taken for his amulet
One perfect rose.

Why is it no one ever sent me yet
One perfect limousine, do you suppose?
Ah no, it's always just my luck to get
One perfect rose.

A Vindication

Li Po

If heaven loved not the wine,
A Wine Star would not be in heaven;
If earth loved not the wine,
The Wine Spring would not be on the earth.
Since heaven and earth love the wine,
Need a tippling mortal be ashamed?
The transparent wine, I hear,
Has the soothing virtue of a sage,
While the turgid is rich, they say,
As the fertile mind of the wise.
Both the sage and the wise were drinkers,
Why seek for peers among gods and goblins?
Three cups open the grand door to bliss;
Take a jugful, the universe is yours.
Such is the rapture of the wine,
That the sober shall never inherit.

Alone

Edgar Allan Poe

From childhood's hour I have not been
As others were; I have not seen
As others saw; I could not bring
My passions from a common spring.

From the same source I have not taken
My sorrow; I could not awaken
My heart to joy at the same tone;
And all I loved, I loved alone.

Then- in my childhood, in the dawn
Of a most stormy life- was drawn
From every depth of good and ill
The mystery which binds me still:
From the torrent, or the fountain,
From the red cliff of the mountain,
From the sun that round me rolled
In its autumn tint of gold,
From the lightning in the sky
As it passed me flying by,
From the thunder and the storm,
And the cloud that took the form
(When the rest of Heaven was blue)
Of a demon in my view.

Aunt Jennifer's Tigers

Adrienne Rich

Aunt Jennifer's tigers prance across a screen,
Bright topaz denizens of a world of green.
They do not fear the men beneath the tree;
They pace in sleek chivalric certainty.

Aunt Jennifer's finger fluttering through her wool
Find even the ivory needle hard to pull.
The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band
Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand.

When Aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie
Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by.
The tigers in the panel that she made
Will go on prancing, proud and unafraid.

The Man Watching

Rainer Maria Rilke

I can tell by the way the trees beat, after
so many dull days, on my worried windowpanes
that a storm is coming,
and I hear the far-off fields say things
I can't bear without a friend,
I can't love without a sister

The storm, the shifter of shapes, drives on
across the woods and across time,
and the world looks as if it had no age:
the landscape like a line in the psalm book,
is seriousness and weight and eternity.

What we choose to fight is so tiny!
What fights us is so great!
If only we would let ourselves be dominated
as things do by some immense storm,
we would become strong too, and not need names.

When we win it's with small things,
and the triumph itself makes us small.
What is extraordinary and eternal
does not want to be bent by us.
I mean the Angel who appeared
to the wrestlers of the Old Testament:
when the wrestler's sinews
grew long like metal strings,
he felt them under his fingers
like chords of deep music.

Whoever was beaten by this Angel
(who often simply declined the fight)
went away proud and strengthened
and great from that harsh hand,
that kneaded him as if to change his shape.
Winning does not tempt that man.
This is how he grows: by being defeated, decisively,
by constantly greater beings.

Joe, I Never Write About You

Jose Antonio Rodriguez

When I write about friends, I write
about Luis from kindergarten,
about how he grew up to a gangbanger,
how I think he dropped out of school,
how I don't know because even though
I befriended his brother in college,
I never asked about him.

Or I write about my friends from 6th grade
because I still keep in touch because
they live in Austin and drive nice cars
but still keep it real.

But I never write about Joe,
my friend from 5th grade. I never write
about how his mother fed me
battered toast because breakfast at home
was sometimes not enough, how
I never told my mother
that I wasn't being a polite boy
and refusing food, how
we did all our homework together, how
he lived one block down
in a two-room shack
 smaller even than my family's
how he was the first one to get my jokes,
how he laughed, sometimes
at nothing in particular. How one day
my sister and I were leaning on the fence
 in front of our house
 swatting away flies.

How Joe walked by
on the other side of the street,
how his jeans were tight, how
they were too short for him.

How before I could wave hi to Joe
my sister called him a faggot
because of the way he walked
 hips swishing, head bobbing.

How she didn't say hi to him
but whispered it to me. How
at that moment
the late afternoon sky suddenly dimmed,
just a little. How only I noticed.

