NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS
AND POETRY FOUNDATION PRESENT

POETRY OUT LOUD™

Master Anthology 2021-2022

War Widow

By Chris Abani

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

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

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

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

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

Things You May Find Hidden in My Ear

By Mosad Abu Toha

For Alicia M. Quesnel, MD

i

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

You may encounter songs in Arabic,

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

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

ii

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

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

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

A Daughter Named After Nina

By Elizabeth Acevedo

voice of incoming 2 express train

pray herself altar

contort mouth shotgun:

sawed off a saw

soften tongue songbird

hands mosaicked mirrors

donning skin like battle gear

dawning skin like evening gown

this name pinned on her shoulders;

a heavy mantle. an incantation.

Manhunt or Ode to First Kisses

By Elizabeth Acevedo

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

wanting to hear a
countdown softly whispered
as the July air

stuck our baby hairs

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

Buckroe, After the Season, 1942

By Virginia Adair Hamilton

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

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

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

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

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

Musical Moment

By Virginia Adair Hamilton

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

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

in double time over the elephant's back.

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

Apella

By Dilruba Ahmed

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

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

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

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

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

the golden light
with squinting faces.
And everywhere

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

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

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

more & more impassable

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

with tenderness and then
with fierce intensity.

Snake Oil, Snake Bite

By Dilruba Ahmed

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

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

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

I Eat Breakfast to Begin the Day

By Zubair Ahmed

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

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

Truth is I would like to escape myself

By Nour Al Ghraowi

Truth is I would like to escape myself.
Detach my body from my skin,
peel it layer by layer to uncover
beneath the surface of petals
and thorns piled up year after year,
who I am and who I want to be.
I want to be the flower that grows
in dirt, the feather that flies free between
the cracks of fences. A wise woman
once told me, *don't worry about you,*
worry about who you could be.
I want to be the woman who sits
on a desk and writes pieces of oceans,

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

Jaguar

By Francisco X. Alarcón

some say
I'm now almost
extinct in this park

but the people
who say this
don't know

that by smelling
the orchids
in the trees

they're sensing
the fragrance
of my chops

that by hearing
the rumbling
of the waterfalls

they're listening
to my ancestors'
great roar

that by observing
the constellations
of the night sky

they're gazing
at the star spots
on my fur

that I am and
always will be
the wild

untamed
living spirit
of this jungle

Words are Birds

By Francisco X. Alarcón

words
are birds
that arrive
with books
and spring

they
love
clouds
the wind
and trees

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

for them
there are
no borders
only stars
moon and sun

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

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

some words
die
caged—
they're difficult
to translate

and others

build nests
have chicks
warm them
feed them

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

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

Le Maudit

By Richard Aldington

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

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

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

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

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

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

Apollo

By Elizabeth Alexander

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

even than we are.

Revenant

By Meena Alexander

This disease has come back
With frills and furbelows.

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

Poems I mean, paper crumpled
Shades of another water—

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

Through a hole in your chest.

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

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

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

Meeting at an Airport

By Taha Muhammad Ali

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

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

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

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

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

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

hours of morning."

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

Ghazal

By Agha Shahid Ali

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Behind a door marked DANGER" are being unwound
the prayers my friend had enscrolled in real time.

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

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

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

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

(*for Daniel Hall*)

NOTES: Yaar: Hindi word for friend.

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

Land

By Agha Shahid Ali

For Christopher Merrill

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Prayer Rug

By Agha Shahid Ali

Those intervals
between the day's
five calls to prayer

the women of the house
pulling thick threads
through vegetables

rosaries of ginger
of rustling peppers
in autumn drying for winter

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

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

with minarets of gold
but then the sunset
call to prayer

the servants
their straw mats unrolled

praying or in the garden

in summer on grass
the children wanting
the prayers to end

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

black stone descended
from Heaven
the pilgrims in white circling it

this year my grandmother
also a pilgrim
in Mecca she weeps

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

(for Begum Zafar Ali)

Snowmen

By Agha Shahid Ali

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

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

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

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

Explorer

By Kazim Ali

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rain

By Kazim Ali

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

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

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

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

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

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

What You Have to Get Over

By Dick Allen

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

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

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

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

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

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

to that bridge in the darkness
where the sentinels stand

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

“Un Tintero,” Inkwell

By Desirée Alvarez

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

The mouth’s mouth is the deepest.

Rage is the homeless boy fallen down a well.

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

How long have you been down there?

Subterráneo, underground.

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

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

Another town is burned alive
with all its caged creatures.

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

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

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

Over and over, the design obliterates.

Never does he say this was their home we took.

Finishing Up

By A. R. Ammons

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

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

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

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

Gravelly Run

By A. R. Ammons

I don't know somehow it seems sufficient
to see and hear whatever coming and going is,
losing the self to the victory
  of stones and trees,
of bending sandpit lakes, crescent
round groves of dwarf pine:

for it is not so much to know the self
as to know it as it is known
  by galaxy and cedar cone,
as if birth had never found it
and death could never end it:

the swamp's slow water comes
down Gravelly Run fanning the long
  stone-held algal
hair and narrowing roils between
the shoulders of the highway bridge:

holly grows on the banks in the woods there,
and the cedars' gothic-clustered
  spires could make
green religion in winter bones:

so I look and reflect, but the air's glass
jail seals each thing in its entity:

no use to make any philosophies here:
  I see no
god in the holly, hear no song from
the snowbroken weeds: Hegel is not the winter
yellow in the pines: the sunlight has never
heard of trees: surrendered self among
  unwelcoming forms: stranger,
hoist your burdens, get on down the road.

Self-Portrait as Kendrick Lamar, Laughing to the Bank

By Ashanti Anderson

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

Awakening in New York

By Maya Angelou

Curtains forcing their will

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

Caged Bird

By Maya Angelou

A free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and dips his wing
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.

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

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

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

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams

his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

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

Kin

By Maya Angelou

FOR BAILEY

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

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

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

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

You may be right.
Your slow return from

Regions of terror and bloody
Screams, races my heart.
I hear again the laughter
Of children and see fireflies
Bursting tiny explosions in
An Arkansas twilight.

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

The Mothering Blackness

By Maya Angelou

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

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

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

Our Nature

By Rae Armantrout

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

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

Let’s say
it shows our recklessness,

our fast gun,

our self-consciousness
which was really

our infatuation
with our own fame,

our escapes,

the easy way
we’d blend in

with the peasantry,

our loyalty
to our old gang

from among whom
it was our nature

to be singled out

Pinocchio

By Rae Armantrout

Strand. String.
In this dream,

the paths cross
and cross again.

They are spelling
a real boy

out of repetition.

•

Each one
is the one

real boy.

Each knows
he must be

wrong
about this, but

he can’t feel
how.

•

The fish
and the fisherman,

the pilot,
the princess,

the fireman and
the ones on fire.

Riddance

By Rae Armantrout

Ok, we’ve rendered
the rendition

how often?

What were we trying
to get rid of?

We exposed the homeless
character of desire
to the weather.

Shall we talk
about the weather

worsening four times
faster than expected,

eight times,

until the joy
of pattern recognition
kicks in?

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

Twilight

By Rae Armantrout

Where there's smoke
there are mirrors

and a dry ice machine,
industrial quality fans.

If I've learned anything
about the present moment

•

But who doesn't
love a flame,

the way one leaps
into being

full-fledged,
then leans over

to chat

•

Already the light
is retrospective,
sourceless,

is losing itself
though the trees
are clearly limned.

Xenophobia

By Rae Armantrout

1

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

staring at me fixedly, no
trace of recognition.

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

strained attention. They were white.”

(The fear of cloudy skies.)

like strangers! After five years

Misgiving. Misdoubt.

2

(The fear that one is dreaming.)

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

Wild vista
inside or near the home.

(Dread of bearing a monster.)

If I failed to overlook the torn cushions,

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

both foreign and stale.

3

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

The doctor forced me to repeat the word.

Chimera. Cold feet.

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

4

After five years

(The fear that you are not at home.)

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

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

The paint was blistering—
beneath it I saw white.

5

Sparrows settle on the sagging wires.

(Fear of sights not turned to words.)

Horrific. Grisly.
“Rumplestiltskin!”

Not *my* expression.

Not my net of veins
beneath thin skin.

(A morbid dread of throbbing.)

Of its own accord

Zoom!

By Simon Armitage

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

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

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

Mediation on a Grapefruit

By Craig Arnold

To wake when all is possible
before the agitations of the day
have gripped you
To come to the kitchen
and peel a little basketball
for breakfast
To tear the husk
like cotton padding a cloud of oil
misting out of its pinprick pores
clean and sharp as pepper
To ease
each pale pink section out of its case
so carefully without breaking
a single pearly cell
To slide each piece
into a cold blue china bowl
the juice pooling until the whole
fruit is divided from its skin
and only then to eat
so sweet
a discipline
precisely pointless a devout
involvement of the hands and senses
a pause a little emptiness

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

Very Large Moth

By Craig Arnold

After D.H.L.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Everybody Believes They Are the Good Guy

By Cynthia Arrieu-King

I was hanging with grandparents in a kindergarten

and the teacher drew an accordion wall across

to keep the children in antigravity class together

the grandparents separately graded balloon worksheets

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

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

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

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

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

More human than human, got it? I cuddled her

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

If They Should Come for Us

By Fatimah Asghar

these are my people & I find
them on the street & shadow
through any wild all wild
my people my people
a dance of strangers in my blood
the old woman's sari dissolving to wind
bindi a new moon on her forehead
I claim her my kin & sew
the star of her to my breast
the toddler dangling from stroller
hair a fountain of dandelion seed
at the bakery I claim them too
the sikh uncle at the airport
who apologizes for the pat
down the muslim man who abandons
his car at the traffic light drops
to his knees at the call of the azan
& the muslim man who sips
good whiskey at the start of maghrib
the lone khala at the park
pairing her kurta with crocs
my people my people I can't be lost
when I see you my compass
is brown & gold & blood
my compass a muslim teenager
snapback & high-tops gracing
the subway platform
mashallah I claim them all
my country is made
in my people's image
if they come for you they
come for me too in the dead
of winter a flock of

aunties step out on the sand
their dupattas turn to ocean
a colony of uncles grind their palms
& a thousand jasmines bell the air
my people I follow you like constellations
we hear the glass smashing the street
& the nights opening their dark
our names this country's wood
for the fire my people my people
the long years we've survived the long
years yet to come I see you map
my sky the light your lantern long
ahead & I follow I follow

The animals in that country

By Margaret Atwood

In that country the animals
have the faces of people:

the ceremonial
cats possessing the streets

the fox run
politely to earth, the huntsmen
standing around him, fixed
in their tapestry of manners

the bull, embroidered
with blood and given
an elegant death, trumpets, his name
stamped on him, heraldic brand
because

(when he rolled
on the sand, sword in his heart, the teeth
in his blue mouth were human)

he is really a man

even the wolves, holding resonant
conversations in their
forests thickened with legend.

In this country the animals

have the faces of
animals.

Their eyes
flash once in car headlights
and are gone.

Their deaths are not elegant.

They have the faces of
no-one.

Backdrop addresses cowboy

By Margaret Atwood

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

you are innocent as a bathtub
full of bullets.

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

and you leave behind you a heroic
trail of desolation:
beer bottles
slaughtered by the side
of the road, bird-
skulls bleaching in the sunset.

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

Then what about me

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

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

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

I am the space you desecrate
as you pass through.

Siren Song

By Margaret Atwood

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

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

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

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

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

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

I will tell the secret to you,

to you, only to you.
Come closer. This song

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

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

They are hostile nations

By Margaret Atwood

i

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

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

Instead we are opposite, we
touch as though attacking,

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

ii

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

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

See, we are alone in

the dormant field, the snow
that cannot be eaten or captured

iii

Here there are no armies
here there is no money

It is cold and getting colder,

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

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

the (possibly) last summer

City Lights

By Mary Avidano

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

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

Lucille's Roaches

By Cameron Awkward-Rich

After Lucille Clifton

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

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

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

Hole

By Naomi Ayala

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

My Dad Says

By Naomi Ayala

I can do anything, so I try yoga nidra
to see if I can find him.
He's been dead four years now
though I tell people when they ask, two. Just two.
My mind refuses what it wants

even if I haven't lost anything.
One day I caw like a seagull
swooping in for a long dive.
Another, I am hunger waking up the bear.
Today I go to the trees to listen
and he is an old cedar, but sweeter than that.
When I was a girl, I knew I'd never be a girl exactly.
He was the only one who knew it
and let me run wild, would never tell the others.

As Children Know

By Jimmy Santiago Baca

Elm branches radiate green heat,
blackbirds stiffly strut across fields.
Beneath bedroom wood floor, I feel earth—
bread in an oven that slowly swells,
simmering my Navajo blanket thread-crust
as white-feathered and corn-tasseled
Corn Dancers rise in a line, follow my calf,
vanish in a rumple and surface at my knee-cliff,
chanting. Wearing shagged buffalo headgear,
Buffalo Dancer chases Deer Woman across
Sleeping Leg mountain. Branches of wild rose
trees rattle seeds. Deer Woman fades into hills
of beige background. Red Bird
of my heart thrashes wildly after her.
What a stupid man I have been!
How good to let imagination go,
step over worrisome events,
                those hacked logs
                tumbled about
                in the driveway.
Let decisions go!
                Let them blow
                like school children's papers
                against the fence,
                rattling in the afternoon wind.
This Red Bird
of my heart thrashes within the tidy appearance
I offer the world,
topples what I erect, snares what I set free,
dashes what I've put together,
indulges in things left unfinished,
and my world is left, as children know,

left as toys after dark in the sandbox.

I Am Offering this Poem

By Jimmy Santiago Baca

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

I love you,

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

I love you,

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

I love you,

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

I love you.

[It would be near if with the New Year]

By Jimmy Santiago Baca

for Miguel

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

But my happiness depends so much on wearing those boots.

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

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

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

Snowflake

By William Baer

Timing's everything. The vapor rises
high in the sky, tossing to and fro,
then freezes, suddenly, and crystalizes
into a perfect flake of miraculous snow.
For countless miles, drifting east above
the world, whirling about in a swirling free-
for-all, appearing aimless, just like love,

but sensing, seeking out, its destiny.
Falling to where the two young skaters stand,
hand in hand, then flips and dips and whips
itself about to ever-so-gently land,
a miracle, across her unkissed lips:
as he blocks the wind raging from the south,
leaning forward to kiss her lovely mouth.

The Jewel Stairs' Grievance

By Li Bai
Translated by Ezra Pound

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

Song

By Joanna Baillie

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

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

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

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

To Cupid

By Joanna Baillie

Child, with many a childish wile,
Timid look, and blushing smile,
Downy wings to steal thy way,
Gilded bow, and quiver gay,
Who in thy simple mien would trace
The tyrant of the human race?

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

Faith

By David Baker

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

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

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

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

By James Baldwin

The lady is a tramp
    a camp
    a lamp

The lady is a sight
a might
a light
the lady devastated
an alley or two
reverberated through the valley
which leads to me, and you

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

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

History Textbook, America

By JoAnn Balingit

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

Legacy

By Amiri Baraka

(For Blues People)

In the south, sleeping against
the drugstore, growling under
the trucks and stoves, stumbling
through and over the cluttered eyes
of early mysterious night. Frowning
drunk waving moving a hand or lash.
Dancing kneeling reaching out, letting
a hand rest in shadows. Squatting
to drink or pee. Stretching to climb
pulling themselves onto horses near
where there was sea (the old songs
lead you to believe). Riding out
from this town, to another, where
it is also black. Down a road
where people are asleep. Towards
the moon or the shadows of houses.
Towards the songs' pretended sea.

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

The Rights of Women

By Anna Lætitia Barbauld

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

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

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

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

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

Awe the licentious, and restrain the rude;
Soften the sullen, clear the cloudy brow:
Be, more than princes' gifts, thy favours sued;—
She hazards all, who will the least allow.

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

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

To the Poor

By Anna Lætitia Barbauld

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

Aria

By David Barber

What if it were possible to vanquish
All this shame with a wash of varnish
Instead of wishing the stain would vanish?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Corn Maze

By David Barber

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

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

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

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

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

Ice Bound

By Walter Bargen

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

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

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

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

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

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

Remarks on Poetry and the Physical World

By Mary Barnard

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

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

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

Napalm

By Quan Barry

I have come to realize the body is its own pyre, that degree
rises from within, the fatty acids a kind of kindling.
Like a scientist in a lab, this much I have established, blood jelled
like gasoline, the years spread before me like a map
pinned with targets, where I'm raging even now.
It works both ways. Clear the forests to see your enemies
and your enemies see you clearly. Like all effective incendiaries,

I won’t only bloom where I’m planted.

Catch

By Samiya Bashir

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

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

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

When the saints went

By Samiya Bashir

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

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

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

Dead Butterfly

By Ellen Bass

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

Was it the year her brother was born?
Was this her own too-fragile baby

that had lived—so briefly—in its glassed world?
Or the year she refused to go to her father's house?
Was this the holding-her-breath girl she became there?