No, I never write about how

I never spoke to him after that day. How
I moved on to 6th grade,
to a gifted-and-talented program in a new school
while he moved on to 6th grade,
to a not-gifted-and-talented program in the old school.

How we couldn't be friends anymore
because we were now in different schools. How
he lived down the block.

Speaking with Hands

Luis J. Rodriguez

There were no markets in Watts.
There were these small corner stores
we called *marketas*
who charged more money
for cheaper goods than what existed
in other parts of town.
The owners were often thieves in white coats
who talked to you like animals,
who knew you had no options;
who knew Watts was the preferred landfill
of the city.

One time, Mama started an argument
at the cash register.
In her broken English,
speaking with her hands,
she had us children stand around her
as she fought with the grocer
on prices & quality & dignity.

Mama became a woman swept
by a sobering madness;
she must have been what Moses saw
in the burning bush,
a pillar of fire,
consuming the still air
that reeked of overripe fruit
and bad meat from the frozen food
sections.

She refused to leave
until the owner called the police.
The police came and argued too,
but Mama wouldn't stop.
They pulled her into the parking lot,
called her crazy...
and then Mama showed them crazy!

They didn't know what to do
but let her go, and Mama took us children
back toward home, tired of being tired.

Unfold Your Own Myth

Rumi

Who gets up early
to discover the moment light begins?
Who finds us here circling, bewildered, like atoms?
Who comes to a spring thirsty
and sees the moon reflected in it?
Who, like Jacob blind with grief and age,
smells the shirt of his lost son
and can see again?
Who lets a bucket down and brings up
a flowing prophet?
Or like Moses goes for fire
and finds what burns inside the sunrise?
Jesus slips into a house to escape enemies,
and opens a door to the other world.
Soloman cuts open a fish, and there's a gold ring.
Omar storms in to kill the prophet
and leaves with blessings.
Chase a deer and end up everywhere!
An oyster opens his mouth to swallow on drop.
Now there's a pearl.
A vagrant wanders empty ruins.
Suddenly he's wealthy.
But don't be satisfied with stories, how things
have gone with others. Unfold
your own myth, without complicated explanation,
so everyone will understand the passage,
We have opened you.
Start walking toward Shams. Your legs will get heavy
and tired. Then comes a moment
of feeling the wings you've grown,
lifting.

Evolution of My Block

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.

Song No. 2

Sonia Sanchez

(1)

i say. all you young girls waiting to live
i say. all you young girls taking yo pill
i say. all you sisters tired of standing still
i say. all you sisters thinkin you won't, but you will.

don't let them kill you with their stare
don't let them closet you with no air
don't let them feed you sex piecemeal
don't let them offer you any old deal.

i say. step back sisters. we're rising from the dead
i say. step back johnnies. we're dancings on our heads
i say. step back man. no mo hanging by a thread
i say. step back world. can't let it all go unsaid.

(2)

i say. all you young girls molested at ten
i say. all you young girls giving it up again & again
i say. all you sisters hanging out in every den
i say. all you sisters needing your own oxygen.

don't let them trap you with their coke
don't let them treat you like one fat joke
don't let them bleed you till you broke
don't let them blind you in masculine smoke.

i say, step back sisters. we're rising from the dead
i say. step back johnnies. we're dancing on our heads
i say. step back man. no mo hanging by a thread.
i say. step back world. can't let it go unsaid.

This is Not a Small Voice

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.

Selfish

Jill Scott

give me a minute to love you
an hour to stare in your face
a moment to praise your nose
your hands, your lips, your eyes
don't say later
don't say tomorrow
because the day's too busy
because the day's too hurried
too demanding
give me a week to hold you
a second to play in your lashes
a night to kiss your forehead
Your back, your feet, your fingers
Don't say you're tired
Don't say you're anxious
because the world is calling
because the world is heavy
Ever present
just let me soothe you
let me put you in my mouth and hum sweet tunes
let me calm that ocean
give me a day
give me four and more
to ease and please you
let me take that chip from your shoulder
place it on the nightstand for a while
because you're lonely
and
I am too

I Cry

Tupac Shakur

Sometimes when I'm alone

I Cry,

Cause I am on my own.

The tears I cry are bitter and warm.

They flow with life but take no form

I Cry because my heart is torn.

I find it difficult to carry on.

If I had an ear to confiding,

I would cry among my treasured friend,

but who do you know that stops that long,

to help another carry on.

The world moves fast and it would rather pass by.

Then to stop and see what makes one cry,

so painful and sad.

And sometimes...

I Cry

and no one cares about why.

Untitled

Tupac Shakur

Please... wake me when I am free
I cannot bear captivity
Where my country, I am told, "Hold no significance"
I waited and died in ignorance
But my inner eye can see, a race
Who reigned as king in another place
The green trees were rich and full
And every man spoke of beautiful men and women together as equals

War was gone because all was at peace
But now like a nightmare, I woke to see
That I live like a prisoner of poverty..

Please... wake me when I am free
I cannot bear captivity
For, I would rather be stricken blind
Than to live without expression of mind

Ozymandias

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."

No Difference

Shel Silverstein

Small as a peanut,
Big as a giant,
We're all the same size
When we turn off the light
Rich as a sultan,
Poor as a mite,
We're all worth the same
When we turn off the light.
Red, black or orange,
Yellow or white,
We all look the same
When we turn off the light.
So maybe the way
To make everything right
Is for God to just reach out
And turn off the light!

A Story that Could Be True

William Stafford

If you were exchanged in the cradle and
your real mother died
without ever telling the story
then no one knows your name,
and somewhere in the world
your father is lost and needs you
but you are far away.

He can never find
how true you are, how ready.
When the great wind comes
and the robberies of the rain
you stand on the corner shivering.
people who go by--
you wonder at their calm.

They miss the whisper that runs
any day in your mind,
"Who are you really, wanderer?"
-- and the answer you have to give
no matter how dark and cold
the world around you is:
"Maybe I'm a king."

Blink Your Eyes

Sekou Sundiata

I was on my way to see my woman
but the Law said I was on my way
thru a red light red light red light
and if you saw my woman
you could understand,
I was just being a man.
It wasn't about no light
it was about my ride
and if you saw my ride
you could dig that too, you dig?
Sunroof stereo radio black leather
bucket seats sit low you know,
the body's cool, but the tires are worn.
Ride when the hard time come, ride
when they're gone, in other words
the light was green.

I could wake up in the morning
without a warning
and my world could change:
blink your eyes.
All depends, all depends on the skin,
all depends on the skin you're living in

Up to the window comes the Law
with his hand on his gun
what's up? what's happening?
I said I guess
that's when I really broke the law.
He said a routine, step out the car
a routine, assume the position.
Put your hands up in the air
you know the routine, like you just don't care.
License and registration.
Deep was the night and the light
from the North Star on the car door, deja vu
we've been through this before,
why did you stop me?
Somebody had to stop you.
I watch the news, you always lose.
You're unreliable, that's undeniable.
This is serious, you could be dangerous.

I could wake up in the morning
without a warning
and my world could change:
blink your eyes.
All depends, all depends on the skin,
all depends on the skin you're living in

New York City, they got laws
can't no bruthas drive outdoors,
in certain neighborhoods, on particular streets
near and around certain types of people.
They got laws.
All depends, all depends on the skin,
all depends on the skin you're living in.

Love at First Sight

Wisława Szymborska

They're both convinced
that a sudden passion joined them.
Such certainty is beautiful
but uncertainty is more beautiful still.

Since they'd never met before, they're sure
that there'd been nothing between them.
But what's the word from the streets, staircases, hallways –
perhaps they've passed each other by a million times?

I want to ask them
if they don't remember –
a moment face to face
in some revolving door?
perhaps a "sorry" muttered in a crowd?
a curt "wrong number" caught in the receiver? –
but I know the answer.
No, they don't remember.

They'd be amazed to hear
that Chance has been toying with them
now for years.

Not quite ready yet
to become their Destiny,
it pushed them close, drove them apart,
it barred their path,
stifling a laugh,
and then leaped aside.