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

The Albatross

By Kate Bass

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

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

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

The Cricket and the Grasshopper

By Dan Beachy-Quick

The senseless leaf in the fevered hand
Grows hot, near blood-heat, but never grows
Green. Weeks ago the dove's last cooing strain

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

Cabezón

By Amy Beeder

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

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

Nostalgia

By Chase Beggrun

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

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

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

By Aphra Behn

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

Love Armed

By Aphra Behn

Song from Abdelazar

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

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

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

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

A Thousand Martyrs

By Aphra Behn

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

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

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

An Introduction to My Anthology

By Marvin Bell

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

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

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

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

The Uniform

By Marvin Bell

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

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

Somewhere Thuban Is Fading

By Rosebud Ben-Oni

For Carolina Ebeid

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

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

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

While at 16
We were already trash-talking
Our prayers never went beyond
The second floor
Light-years away
From the last word
That distant somewhere
Where a boat loses course
The north star forsaking
Its name to another

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

Difference

By Stephen Vincent Benét

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

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

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

On Education

By Elizabeth Bentley

December 1789

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

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

Sad Boy's Sad Boy

By Charles Bernstein

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

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

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

I jump I run you up inside my truck

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

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

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

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

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

Enemies

By Wendell Berry

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

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

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

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

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

Dream Song 14

By John Berryman

Life, friends, is boring. We must not say so.
After all, the sky flashes, the great sea yearns,
we ourselves flash and yearn,
and moreover my mother told me as a boy
(repeatingly) ‘Ever to confess you’re bored
means you have no

Inner Resources.’ I conclude now I have no
inner resources, because I am heavy bored.
Peoples bore me,
literature bores me, especially great literature,
Henry bores me, with his plights & gripes
as bad as achilles,

who loves people and valiant art, which bores me.
And the tranquil hills, & gin, look like a drag
and somehow a dog
has taken itself & its tail considerably away
into mountains or sea or sky, leaving
behind: me, wag.

the name before the name before mine

By Jay Besemer

the unknown has hold of me and its grip is strong as honey on the underside of a spoon

the unknown i mean is not the usual one the future the tomorrow of survival

but the past and what happened in the name of the name after mine and in the name of the name before mine

i do not know enough to speak i do not know enough to remain silent

there is a fear that holds me and it sounds like wind it sounds like katydids in catalpa

ah the tall grass of the days before i knew there was a before me

where do i live if there’s no home remaining

where do i live if the home i helped build can never be mine and the one i was born into never was

The New Decalogue

By Ambrose Bierce

Have but one God: thy knees were sore
If bent in prayer to three or four.

Adore no images save those
The coinage of thy country shows.

Take not the Name in vain. Direct
Thy swearing unto some effect.

Thy hand from Sunday work be held—
Work not at all unless compelled.

Honor thy parents, and perchance
Their wills thy fortunes may advance.

Kill not—death liberates thy foe
From persecution's constant woe.

Kiss not thy neighbor's wife. Of course
There's no objection to divorce.

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

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

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

The Statesmen

By Ambrose Bierce

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lo, D lifts up his voice: "You see
    The single tax on land would fall
On all alike." More evenly
    No tax at all.

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

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

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

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

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

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

At the Vietnam Memorial

By George Bilgere

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

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

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

Filling Station

By Elizabeth Bishop

Oh, but it is dirty!
—this little filling station,
oil-soaked, oil-permeated

to a disturbing, over-all
black translucency.
Be careful with that match!

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

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

Some comic books provide
the only note of color—
of certain color. They lie
upon a big dim doily
draping a taboret
(part of the set), beside
a big hirsute begonia.

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

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

One Art

By Elizabeth Bishop

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

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

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

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

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

—Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident
the art of losing's not too hard to master
though it may look like (*Write* it!) like disaster.

Istanbul 1983

By Sheila Black

In the frozen square, the student asks me if I will
sell him the books from my backpack. He hides them
under his winter coat. Steam rises from the whole
wheat rolls we break open at the breakfast table.
We drink hot apple tea and pronounce the skyline
"charming." In a jail a man counts the visible bones,
and recounts them in the blaze of morning. To turn
a self to light proves painful — each piece must
be dissected in turn; you pass through every feeling
imaginable, so many you might make a dictionary —
dread to disgust, delight to degradation. The prisoner
remembers wanting only to read as if in a fever —
running fingers over pyramids of words as if he might
translate himself from this life to a more vivid existence

in which he cuts open the pages with a knife in
plain sight of everyone like a man eating meat and
potatoes at the dinner table. Not that world; this one
where blue light and sharpened files, where identikit
and stamps on passports, where the book in his back-
pack is a crime, and I have sold him down the river
for ideas I barely value — the volumes flung carelessly
across my hotel room, while he picks mushrooms on
the edge of dread, pallid ghosts of what won't speak
or be spoken. Or where I remember what it is to
be present in the world, and I turn away, unable to
bear it — so much light and dread, so much in the darkness
growing or simply how hard to ever remain in place.

About Standing (in Kinship)

By Kimberly Blaeser

We all have the same little bones in our foot
twenty-six with funny names like *navicular*.
Together they build something strong—
our foot arch a pyramid holding us up.
The bones don't get casts when they break.
We tape them—one *phalange* to its neighbor for support.
(Other things like sorrow work that way, too—
find healing in the leaning, the closeness.)
Our feet have one quarter of all the bones in our body.
Maybe we should give more honor to feet
and to all those tiny but blessed cogs in the world—
communities, the forgotten architecture of friendship.

The Chimney Sweeper: A little black thing among the snow

By William Blake

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

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

And because I am happy and dance and sing,

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

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

By William Blake

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Ecchoing Green

By William Blake

The sun does arise,
And make happy the skies.
The merry bells ring

To welcome the Spring.
The sky-lark and thrush,
The birds of the bush,
Sing louder around,
To the bells' cheerful sound.
While our sports shall be seen
On the Ecchoing Green.

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

Till the little ones weary
No more can be merry
The sun does descend,
And our sports have an end:
Round the laps of their mothers,
Many sisters and brothers,
Like birds in their nest,
Are ready for rest;
And sport no more seen,
On the darkening Green.

Introduction to the Songs of Innocence

By William Blake

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

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

Drop thy pipe thy happy pipe
Sing thy songs of happy chear,

So I sung the same again
While he wept with joy to hear

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

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

London

By William Blake

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

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice: in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear

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

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

Mad Song

By William Blake

The wild winds weep,
    And the night is a-cold;
Come hither, Sleep,
    And my griefs infold:
But lo! the morning peeps

Over the eastern steeps,
And the rustling birds of dawn
The earth do scorn.

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

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

A Poison Tree

By William Blake

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

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

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

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

The Tyger

By William Blake

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

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

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

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

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

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

Burning in the Rain

By Richard Blanco

Someday compassion would demand
I set myself free of my desire to recreate
my father, indulge in my mother’s losses,
strangle lovers with words, forcing them
to confess for me and take the blame.
Today was that day: I tossed them, sheet
by sheet on the patio and gathered them
into a pyre. I wanted to let them go
in a blaze, tiny white dwarfs imploding

beside the azaleas and ficus bushes,
let them crackle, burst like winged seeds,
let them smolder into gossamer embers—
a thousand gray butterflies in the wind.
Today was that day, but it rained, kept
raining. Instead of fire, water—drops
knocking on doors, wetting windows
into mirrors reflecting me in the oaks.
The garden walls and stones swelling
into ghostlier shades of themselves,
the wind chimes giggling in the storm,
a coffee cup left overflowing with rain.
Instead of burning, my pages turned
into water lilies floating over puddles,
then tiny white cliffs as the sun set,
finally drying all night under the moon
into papier-mâché souvenirs. Today
the rain would not let their lives burn.

The Bug

By Tommye Blount

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

No, he is not

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

of bugs before. On night watch,
over there. Over there, they're everywhere.

Driving Toward the Lac Qui Parle River

By Robert Bly

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

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

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

Prayer for My Father

By Robert Bly

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

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

Waking from Sleep

By Robert Bly

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

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

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

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

Medusa

By Louise Bogan

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

When the bare eyes were before me

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

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

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

And I shall stand here like a shadow
Under the great balanced day,
My eyes on the yellow dust, that was lifting in the wind,
And does not drift away.

Song for the Last Act

By Louise Bogan

Now that I have your face by heart, I look
Less at its features than its darkening frame
Where quince and melon, yellow as young flame,
Lie with quilled dahlias and the shepherd's crook.
Beyond, a garden. There, in insolent ease
The lead and marble figures watch the show
Of yet another summer loath to go
Although the scythes hang in the apple trees.

Now that I have your face by heart, I look.

Now that I have your voice by heart, I read
In the black chords upon a dulling page
Music that is not meant for music's cage,
Whose emblems mix with words that shake and bleed.
The staves are shuttled over with a stark
Unprinted silence. In a double dream
I must spell out the storm, the running stream.
The beat's too swift. The notes shift in the dark.

Now that I have your voice by heart, I read.

Now that I have your heart by heart, I see
The wharves with their great ships and architraves;
The rigging and the cargo and the slaves
On a strange beach under a broken sky.
O not departure, but a voyage done!
The bales stand on the stone; the anchor weeps
Its red rust downward, and the long vine creeps
Beside the salt herb, in the lengthening sun.

Now that I have your heart by heart, I see.

Women

By Louise Bogan

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

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

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

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

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

And Soul

By Eavan Boland

My mother died one summer—
the wettest in the records of the state.

Crops rotted in the west.
Checked tablecloths dissolved in back gardens.
Empty deck chairs collected rain.
As I took my way to her
through traffic, through lilacs dripping blackly
behind houses
and on curbsides, to pay her
the last tribute of a daughter, I thought of something
I remembered
I heard once, that the body is, or is
said to be, almost all
water and as I turned southward, that ours is
a city of it,
one in which
every single day the elements begin
a journey towards each other that will never,
given our weather,
fail—
the ocean visible in the edges cut by it,
cloud color reaching into air,
the Liffey storing one and summoning the other,
salt greeting the lack of it at the North Wall and,
as if that wasn't enough, all of it
ending up almost every evening
inside our speech—
coast canal ocean river stream and now
mother and I drove on and although
the mind is unreliable in grief, at
the next cloudburst it almost seemed
they could be shades of each other,
the way the body is
of every one of them and now
they were on the move again—fog into mist,
mist into sea spray and both into the oily glaze
that lay on the railings of
the house she was dying in
as I went inside.

How We Made a New Art on Old Ground

By Eavan Boland

A famous battle happened in this valley.
You never understood the nature poem.
Till now. Till this moment—if these statements
seem separate, unrelated, follow this

silence to its edge and you will hear
the history of air: the crispness of a fern
or the upward cut and turn around of
a fieldfare or thrush written on it.

The other history is silent: The estuary
is over there. The issue was decided here:
Two kings prepared to give no quarter.
Then one king and one dead tradition.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Lost Land

By Eavan Boland

I have two daughters.

They are all I ever wanted from the earth.

Or almost all.

I also wanted one piece of ground:

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

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

Now they are grown up and far away

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

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

At night,
on the edge of sleep,

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

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

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

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

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

Ireland. Absence. Daughter.

The War Horse

By Eavan Boland

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Of curtains. He stumbles down our short street

Thankfully passing us. I pause, wait,

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

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

Of burned countryside, illicit braid:
A cause ruined before, a world betrayed.

The Delta

By Bruce Bond

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

it was us who made them. We are not us.

We are a floodplain by the Mississippi

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

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

We understand if you want a widow
to stay single, cut up her husband's shoes.

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

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

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

Rocket

By Todd Boss

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

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

nor your choice of
paint and lacquer

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

nor the thrill

of its swift ignition

nor the heights
it streaks

nor the dancing
way you chase
beneath its

dot

across that
seemingly endless
childhood field

will ever be
restored to you

by the people
in the topmost
branches of whose trees

unseen

it may yet from
its plastic
chute
on thin
white
string

still swing.

Sign for My Father, Who Stressed the Bunt

By David Bottoms

On the rough diamond,
the hand-cut field below the dog lot and barn,
we rehearsed the strict technique
of bunting. I watched from the infield,
the mound, the backstop
as your left hand climbed the bat, your legs
and shoulders squared toward the pitcher.
You could drop it like a seed

down either base line. I admired your style,
but not enough to take my eyes off the bank
that served as our center-field fence.

Years passed, three leagues of organized ball,
no few lives. I could homer
into the left-field lot of Carmichael Motors,
and still you stressed the same technique,
the crouch and spring, the lead arm absorbing
just enough impact. That whole tiresome pitch
about basics never changing,
and I never learned what you were laying down.

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

Under the Vulture-Tree

By David Bottoms

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

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

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

Peace Lilies

By Cathy Smith Bowers

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Poet Orders His Tomb

By Edgar Bowers

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

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

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

Some deaf bats in a cave, a porcupine
Quill-less, a superfine
Flightless eagle, and, after them, a line
Of geese, unnavigating by design;

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

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

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

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

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

Bereavement

By William Lisle Bowles

Whose was that gentle voice, that, whispering sweet,
Promised methought long days of bliss sincere!
Soothing it stole on my deluded ear,
Most like soft music, that might sometimes cheat
Thoughts dark and drooping! 'Twas the voice of Hope.
Of love and social scenes, it seemed to speak,

Of truth, of friendship, of affection meek;
That, oh! poor friend, might to life's downward slope
Lead us in peace, and bless our latest hours.
Ah me! the prospect saddened as she sung;
Loud on my startled ear the death-bell rung;
Chill darkness wrapt the pleasurable bowers,
Whilst Horror, pointing to yon breathless clay,
"No peace be thine," exclaimed, "away, away!"

Respectability

By Tina Boyer Brown

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

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

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

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

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

Breonna
Rekia
Sandra
Nia
Bettie
Yvette
Miriam
Shereese

Ahmaud
Trayvon
Eric
Laquan
Michael
Philando
Stephon
Alton
Amadou
Akai
Quintonio
Rumai
John
Jordan
Jonathan
Reynaldo
Kendrec
Ramarley
Kenneth
Robert
Walter
Terence
Freddie
Samuel
George
Tamir
and more
and more
and more

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

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

Barber

By Larry Bradley

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

The razor's edge along a worn strop or random thoughts

As they spring so invisibly from the mind to a mouth

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Author to Her Book

By Anne Bradstreet

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

And for thy Mother, she alas is poor,
Which caus'd her thus to send thee out of door.

Before the Birth of one of Her Children

By Anne Bradstreet

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

A Letter to her Husband, absent upon Publick employment

By Anne Bradstreet

My head, my heart, mine Eyes, my life, nay more,
My joy, my Magazine of earthly store,
If two be one, as surely thou and I,
How stayest thou there, whilst I at *Ipswich* lye?
So many steps, head from the heart to sever
If but a neck, soon should we be together:

I like the earth this season, mourn in black,
My Sun is gone so far in's Zodiack,
Whom whilst I 'joy'd, nor storms, nor frosts I felt,
His warmth such frigid colds did cause to melt.
My chilled limbs now nummed lye forlorn;
Return, return sweet *Sol* from *Capricorn*;
In this dead time, alas, what can I more
Then view those fruits which through thy heat I bore?
Which sweet contentment yield me for a space,
True living Pictures of their Fathers face.
O strange effect! now thou art *Southward* gone,
I weary grow, the tedious day so long;
But when thou *Northward* to me shalt return,
I wish my Sun may never set, but burn
Within the Cancer of my glowing breast,
The welcome house of him my dearest guest.
Where ever, ever stay, and go not thence,
Till natures sad decree shall call thee hence;
Flesh of thy flesh, bone of thy bone,
I here, thou there, yet both but one.

To Her Father with Some Verses

By Anne Bradstreet

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

To my Dear and Loving Husband

By Anne Bradstreet

If ever two were one, then surely we.
If ever man were loved by wife, then thee.

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

The Watchers

By William Stanley Braithwaite

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

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

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

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

Layabout

By John Brehm

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

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

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

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

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

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

Over and Under

By John Brehm

So sexy to slide under-
neath a river,
to sit inside this
snakelike sub-
marine-like
subway car and
freely imagine
the world above—
the Brooklyn
Bridge invisibly
trembling with the
weight of its
own beauty,
the East River
still guided by
the grooves
Walt Whitman's
eyes wore in it,
the bulldog tug-
boats pushing the
passively impressive
broad-bottomed
barges around,
and the double-
decker orange

and black Staten
Island ferries,
with their aura
of overworked
pack-mule
mournfulness,
and beyond them
the Atlantic Ocean
which I lately learned
was brought here
by ice comets three
billion years ago,
which explains
a few things, like
why everybody
feels so alienated,
and of course
the thoughts being
thought by every
person in New
York City at
this moment—
vast schools of
undulating fish
curving and rising
in the cloud-swirling
wind-waved sky,
surrounded by
the vaster emptiness
of non-thought
which holds them
and which they try
not to think
about and you
lying in bed in
your sixth-floor
walk-up sublet
on St. Mark's Place—
such a breath-
taking ascension!
imagining me
rising now to meet you.

The Affliction of Richard

By Robert Bridges

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

Though thou, I know not why,
Didst kill my childish trust,
That breach with toil did I
Repair, because I must:
And spite of frighting schemes,
With which the fiends of Hell
Blaspheme thee in my dreams,
So far I have hoped well.

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

Will

By Trevino L. Brings Plenty

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

grassland; the place of deer marks and porcupine
quills, ledger extrapolates history. I refold estate
document, place it back into its envelope.

The Day

By Geoffrey Brock

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

It's swelling and
blushing and ripe
and I reach out a
hand to pick it

but flesh moves
slow through time
and evening
comes on fast

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

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

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

What to Say Upon Being Asked to Be Friends

By Julian Talamantez Brolaski

Why speak of hate, when I do bleed for love?
Not hate, my love, but Love doth bite my tongue
Till I taste stuff that makes my rhyming rough
So flatter I my fever for the one

For whom I inly mourn, though seem to shun.
A rose is arrows is eros, so what
If I confuse the shade that I've become
With winedark substance in a lover's cup?
But stop my tonguely wound, I've bled enough.
If I be fair, or false, or freaked with fear
If I my tongue in lockèd box immure
Blame not me, for I am sick with love.
    Yet would I be your friend most willingly
    Since friendship would infect me killingly.

On the Death of Anne Brontë

By Charlotte Brontë

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

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

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

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

Ah! Why, Because the Dazzling Sun

By Emily Brontë

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

All through the night, your glorious eyes
Were gazing down in mine,

And with a full heart's thankful sighs
I blessed that watch divine!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

O Stars and Dreams and Gentle Night;
O Night and Stars return!
And hide me from the hostile light

That does not warm, but burn—

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

No Coward Soul Is Mine

By Emily Brontë

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[‘Often rebuked, yet always back returning’]

By Emily Brontë

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

To-day, I will seek not the shadowy region;
   Its unsustaining vastness waxes drear;
And visions rising, legion after legion,
   Bring the unreal world too strangely near.

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

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

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

Shall earth no more inspire thee

By Emily Brontë

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Soldier

By Rupert Brooke

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

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

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

The Children of the Poor

By Gwendolyn Brooks

1

People who have no children can be hard:
Attain a mail of ice and insolence:
Need not pause in the fire, and in no sense
Hesitate in the hurricane to guard.
And when wide world is bitten and bewarred
They perish purely, waving their spirits hence
Without a trace of grace or of offense
To laugh or fail, diffident, wonder-starred.
While through a throttling dark we others hear
The little lifting helplessness, the queer
Whimper-whine; whose unridiculous
Lost softness softly makes a trap for us.
And makes a curse. And makes a sugar of
The malocclusions, the inconditions of love.