There were signs and signals
even if they couldn't read them yet.
Perhaps three years ago
or just last Tuesday
a certain leaf fluttered
from one shoulder to another?
Something was dropped and then picked up.
Who knows, maybe the ball that vanished
into childhood's thickets?

There were doorknobs and doorbells
where one touch had covered another
beforehand.
Suitcases checked and standing side by side.
One night perhaps some dream
grown hazy by morning.

Every beginning
is only a sequel, after all,
and the book of events
is always open halfway through.

I Am Not Yours

Sara Teasdale

I am not yours, not lost in you,
Not lost, although I long to be
Lost as a candle lit at noon,
Lost as a snowflake in the sea.

You love me, and I find you still
A spirit beautiful and bright,
Yet I am I, who long to be
Lost as a light is lost in light.

Oh plunge me deep in love—put out
My senses, leave me deaf and blind,
Swept by the tempest of your love,
A taper in a rushing wind.

Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night

Dylan Thomas

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

How Poems are Made

Alice Walker

Letting go
In order to hold one
I gradually understand
How poems are made.

There is a place the fear must go.
There is a place the choice must go.
There is a place the loss must go.
The leftover love.
The love that spills out
Of the too full cup
And runs and hides
Its too full self
In shame.

I gradually comprehend
How poems are made.
To the upbeat flight of memories.
The flagged beats of the running
Heart.

I understand how poems are made.
They are the tears
That season the smile.
The stiff-neck laughter
That crowds the throat.
The leftover love.
I know how poems are made.

There is a place the loss must go.
There is a place the gain must go.
The leftover love.

Leaves of Grass (part 18)

Walt Whitman

With music strong I come, with my cornets and my drums,
I play not marches for accepted victors only, I play marches
for conquere'd and slain persons.

Have you heard that it was good to gain the day?
I also say it is good to fall, battles are lost in the same spirit
in which they are won.

I beat and pound for the dead,
I blow through my embouchures my loudest and gayest for
them.

Vivas to those who have fail'd!
And to those whose war-vessels sank in the sea!
And to those themselves who sank in the sea!
And to all generals that lost engagements, and all overcome
heroes!
And the numberless unknown heroes equal to the greatest
heroes known!

O Captain! My Captain!

Walt Whitman

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;
 But O heart! heart! heart!
 O the bleeding drops of red,
 Where on the deck my Captain lies,
 Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills,
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the shores a-crowding,
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
 Here Captain! dear father!
 This arm beneath your head!
 It is some dream that on the deck,
 You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will,
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;
 Exult O shores, and ring O bells!
 But I with mournful tread,
 Walk the deck my Captain lies,
 Fallen cold and dead.

To You

Walt Whitman

Whoever you are, I fear you are walking the walks of dreams,
I fear these supposed realities are to melt from under your feet and hands;
Even now, your features, , speech, house, trade, manners, troubles, follies, costume,
 crimes, dissipate away from you,
Your true Soul and Body appear before me,
They stand forth out of affairs—out of commerce, shops, law, science, work, forms,
 clothes, the house, medicine, print, buying, selling, eating, drinking, suffering, dying.

Whoever you are, now I place my hand upon you, that you be my poem;
I whisper with my lips close to your ear,
I have loved many women and men, but I love none better than you.

O I have been dilatory and dumb;
I should have made my way straight to you long ago;
I should have blabb'd nothing but you, I should have chanted nothing but you.

I will leave all, and come and make the hymns of you;
None have understood you, but I understand you;
None have done justice to you—you have not done justice to yourself;
None but have found you imperfect—I only find no imperfection in you;
None but would subordinate you—I only am he who will never consent to subordinate
 you;
I only am he who places over you no master, owner, better, God, beyond what waits
 intrinsically
 in yourself.