2

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

3

And shall I prime my children, pray, to pray?
Mites, come invade most frugal vestibules
Spectered with crusts of penitents' renewals
And all hysterics arrogant for a day.
Instruct yourselves here is no devil to pay.
Children, confine your lights in jellied rules;
Resemble graves; be metaphysical mules.

Learn Lord will not distort nor leave the fray.
Behind the scurryings of your neat motif
I shall wait, if you wish: revise the psalm
If that should frighten you: sew up belief
If that should tear: turn, singularly calm
At forehead and at fingers rather wise,
Holding the bandage ready for your eyes.

kitchenette building

By Gwendolyn Brooks

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

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

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

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

Sadie and Maud

By Gwendolyn Brooks

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

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

Sadie bore two babies
Under her maiden name.
Maud and Ma and Papa

Nearly died of shame.

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

Maud, who went to college,
Is a thin brown mouse.
She is living all alone
In this old house.

a song in the front yard

By Gwendolyn Brooks

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

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

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

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

truth

By Gwendolyn Brooks

And if sun comes
How shall we greet him?

Shall we not dread him,
Shall we not fear him
After so lengthy a
Session with shade?

Though we have wept for him,
Though we have prayed
All through the night-years—
What if we wake one shimmering morning to
Hear the fierce hammering
Of his firm knuckles
Hard on the door?

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

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

The dark hangs heavily
Over the eyes.

Waiheke

By James Brown

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

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

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

washed up here.

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

the other
stepping down
the sand
to stand
in the water.

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

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

The Card Tables

By Jericho Brown

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

This is the Honey

By Mahogany L. Browne

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

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

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

Each bone of our flesh-homes sings welcome

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

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

Rooted in miraculous possibilities
& alive

Grief

By Elizabeth Barrett Browning

I tell you, hopeless grief is passionless;

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

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

By Elizabeth Barrett Browning

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

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

Confessions

By Robert Browning

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Epilogue

By Robert Browning

At the midnight in the silence of the sleep-time,
When you set your fancies free,

Will they pass to where—by death, fools think, imprisoned—
Low he lies who once so loved you, whom you loved so,
—Pity me?

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

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

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

Life in a Love

By Robert Browning

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

Ever
Removed!

Meeting at Night

By Robert Browning

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

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

Steel

By Joseph Bruchac

Seeing photos
of ancestors
a century past

is like looking
at your own
fingerprints—

circles
and lines
you can't
recognize

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

Prints

By Joseph Bruchac

for Rick Hill and in memory of Buster Mitchell

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

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

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

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

III
Loading on,
the cable lifts.
Girders swing
and sing in sun.
Tacked to the sky,
reflecting wind,

long knife-blade mirrors
they fall like jackstraws
when they hit the top
of the big boom's run.

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

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

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

The Moonlight

By Noah Buchholz
Translated by John Lee Clark

That night the moon rose
in the window. Its light
touched the pane and spread
over the floor. The girls
climbed out of their beds
and gathered in the glow,

where their hands came alive.
Their chatter filled their chests
with such gladness it flowed
out past the sentry girl
at the door and down
the corridor until it struck
the matron's ears. She rocked
forward, enraged, and thundered up
the corridor. The sentry girl
gave the alarm. They flew
for their beds. The matron
burst in. Her arm swung
and connected. A girl dropped.
The hand of the moon
went to the girl, tapping
her on the shoulder, tapping
to no avail. It withdrew,
gliding back to the window
and out. When the sun
came up, its blaze seething
into the floor, the girls
gathered again at the window.
They watched as the gardener
dug a hole. His shovel
thrust firmly in the ground,
he lifted a covered figure
and let drop. Its arms
were crossed as it tumbled
to the bottom. The gardener
grimaced and covered the hole.
That night the moon rose
in the window. Its light
touched the pane and spread
over the floor. The girls
climbed out of their beds
and gathered in the glow,
where their hands came alive.

Note: *Translated from the American Sign Language*

Enough

By Suzanne Buffam

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

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

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

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

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

To describe her private sufferings
The more distantly she can perceive them.

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

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

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

One day I plan to be riding it.

The Pilgrim

By John Bunyan

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

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

But he will have a right,
To be a Pilgrim.

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

Diameter

By Michelle Y. Burke

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Red, Red Rose

By Robert Burns

O my Luve is like a red, red rose

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

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

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

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

A Covered Bridge in Littleton, New Hampshire

By Stephanie Burt

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

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

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

The point is to be, in your own eyes, what you are,

or to keep your own tools, so that you can pretend.

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

That morning, needing a nap,
he had thrown, from the third-story balcony
of Miller's Cafe and Bakery, into the whistling

rapids and shallows
of the Ammonoosuc River, with its arrowheads and caravans of stones,
his Red Sox cap. His hair was shining like
another planet's second sun,
as he explained, looking up, "I threw my hat in the river.
I would like my hat back now."

Advice from Rock Creek Park

By Stephanie Burt

What will survive us
has already begun

Oak galls
Two termites' curious
self-perpetuating bodies

Letting the light through the gaps

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

Almost always better
to build than to wreck

You can build in a wreck

Under the roots
of an overturned tree

Consider the martin that hefts
herself over traffic cones

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

Nothing lasts
forever not even
the future we want

The President has never
owned the rain

Kites

By Stephanie Burt

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

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

until we became intertwined, which is why
you try
to keep us permanently apart.

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

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

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

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

we take off on our almost arbitrarily
lengthy singletons of string

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

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

A Farmer Remember Lincoln

By Witter Bynner

"Lincoln?—
Well, I was in the old Second Maine,
The first regiment in Washington from the Pine Tree State.

Of course I didn't get the butt of the clip;
We was there for guardin' Washington—
We was all green.

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

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

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

Cow Song

By Elena Karina Byrne

For Thomas Lux

I heard them, far-off, deep calling
from behind death's invisible floor door. Their wallow
metronome from the after-rain mud was one giant body.
Arizona's yellow arm's length of light all the way
to my own body standing at the edge of their field held

me. I moved toward them and they toward me, as if to ask
for something from nothing, as memory does, each face

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

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

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

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

The Destruction of Sennacherib

By George Gordon, Lord Byron

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

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

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

And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,

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

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

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

She Walks in Beauty

By George Gordon, Lord Byron

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

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

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

So We'll Go No More a Roving

By George Gordon, Lord Byron

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

And the moon be still as bright.

For the sword outwears its sheath,
And the soul wears out the breast,
And the heart must pause to breathe,
And love itself have rest.

Though the night was made for loving,
And the day returns too soon,
Yet we'll go no more a roving
By the light of the moon.

Altered After Too Many Years Under the Mask

By CAConrad

I feel you
judging me for
becoming agoraphobic
in someone else's house
I forget how I learned to stroll through
grocery stores as though there is no crisis
my elbow cannot touch the middle of my back
my fingers though have found every part of me
soon no migration of wild animals will
be unknown to humans we will chart
film record publish archive everything
it gives us something to do while we
annihilate beauty poets shoveling
a quarry that is really an ongoing
crime scene investigation
a study in vomit imitating
vast chronicles of the face
whatever world we can hold
we will never agree our
neglect was worth it
whatever amount of
crazy we can imagine
coming at us double it
I found the perfect
listening chair nothing
but listeners who sit
I am sitting in it now
listening to my friend
the photographer
whose self-portrait

I find reflected
in eyes
of her
every
photo

For the Feral Splendor that Remains

By CAConrad

For Kazim Ali

sometimes I strain
to hear one
natural
sound
when gender blurs in a
poem my world sets a
tooth in the gear
if god is in me
when will I ask for
my needs to be met
every god is qualified
it is not such a secret
when I was afraid of the
road I learned to drive
map says name of
your city in ocean
line drawn to it
towing behind
the big party
history of life on
earth might be
interesting to a
visitor one day
chewing parsley and
cilantro together is for
me where forest
meets meadow
in a future life
would we like to
fall in love with the
world as it is with
no recollection
of the beauty
we destroy

today

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

First Storm and Thereafter

By Scott Cairns

What I notice first within
this rough scene fixed
in memory is the rare
quality of its lightning, as if
those bolts were clipped
from a comic book, pasted
on low cloud, or fashioned
with cardboard, daubed
with gilt then hung overhead
on wire and fine hooks.
What I hear most clearly
within that thunder now
is its grief—a moan, a long
lament echoing, an ache.
And the rain? Raucous enough,
pounding, but oddly
musical, and, well,
eager to entertain, solicitous.

No storm since has been framed
with such matter-of-fact
artifice, nor to such comic
effect. No, the thousand-plus
storms since then have turned
increasingly artless,
arbitrary, bearing—every
one of them—a numbing burst.

And today, from the west a gust
and a filling pressure
pulsing in the throat—offering
little or nothing to make light of.

Possible Answers to Prayer

By Scott Cairns

Your petitions—though they continue to bear
just the one signature—have been duly recorded.
Your anxieties—despite their constant,

relatively narrow scope and inadvertent
entertainment value—nonetheless serve
to bring your person vividly to mind.

Your repentance—all but obscured beneath
a burgeoning, yellow fog of frankly more
conspicuous resentment—is sufficient.

Your intermittent concern for the sick,
the suffering, the needy poor is sometimes
recognizable to me, if not to them.

Your angers, your zeal, your lipsmackingly
righteous indignation toward the many
whose habits and sympathies offend you—

these must burn away before you'll apprehend
how near I am, with what fervor I adore
precisely these, the several who rouse your passions.

Come Back

By Rocket Caleshu

I hate how I can't keep this tremor inside, this mute
matter of being made extant, this shiver in being, in
no not-being, this wild flying up from the inner surge

and this crack in the apparatus espied around
the corner from my particular warble, this
quiver of dissolution in the pool of no single thing,

this break in the entity of the single, of not
a mistake in being made, this suffering of trying
to contain the infinite in language, this refusal

inextricable from its mass; this love, love of
love, this being only in your presence, this inability
not to err, rather the constitution of my broken image

caressed by this, this permission to submerge, this bigger
and bigger being, tremor of infinite allowances, this telos
of cataloging that which can never be disappeared.

At Last the New Arriving

By Gabrielle Calvocoresi

Like the horn you played in Catholic school
the city will open its mouth and cry

out. *Don't worry 'bout nothing. Don't mean*
no thing. It will leave you stunned

as a fighter with his eyes swelled shut
who's told he won the whole damn purse.

It will feel better than any floor
that's risen up to meet you. It will rise

like Easter bread, golden and familiar
in your grandmother's hands. She'll come back,

heaven having been too far from home
to hold her. O it will be beautiful.

Every girl will ask you to dance and the boys
won't kill you for it. Shake your head.

Dance until your bones clatter. What a prize
you are. What a lucky sack of stars.

First Job

By Joseph Campana

All evening I hunted
the bird that wanted
a cage of glass,
here where cemetery
slides into creek, fronting
what was once the largest
indoor leather mill in the world.
There the skins gathered
for cleansing, coloring,

scraping, shipping off.

It closed three years after
a lone sparrow set up camp
behind the only desk
in the only full-serve
service station left in town
where, from four to seven
nightly one summer,
I blackened the pages
of books with my thumbs.

Whatever it sought there—
thumping its frightened body
against glass, into cabinets
or out to the bays
scrubbed raw with gasoline
where the broken waited
to be raised up, hosed off,
fastened together in hope
of coughing to life again—
whatever it sought was not a dollar
slipped through a window cracked
because patronage was right
for the aging ladies of August to provide
from Chryslers cool in the sun.

There was nothing to be found
in books or boxes of parts.
And the tools hanging from pegs
were as useless as my hands,
which could not patch together
those straggling conveyances
any more than I could
with a tattered broom
batter the bird to freedom
as I swung at fluttering terror
as I sought with useless devices
some fortune reposed
in corners of grease and dust.

Follow Thy Fair Sun

By Thomas Campion

Follow thy fair sun, unhappy shadow,

Though thou be black as night
And she made all of light,
Yet follow thy fair sun unhappy shadow.

Follow her whose light thy light depriveth,
Though here thou liv'st disgraced,
And she in heaven is placed,
Yet follow her whose light the world reviveth.

Follow those pure beams whose beauty burneth,
That so have scorched thee,
As thou still black must be,
Till Her kind beams thy black to brightness turneth.

Follow her while yet her glory shineth,
There comes a luckless night,
That will dim all her light,
And this the black unhappy shade divineth.

Follow still since so thy fates ordained,
The Sun must have his shade,
Till both at once do fade,
The Sun still proved, the shadow still disdained.

My partner wants me to write them a poem about Sheryl Crow

By Kayleb Rae Candrilli

but all I want to do is marry them on a beach

that refuses to take itself too seriously.

So much of our lives has been serious.

Over time, I've learned that love is most astonishing

when it persists after learning where we come from.

When I bring my partner to my childhood home

it is all bullets and needles and trash bags held

at arm's length. It is my estranged father's damp

bed of cardboard and cigar boxes filled

with gauze and tarnished spoons. It is hard

to clean a home, but it is harder to clean

the memory of it. When I was young, my

father would light lavender candles and shoot

up. Now, my partner and I light a fire that will

burn all traces of the family that lived here.

Black plastic smoke curdles up, and loose bullets

discharge in the flames. My partner holds

my hand as gunfire rings through

the birch trees. Though this is almost

beautiful, it is not. And if I'm being honest,

my partner and I spend most of our time

on earth feeding one another citrus fruits

and enough strength to go on. Every morning

I pack them half a grapefruit and some sugar.

And they tell me it's just sweet enough.

Song

By Brenda Cárdenas

You shout my name
from beyond my dreams,
beyond the picture window
of this Rosarito beach house.
Rushing from bed to shore
I glimpse their backs—
volcanoes rising out of the sea.
Your back, a blue-black silhouette,
feet wet with the wash of morning waves.

Fountains spring from mammal minds,
my hands lifting a splash of sand.
I'm on my knees,
toes finding a cool prayer
beneath them, fingers pressing
sea foam to my temples,
while you open arms wide as a generation,
raise them to a compass point,
dive.
If you could reach them,
you would ride their fins
under the horizon,
then surf the crash of waves
left in their wake.
And if I could grasp
my own fear,
I'd drown it,
leave it breathless and blue
as this ocean,
as the brilliant backs
of whales
surfacing
for air.

Epitaph on the Lady Mary Villiers

By Thomas Carew

This little vault, this narrow room,
Of Love, and Beauty, is the tomb;
The dawning beam that gan to clear
Our clouded sky, lies darken'd here,
Forever set to us, by death
Sent to inflame the world beneath.
'Twas but a bud, yet did contain
More sweetness than shall spring again;
A budding star that might have grown
Into a sun, when it had blown.
This hopeful beauty did create
New life in Love's declining state;
But now his empire ends, and we
From fire and wounding darts are free;
His brand, his bow, let no man fear,
The flames, the arrows, all lie here.

The Spring

By Thomas Carew

Now that the winter's gone, the earth hath lost
Her snow-white robes, and now no more the frost
Candies the grass, or casts an icy cream
Upon the silver lake or crystal stream;
But the warm sun thaws the benumbed earth,
And makes it tender; gives a sacred birth
To the dead swallow; wakes in hollow tree
The drowsy cuckoo, and the humble-bee.
Now do a choir of chirping minstrels bring
In triumph to the world the youthful Spring.
The valleys, hills, and woods in rich array
Welcome the coming of the long'd-for May.
Now all things smile, only my love doth lour;
Nor hath the scalding noonday sun the power
To melt that marble ice, which still doth hold
Her heart congeal'd, and makes her pity cold.
The ox, which lately did for shelter fly
Into the stall, doth now securely lie
In open fields; and love no more is made
By the fireside, but in the cooler shade
Amyntas now doth with his Chloris sleep
Under a sycamore, and all things keep
Time with the season; only she doth carry
June in her eyes, in her heart January.

Fortuna

By Thomas Carlyle

The wind blows east, the wind blows west,
And the frost falls and the rain:
A weary heart went thankful to rest,
And must rise to toil again, ’gain,
And must rise to toil again.

The wind blows east, the wind blows west,
And there comes good luck and bad;
The thriftiest man is the cheerfulest;
’Tis a thriftless thing to be sad, sad,
’Tis a thriftless thing to be sad.

The wind blows east, the wind blows west;
Ye shall know a tree by its fruit:

This world, they say, is worst to the best;—
But a dastard has evil to boot, boot,
But a dastard has evil to boot.

The wind blows east, the wind blows west;
What skills it to mourn or to talk?
A journey I have, and far ere I rest;
I must bundle my wallets and walk, walk,
I must bundle my wallets and walk.

The wind does blow as it lists alway;
Canst thou change this world to thy mind?
The world will wander its own wise way;
I also will wander mine, mine,
I also will wander mine.

A Boat Beneath a Sunny Sky

By Lewis Carroll

A boat beneath a sunny sky,
Lingering onward dreamily
In an evening of July —

Children three that nestle near,
Eager eye and willing ear,
Pleased a simple tale to hear —

Long has paled that sunny sky:
Echoes fade and memories die:
Autumn frosts have slain July.

Still she haunts me, phantomwise,
Alice moving under skies
Never seen by waking eyes.

Children yet, the tale to hear,
Eager eye and willing ear,
Lovingly shall nestle near.

In a Wonderland they lie,
Dreaming as the days go by,
Dreaming as the summers die:

Ever drifting down the stream —
Lingering in the golden gleam —

Life, what is it but a dream?