Everything is Waiting for You

David Whyte

Your great mistake is to act the drama
as if you were alone. As if life
were a progressive and cunning crime
with no witness to the tiny hidden
transgressions. To feel abandoned is to deny
the intimacy of your surroundings. Surely,
even you, at times, have felt the grand array;
the swelling presence, and the chorus, crowding
out your solo voice You must note
the way the soap dish enables you,
or the window latch grants you freedom.
Alertness is the hidden discipline of familiarity.
The stairs are your mentor of things
to come, the doors have always been there
to frighten you and invite you,
and the tiny speaker in the phone
is your dream-ladder to divinity.
Put down the weight of your aloneness and ease into
the conversation. The kettle is singing
even as it pours you a drink, the cooking pots
have left their arrogant aloofness and
seen the good in you at last. All the birds
and creatures of the world are unutterably
themselves. Everything is waiting for you.

Sweet Darkness

David Whyte

When your eyes are tired
the world is tired also.

When your vision has gone
no part of the world can find you.

Time to go into the dark
where the night has eyes
to recognize its own.

There you can be sure
you are not beyond love.

The dark will be your womb
tonight.

The night will give you a horizon
further than you can see.

You must learn one thing.
The world was made to be free in

Give up all the other worlds
except the one to which you belong.

Sometimes it takes darkness and the sweet
confinement of your aloneness
to learn

anything or anyone
that does not bring you alive

is too small for you.

Boy at the Window

Richard Wilbur

Seeing the snowman standing all alone
In dusk and cold is more than he can bear.
The small boy weeps to hear the wind prepare
A night of gnashings and enormous moan.
His tearful sight can hardly reach to where
The pale-faced figure with bitumen eyes
Returns him such a god-forsaken stare
As outcast Adam gave to Paradise.

The man of snow is, nonetheless, content,
Having no wish to go inside and die.
Still, he is moved to see the youngster cry.
Though frozen water is his element,
He melts enough to drop from one soft eye
A trickle of the purest rain, a tear
For the child at the bright pane surrounded by
Such warmth, such light, such love, and so much fear.

The Rampage

C. K. Williams

a baby got here once who before
he was all the way out and could already feel the hindu
pain inside him and the hebrew and the iliad
decided he was never going to stop crying no matter what
until they did something he wasn't going
to turn the horror
off in their fat sentences
and in the light bulb how much murder to get light
and in the walls agony agony for the bricks for the glaze
he was going to keep screaming
until they made death little like he was
and loved him too and sent
him back to undo al this
and it happened
he kept screaming he scared them he saw them
filling with womblight again like stadiums
he saw the tears sucked back into the story the smiles
opening like sandwiches
so he stopped
and looked up and said all right
it's better now
I'm hungry now I want just to sleep
and they let him

Indigo

Saul Williams

...and you don't stop
and you don't stop
and you don't...

stop letting cities define you
confine you to that which is cement and brick
we are not a hard people
our domes have been crowned
with the likes of steeples
that which is our being soars with the eagles
and the Jonathan Livingston D=Seagulls
yes, I got wings
you got wings
alas God chillun got wings.

So lets widen the circumference of our nest
And escape this urban incubator

The wind plays the world like an instrument
Blows through trees like flutes
But trees don't grow in cement
And as heart beats bring percussion
Fallen trees bring repercussions

Cities play upon our souls like broken drums
We drum the essence of creation from city slums
But city slums mute our drums
And our drums become hum drum
'cause city slums
have never been where our drums were from
just the place where our daughters and sons
become offbeat heartbeats
slaves to city streets

where hearts get broken
when heart beats stop
broken heartbeats become breakbeats
for niggas to rhyme on top
but they rhyme about nothing

they don't have nothing to rhyme about
'cause they've never seen the moon
your styles can't be universal
if your not intoned with the wind.

Terminal

James Blue Wolf

Trading her bright skirts
and fancy shawl
for a thin, no-back, hospital gown
was hard enough
but to feel her full black braids
thin to balding--
broke her heart.

Feeble fingers tugged at mine,
"Promise you won't let me suffer."
She accepted my lie easily, knowing
that this trail
through these mountains--
is all about pain.

This enemy
doesn't bugle its charge to finish us.
It grows unseen,
a tiny flowering throb
that blooms into unbearable.

She presses the button
to pump that angel of relief
into her flattened vein.

All my poems of peace and passing
can not salve the fester of these hours.

We hold hands, sing for release,
balance our grief on a teetering faith
and wait for suffering's end.