The Bearer

By Hayden Carruth

Like all his people he felt at home in the forest.
The silence beneath great trees, the dimness there,
The distant high rustling of foliage, the clumps
Of fern like little green fountains, patches of sunlight,
Patches of moss and lichen, the occasional
Undergrowth of hazel and holly, was he aware
Of all this? On the contrary his unawareness
Was a kind of gratification, a sense of comfort
And repose even in the strain of running day
After day. He had been aware of the prairies.
He had known he hated the sky so vast, the wind
Roaring in the grasses, and the brightness that
Hurt his eyes. Now he hated nothing; nor could he
Feel anything but the urgency that compelled him
Onward continually. "May I not forget, may I
Not forget," he said to himself over and over.
When he saw three ravens rise on their awkward
Wings from the forest floor perhaps seventy-five
Ells ahead of him, he said, "Three ravens,"
And immediately forgot them. "May I not forget,"
He said, and repeated again in his mind the exact
Words he had memorized, the message that was
Important and depressing, which made him feel
Worry and happiness at the same time, a peculiar
Elation. At last he came to his people far
In the darkness. He smiled and spoke his words,
And he looked intently into their eyes gleaming
In firelight. He cried when they cried. No rest
For his lungs. He flinched and lay down while they
Began to kill him with clubs and heavy stones.

I Know, I Remember, But How Can I Help You

By Hayden Carruth

The northern lights. I wouldn’t have noticed them
if the deer hadn’t told me
a doe her coat of pearls her glowing hoofs
proud and inquisitive
eager for my appraisal

and I went out into the night with electrical steps
but with my head held also proud
to share the animal's fear
and see what I had seen before
a sky flaring and spectral
greenish waves and ribbons
and the snow under strange light tossing in the pasture
like a storming ocean caught
by a flaring beacon.
The deer stands away from me not far
there among bare black apple trees
a presence I no longer see.
We are proud to be afraid
proud to share
the silent magnetic storm that destroys the stars
and flickers around our heads
like the saints' cold spiritual agonies
of old.
I remember but without the sense other light-storms
cold memories discursive and philosophical
in my mind's burden
and the deer remembers nothing.
We move our feet crunching bitter snow while the storm
crashes like god-wars down the east
we shake the sparks from our eyes
we quiver inside our shocked fur
we search for each other
in the apple thicket—
a glimpse, an acknowledgment
it is enough and never enough—
we toss our heads and say good night
moving away on bitter bitter snow.

Proem

By Martin Carter

Not, in the saying of you, are you
said. Baffled and like a root
stopped by a stone you turn back questioning
the tree you feed. But what the leaves hear
is not what the roots ask. Inexhaustibly,
being at one time what was to be said
and at another time what has been said
the saying of you remains the living of you
never to be said. But, enduring,

you change with the change that changes
and yet are not of the changing of any of you.
Ever yourself, you are always about
to be yourself in something else ever with me.

To Solitude

By Alice Cary

I am weary of the working,
  Weary of the long day's heat;
To thy comfortable bosom,
  Wilt thou take me, spirit sweet?

Weary of the long, blind struggle
  For a pathway bright and high,—
Weary of the dimly dying
  Hopes that never quite all die.

Weary searching a bad cipher
  For a good that must be meant;
Discontent with being weary,—
  Weary with my discontent.

I am weary of the trusting
  Where my trusts but torments prove;
Wilt thou keep faith with me? wilt thou
  Be my true and tender love?

I am weary drifting, driving
  Like a helmless bark at sea;
Kindly, comfortable spirit,
  Wilt thou give thyself to me?

Give thy birds to sing me sonnets?
  Give thy winds my cheeks to kiss?
And thy mossy rocks to stand for
  The memorials of our bliss?

I in reverence will hold thee,
  Never vexed with jealous ills,
Though thy wild and wimpling waters
  Wind about a thousand hills.

Suppose

By Phoebe Cary

Suppose, my little lady,
    Your doll should break her head,
Could you make it whole by crying
    Till your eyes and nose are red?
And would n't it be pleasanter
    To treat it as a joke;
And say you 're glad "'T was Dolly's
    And not your head that broke?"

Suppose you 're dressed for walking,
    And the rain comes pouring down,
Will it clear off any sooner
    Because you scold and frown?
And would n't it be nicer
    For you to smile than pout,
And so make sunshine in the house
    When there is none without?

Suppose your task, my little man,
    Is very hard to get,
Will it make it any easier
    For you to sit and fret?
And would n't it be wiser
    Than waiting like a dunce,
To go to work in earnest
    And learn the thing at once?

Suppose that some boys have a horse,
    And some a coach and pair,
Will it tire you less while walking
    To say, "It is n't fair?"
And would n't it be nobler
    To keep your temper sweet,
And in your heart be thankful
    You can walk upon your feet?

And suppose the world don't please you,
    Nor the way some people do,
Do you think the whole creation
    Will be altered just for you?
And is n't it, my boy or girl,
    The wisest, bravest plan,
Whatever comes, or does n't come,

To do the best you can?

Christmas, 1970

By Sandra M. Castillo

We assemble the silver tree,
our translated lives,
its luminous branches,
numbered to fit into its body.
place its metallic roots
to decorate our first Christmas.
Mother finds herself
opening, closing the Red Cross box
she will carry into 1976
like an unwanted door prize,
a timepiece, a stubborn fact,
an emblem of exile measuring our days,
marked by the moment of our departure,
our lives no longer arranged.

Somewhere,
there is a photograph,
a Polaroid Mother cannot remember was ever taken:
I am sitting under Tia Tere's Christmas tree,
her first apartment in this, our new world:
my sisters by my side,
I wear a white dress, black boots,
an eight-year-old's resignation;
Mae and Mitzy, age four,
wear red and white snowflake sweaters and identical smiles,
on this, our first Christmas,
away from ourselves.

The future unreal, unmade,
Mother will cry into the new year
with Lidia and Emerito,
our elderly downstairs neighbors,
who realize what we are too young to understand:
Even a map cannot show you
the way back to a place
that no longer exists.

Harina de Castilla

By Sandra M. Castillo

"All accounts of the past are made up of possibilities."
—*Dionisio Martinez*

for Larry Villanueva

i.
For years,
you were a story of ancestors,
pre-revolutionary Cuba:
Barrios, Donate, Gallata, Villanueva,
family names strung and pearled in the Caribbean
by blood and memory,
nostalgia and calamity
en Artemisa, a small town in my mother's childhood,
a woman in December of 1967,
your Tía Marta, a hospital room en la Covadonga,
rows and rows of children, my sisters,
unexpectedly two, your cousins,
whose clothes Mae and Mitzy wore
into history and exile.

En el exilo, La Cuba del Norte,
ten years after the summer of El Mariel,
you were my map of Cuba,
un espejo, un reflejo,
a tisa-blue knot of possibility.
Mi esquina Habanera,
a street en la arquitectura del pasado,
a superficial distance in the patina of memory,
a me I had never really known,
a language I had learned not to think in.

Later, you were a face on T.V.
en Guadalupe, María Elena,
my mother's telenovelas en el canal 23,
an actor, a director, a sculptor, abstract angst with a face
history and coincidence had given me.

ii.
So when you become fingerprints and words,
a noun, a verb, a snapshot in motion,
I am no longer alone with my ghosts,
las sombras de el pasado, inventing truth,

reclaiming language, my old self.
I am me, unadorned by speech,
English or translation;
I am an I, simple, exposed,
this afternoon in our lives,
a conversation about the circle
of coincidence and persuasion,
a photograph of an idea we once were,
and you are familiar,
somehow.

iii.
Constantly returning,
we breathe in Spanish,
move through blank spaces like incantations,
waiting for words to fill a moment
(often ninety miles long)
with etymology, jargon, ghostwords,
shadows and nostalgia,
and become Harina de Castilla, Larry,
re-shaped, translated, improvised, sculpted
and redefined.

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

My Father Sings, to My Embarrassment

By Sandra M. Castillo

at Las Villas, a small Carol City bar with a makeshift stage,
where he spends too much time drinking,
pretending he can learn to play the guitar at forty-five,
become a singer, a musician,
who writes about "Que Difícil Es...."
to live in Spanish in Miami,
a city yet to be translated,
in a restaurant where he has taken us for Cuban food,
where I sit, frozen, unable to make a sound,
where Mother smiles,
all her teeth exposed,
squeezes my hand,
where Mae and Mitzy hide
under the table shielding them from shame
with a blood-red tablecloth,
leaving my mother and me,

pale-faced, trapped by the spotlight shining in our eyes,
making it difficult for us to pretend
we do not know the man in the white suit
pointing to us.

An Apology for Her Poetry

By Margaret Cavendish

I language want to dress my fancies in,
The hair's uncurled, the garment's loose and thin.
Had they but silver lace to make them gay,
They'd be more courted than in poor array;
Or, had they art, would make a better show;
But they are plain; yet cleanly do they go.
The world in bravery doth take delight,
And glistering shows do more attract the sight:
And every one doth honor a rich hood,
As if the outside made the inside good.
And every one doth bow and give the place,
Not for the man's sake but the silver lace.
Let me intreat in my poor book's behalf,
That all will not adore the golden calf.
Consider, pray, gold hath no life therein,
And life, in nature, is the richest thing.
Be just, let Fancy have the upper place,
And then my verses may perchance find grace.

Emplumada

By Lorna Dee Cervantes

When summer ended
the leaves of snapdragons withered
taking their shrill-colored mouths with them.
They were still, so quiet. They were
violet where umber now is. She hated
and she hated to see
them go. Flowers

born when the weather was good - this
she thinks of, watching the branch of peaches
daring their ways above the fence, and further,
two hummingbirds, hovering, stuck to each other,
arcing their bodies in grim determination
to find what is good, what is

given them to find. These are warriors

distancing themselves from history.
They find peace
in the way they contain the wind
and are gone.