Today, at sunrise, she welcomed peace.
Her face smoothed at the change of worlds.

I stayed behind, feeling the weight,
but stars did not wink out
nor birds forget their song.

She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways

William Wordsworth

She dwelt among the untrodden ways
Beside the springs of Dove,
A Maid whom there were none to praise
And very few to love:

A violet by a mossy stone
Half hidden from the eye!
--Fair as a star, when only one
Is shining in the sky.

She lived unknown, and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be;
But she is in her grave, and, oh,
The difference to me!

A Blessing

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.

Ephemera

W.B. Yeats

'Your eyes that once were never weary of mine
Are bowed in sorrow under pendulous lids,
Because our love is waning.'

And then She:

'Although our love is waning, let us stand
By the lone border of the lake once more,
Together in that hour of gentleness
When the poor tired child, passion, falls asleep.
How far away the stars seem, and how far
Is our first kiss, and ah, how old my heart!'

Pensive they paced along the faded leaves,
While slowly he whose hand held hers replied:
'Passion has often worn our wandering hearts.'

The woods were round them, and the yellow leaves
Fell like faint meteors in the gloom, and once
A rabbit old and lame limped down the path;
Autumn was over him: and now they stood
On the lone border of the lake once more:
Turning, he saw that she had thrust dead leaves
Gathered in silence, dewy as her eyes,
In bosom and hair.

'Ah, do not mourn,' he said,
'That we are tired, for other loves await us;
Hate on and love through unrepining hours.
Before us lies eternity; our souls
Are love, and a continual farewell.'

The Second Coming

W. B. 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?

To a Child Dancing in the Wind

W. B. Yeats

Dance there upon the shore;
What need have you to care
For wind or water's roar?
And tumble out your hair
That the salt drops have wet;
Being young you have not known
The fool's triumph, nor yet
Love lost as soon as won,
Nor the best labourer dead
And all the sheaves to bind.
What need have you to dread
The monstrous crying of wind!

Birthday

Yevgeny Yevtushenko

Mother, let me congratulate you on
the birthday of your son.

You worry so much about him. Here he lies,
he earns little, his marriage was unwise,
he's long, he's getting thin, he hasn't shaved.

Oh, what a miserable loving gaze!

I should congratulate you if I may
mother on your worry's birthday.

It was from you he inherited
devotion without pity to this age
and arrogant and awkward in his faith,
from you he took his faith, the Revolution.

You didn't make him prosperous or famous,
and fearlessness is his only talent.

Open up his windows,
let in the twittering in the leafy branches,
kiss his eyes open.

Give him his notebook and his ink bottle,
give him a drink of milk and watch him go.

a series of quotes by Zhuang Zhou

The man in whom Tao
acts without impediment
harms no other being
by his actions
yet he does not know himself
to be 'kind', to be 'gentle'....

The man in whom Tao
Acts without impediment
Does not bother with his own interests
And does not despise
Others who do.
He does not struggle to make money
And does not make a virtue of poverty.
He goes his way
Without relying on others
And does not pride himself
On walking alone.
While he does not follow the crowd
He won't complain of those who do.
Rank and reward
Make no appeal to him;
Disgrace and shame
Do not deter him.
He is not always looking
For right and wrong
Always deciding 'Yes' or 'No.'
The ancients said, therefore:
"The man of Tao
Remains unknown
Perfect virtue
Produces nothing
'No-Self'
Is 'True-Self.'
And the greatest man
is Nobody."

Index of Short Poems

I'm Happiest When Most Away

Emily Bronte

I'm happiest when most away
I can bear my soul from its home of clay
On a windy night when the moon is bright
And the eye can wander through worlds of light—

When I am not and none beside—
Nor earth nor sea nor cloudless sky—
But only spirit wandering wide
Through infinite immensity.

Speech to the Young: Speech to the Progress-Toward

Gwendolyn Brooks

Say to them,
say to the down-keepers,
the sun-slappers,
the self-soilers,
the harmony-hushers,
"Even if you are not ready for day
it cannot always be night."
You will be right.
For that is the hard home-run.

Live not for battles won.
Live not for the-end-of-the-song.
Live in the along.

We Real Cool

Gwendolyn Brooks

We real cool. We
Left school. We

Lurk late. We
Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We
Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We
Die soon.

My Mama Moved Among the Days

Lucille Clifton

My Mama moved among the days
like a dreamwalker in a field;
seemed like what she touched was here
seemed like what touched her couldn't hold,
she got us almost through the high grass
then seemed like she turned around and ran
right back in
right back on in

Love is a Place

e.e. cummings

love is a place
& through this place of
love move
(with brightness of peace)
all places

yes is a world
& in this world of
yes live
(skillfully curled)
all worlds

Maggie and Milly and Molly and May

e.e. cummings

maggie and milly and molly and may
went down to the beach (to play one day)

and maggie discovered a shell that sang
so sweetly she couldn't remember her troubles, and

milly befriended a stranded star
whose rays five languid fingers were;

and molly was chased by a horrible thing
which raced sideways while blowing bubbles: and

may came home with a smooth round stone
For whatever we lose (like a you or a me)
it's always ourselves we find in the sea.

The Lost Jewel

Emily Dickinson

I held a jewel in my fingers
And went to sleep.
The day was warm, and winds were prosy;
I said: "It will keep."
I woke and chid my honest fingers, --
The gem was gone;
And now an amethyst remembrance
Is all I own.

No Man is an Island

John Donne

No man is an island entire of itself; every man
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;
if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe
is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as
well as any manner of thy friends or of thine
own were; any man's death diminishes me,
because I am involved in mankind.
And therefore never send to know for whom
the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

Do Not Stand at my Grave and Weep

Mary Elizabeth Frye

Do not stand at my grave and weep
I am not there. I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow.
I am the diamond glints on snow.
I am the sunlight on ripened grain.
I am the gentle autumn rain.
When you awaken in the morning's hush
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circled flight.
I am the soft stars that shine at night.
Do not stand at my grave and cry;
I am not there. I did not die.

Dropping Keys

Hafiz

The small man
Builds cages for everyone
He
Knows.
While the sage,
Who has to duck his head
When the moon is low,
Keeps dropping keys all night long
For the
Beautiful
Rowdy
Prisoners.

Annunciation

Marie Howe

Even if I don't see it again—nor ever feel it
I know it is—and that if once it hailed me
it ever does—
And so it is myself I want to turn in that direction
not as towards a place, but it was a tilting
within myself,
as one turns a mirror to flash the light to where
it isn't—I was blinded like that—and swam
in what shone at me
only able to endure it by being no one and so
specifically myself I thought I'd die
from being loved like that.

Ennui

Langston Hughes

It's such a
Bore
Being always
Poor

When Sue Wears Red

Langston Hughes

When Susanna Jones wears red
her face is like an ancient cameo
Turned brown by the ages.
Come with a blast of trumpets, Jesus!

When Susanna Jones wears red
A queen from some time-dead Egyptian night
Walks once again.
Blow trumpets, Jesus!

And the beauty of Susanna Jones in red
Burns in my heart a love-fire sharp like a pain.
Sweet silver trumpets, Jesus!

from The Cellist

Galway Kinnell

... Her face shines with the unselfconsciousness
of a cat screaming at night and the
teary radiance of one who gives
everything no matter what has been given...

All I Ask

D. H. Lawrence

All I ask of a woman is that she shall feel gently towards me
when my heart feels kindly towards her,
and there shall be the soft, soft tremor as of unheard bells between us.
It is all I ask.
I am so tired of violent women lashing out and insisting
on being loved, when there is no love in them.

To Women, As Far As I'm Concerned

D. H. Lawrence

The feelings I don't have I don't have.
The feeling I don't have, I won't say I have.
The feelings you say you have, you don't have.
The feelings you would like us both to have, we neither of us have.
The feelings people ought to have, they never have.
If people say they've got feelings, you may be pretty sure they haven't got them.
So if you want either of us to feel anything at all
You'd better abandon all ideas of feelings altogether.

Factory Windows are Always Broken

Vachel Lindsay

Factory windows are always broken.
Somebody's always throwing bricks,
Somebody's always heaving cinders,
Playing ugly Yahoo tricks.

Factory windows are always broken.
Other windows are let alone.
No one throws through the chapel-window
The bitter, snarling, derisive stone.

Factory windows are always broken.
Something or other is going wrong.
Something is rotten--I think, in Denmark.
End of factory-window song.

Was It Necessary to Do It?

Mary Oliver

I tell you that ant is very alive!
Look at how he fusses at being stepped on.

from Ode

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,
world forsakers,

on whom the pale moon gleams,
but we are the movers and shakers
of the world forever it seems.

A Very Short Song

Dorothy Parker

Once, when I was young and true,
Someone left me sad-
Broke my brittle heart in two;
And that is very bad.

Love is for unlucky folk,
Love is but a curse.
Once there was a heart I broke;
And that, I think, is worse.

Resume

Dorothy Parker

Razors pain you;
Rivers are damp;
Acids stain you;
And drugs cause cramp.
Guns aren't lawful;
Nooses give;
Gas smells awful;
You might as well live.

Unhappy South Pole Penguin

Jack Prelutsky

Unhappy South Pole penguin
You are in a nasty mood
As you try to chew your dinner
which refuses to be chewed.
But a simple undertaking
Will improve your attitude -
You must first defrost your dinner
For your dinner's frozen food!

The Drunkard's Song

Rainer Maria Rilke

It wasn't in me. It went out and in.
I wanted to hold it. It held, with Wine.
(I no longer know what it was.)
Then Wine held this and held that for me
till I came to depend on him totally.
Like and ass.

Now I'm playing his game and he deals me out
with a sneer on his lips, and maybe tonight
he will lose me to Death, that boor.
When he wins me, filthiest card in the deck,
he'll take me and scratch the scabs on his neck,
then toss me into the mire.

The Breeze at Dawn

Rumi

The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.
Don't go back to sleep.

You must ask for what you really want.
Don't go back to sleep.

People are going back and forth across the doorsill
where the two worlds touch.

The door is round and open.
Don't go back to sleep.

On Passing Thru Morgantown, PA

Sonia Sanchez

I saw you
vincent van
gogh perched
on those pennsylvania
cornfields communing
amid secret black
bird societies. yes.
i'm sure that was
you exploding your
fantastic delirium
while in the
distance
red indian
hills beckoned.

Fog

Carl Sandburg

The fog comes
on little cat feet.

It sits looking
over harbor and city
on silent haunches
and then moves on.

Grass

Carl Sandburg

Pile the bodies high at Austerlitz and Waterloo.
Shovel them under and let me work—
I am the grass; I cover all.

And pile them high at Gettysburg
And pile them high at Ypres and Verdun.
Shovel them under and let me work.
Two years, ten years, and passengers ask the conductor:
What place is this?
Where are we now?

I am the grass.
Let me work.

Point of View

Shel Silverstein

Thanksgiving dinner's sad and thankless
Christmas dinner's dark and blue
When you stop and try to see it
From the turkey's point of view.

Sunday dinner isn't sunny
Easter feasts are just bad luck
When you see it from the viewpoint
Of a chicken or a duck.

Oh how I once loved tuna salad
Pork and lobsters, lamb chops too
'Til I stopped and looked at dinner
From the dinner's point of view.

When You're Not Here

Afeni Shakur

When you're not here
I measure the space
You used to occupy.
Large areas become
vast and endless
deserts of you
not there.

Night in Day

Joseph Stroud

The night never wants to end, to give itself over
to light. So it traps itself in things: obsidian, crows.
Even on summer solstice, the day of light's great
triumph, where fields of sunflowers guzzle in the sun—
we break open the watermelon and spit out

black seeds, bits of night glistening on the grass.

Leaves of Grass (part 16)

Walt Whitman

Sometimes with one I love I fill myself with rage for fear I effuse unreturn'd love,
But now I think there is no unreturn'd love, the pay is certain one way or another
(I loved a certain person ardently and my love was not return'd,
Yet out of that I have written these songs).

Song of Myself (part 52)

Walt Whitman

The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains of my gab
and my loitering.
I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.

This is Just to Say

William Carlos Williams

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