Four Portraits of Fire

By Lorna Dee Cervantes

1
I find a strange knowledge of wind,
an open door in the mountain
pass where everything intersects.
Believe me. This will not pass.
This is a world where flags
contain themselves, and are still,
marked by their unfurled edges.
Lean stuff sways on the boughs
of pitch pine: silver, almost tinsel,
all light gone blue and sprouting
orange oils in a last bouquet.

2
These were the nest builders;
I caught one last morning, I sang
so it fell down, stupid,
from the trees. They're so incorrect
in their dead skin. Witness their twig
feet, the mistake of their hands.
They will follow you. They yearn
pebbles for their gullets to grind
their own seed. They swallow
so selflessly and die
like patriots.

3
Last Christmas, a family of five
woke from their dreaming and
dreamed themselves over: the baby
in its pink pajamas, the boy
in the red flannel bathrobe
he grabbed from the door,
a mother, a father, and a sister
in curlers; all died.

A wood frame house,
a cannister of oil,
a match—watch
as it unsettles.
They were so cold;
umber.

4
I am away from the knowledge
of animal mystics,
brujas and sorcerers
or the nudging chants
of a Tlingit Kachina.
I am frightened by regions
with wills of their own,
but when my people
die in the snow
I wonder
did the depths billow up
to reach them?

"Love of My Flesh, Living Death"

By Lorna Dee Cervantes

after García Lorca

Once I wasn't always so plain.
I was strewn feathers on a cross
of dune, an expanse of ocean
at my feet, garlands of gulls.

Sirens and gulls. They couldn't tame you.
You know as well as they: to be
a dove is to bear the falcon
at your breast, your nights, your seas.

My fear is simple, heart-faced
above a flare of etchings, a lineage
in letters, my sudden stare. It's you.

It's you! sang the heart upon its mantel
pelvis. Blush of my breath, catch
of my see—beautiful bird—It's you.

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

Night Magic (Blue Jester)

By Lorna Dee Cervantes

After Federico García Lorca

Blue that I love you
Blue that I hate you
Fat blue in the face
Disgraced blue that I erase
You lone blue
Blue of an alien race
Strong blue eternally graced
Blue that I know you
Blue that I choose you
Crust blue
Chunky blue
Moon blue glows that despise
You — idolize you
Blue and the band disappears
Blue of the single left dog
Blue of the eminent red fog
Blue that I glue you to me
You again and again blue
Blue blue of the helium
Bubble of loveloss
Blue of the whirlwind
The blue being again
Blue of the endless rain
Blue that I paint you
Blue that I knew you
Blue of the blinking lights
Blue of the landing at full tilt
Blue of the wilt
Flower of nightfall
Blue of the shadow
In yellowed windows
Blue of the blown
And broken glass
Blue of the Blue Line
Underlines in blue
Blue of the ascending nude
Blue before the blackness

Of new blue of our winsome
Bedlam Blue of the blue
Bed alone: blue of the one
Who looks on blue of what
Remains of cement fall
Blue of the vague crescent
Ship sailing blue of the rainbow
Of wait blue that I whore
You — blue that I adore you
Blue of the bluest door
Blue my painted city
In blue (it blew.)

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

Valentine

By Lorna Dee Cervantes

Cherry plums suck a week's soak,
overnight they explode into the scenery of before
your touch. The curtains open on the end of our past.
Pink trumpets on the vines bare to the hummingbirds.
Butterflies unclasp from the purse of their couplings, they
light and open on the doubled hands of eucalyptus fronds.
They sip from the pistils for seven generations that bear
them through another tongue as the first year of our
punishing mathematic begins clicking the calendar
forward. They land like seasoned rocks on the
decks of the cliffs. They take another turn
on the spiral of life where the blossoms
blush & pale in a day of dirty dawn
where the ghost of you webs
your limbs through branches
of cherry plum. Rare bird,
extinct color, you stay in
my dreams in x-ray. In
rerun, the bone of you
stripping sweethearts
folds and layers the
shedding petals of
my grief into a
decayed holo-
gram—my
for ever

empty
art.

I Once Was a Child

By Victoria Chang

I once was a child am a child am someone's child
not my mother's not my father's the boss
gave us special treatment treatment for something
special a lollipop or a sticker glitter from the

toy box the better we did the better the plastic prize made
in China one year everyone got a spinning top
one year everyone got a tap on their shoulders
one year everyone was fired everyone

fired but me one year we all lost our words one year
my father lost his words to a stroke
a stroke of bad luck stuck his words
used to be so worldly his words fired

him let him go without notice can they do that
can she do that yes she can in this land she can
once we sang songs around a piano *this land is your land*
this land is my land in this land someone always

owns the land in this land someone who owns
the land owns the buildings on the land owns
the people in the buildings unless an earthquake
sucks the land in like a long noodle

Mr. Darcy

By Victoria Chang

In the end she just wanted the house
and a horse not much more what
if he didn’t own the house or worse
not even a horse how do we

separate the things from a man the man from
the things is a man still the same
without his reins here it rains every fifteen
minutes it would be foolish to

marry a man without an umbrella did
Cinderella really love the prince or
just the prints on the curtains in the
ballroom once I went window-

shopping but I didn't want a window when
do you know it's time to get a new
man one who can win more things at the
fair I already have four stuffed

pandas from the fair I won fair and square
is it time to be less square to wear
something more revealing in *North and*
South she does the dealing gives him

the money in the end but she falls in love
with him when he has the money when
he is still running away if the water is
running in the other room is it wrong

for me to not want to chase it because it owns
nothing else when I wave to a man I
love what happens when another man with
a lot more bags waves back

Self-Portrait as So Much Potential

By Chen Chen

Dreaming of one day being as fearless as a mango.

As friendly as a tomato. Merciless to chin & shirtfront.

Realizing I hate the word "sip."

But that's all I do.

I drink. So slowly.

& say I'm tasting it. When I'm just bad at taking in liquid.

I'm no mango or tomato. I'm a rusty yawn in a rumored year. I'm an arctic attic.

Come amble & ampersand in the slippery polar clutter.

I am not the heterosexual neat freak my mother raised me to be.

I am a gay sipper, & my mother has placed what's left of her hope on my brothers.

She wants them to gulp up the world, spit out solid degrees, responsible grandchildren ready to gobble.

They will be better than mangoes, my brothers.

Though I have trouble imagining what that could be.

Flying mangoes, perhaps. Flying mango-tomato hybrids. Beautiful sons.

Summer

By Chen Chen

You are the ice cream sandwich connoisseur of your generation.

Blessed are your floral shorteralls, your deeply pink fanny pack with travel-size lint roller just in case.

Level of splendiferous in your outfit: 200.

Types of invisible pain stemming from adolescent disasters in classrooms, locker rooms, & quite often Toyota Camrys: at least 10,000.

You are not a jigglypuff, not yet a wigglytuff.

Reporters & fathers call your generation "the worst."

Which really means "queer kids who could go online & learn that queer doesn't have to mean disaster."

Or dead.

Instead, queer means, splendiferously, you.

& you means someone who knows that common flavors for ice cream sandwiches in Singapore include red bean, yam, & honeydew.

Your powers are great, are growing.

One day you will create an online personality quiz that also freshens the breath.

The next day you will tell your father, *You were wrong to say that I had to change*.

To make me promise I would. To make me promise.

& promise.

The Bait

By Eric Chock

Saturday mornings, before
my weekly chores,
I used to sneak out of the house
and across the street,
grabbing the first grasshopper
walking in the damp California grass
along the stream.
Carefully hiding a silver hook
beneath its green wings,
I'd float it out
across the gentle ripples
towards the end of its life.
Just like that.
I'd give it the hook
and let it ride.
All I ever expected for it
was that big-mouth bass
awaiting its arrival.
I didn't think
that I was giving up one life
to get another,
that even childhood
was full of sacrifice.
I'd just take the bright green thing,
pluck it off its only stalk,
and give it away as if
it were mine to give.
I knew someone out there
would be fooled,
that someone would accept
the precious gift.
So I just sent it along
with a plea of a prayer,
hoping it would spread its wings this time
and fly across that wet glass sky,
no concern for what inspired
its life, or mine,

only instinct guiding pain
towards the other side.

The Craftsman

By Marcus B. Christian

I ply with all the cunning of my art
This little thing, and with consummate care
I fashion it—so that when I depart,
Those who come after me shall find it fair
And beautiful. It must be free of flaws—
Pointing no laborings of weary hands;
And there must be no flouting of the laws
Of beauty—as the artist understands.

Through passion, yearnings infinite—yet dumb—
I lift you from the depths of my own mind
And gild you with my soul's white heat to plumb
The souls of future men. I leave behind
This thing that in return this solace gives:
"He who creates true beauty ever lives."

First Love

By John Clare

I ne'er was struck before that hour
  With love so sudden and so sweet,
Her face it bloomed like a sweet flower
  And stole my heart away complete.
My face turned pale as deadly pale,
  My legs refused to walk away,
And when she looked, what could I ail?
  My life and all seemed turned to clay.

And then my blood rushed to my face
  And took my eyesight quite away,
The trees and bushes round the place
  Seemed midnight at noonday.
I could not see a single thing,
  Words from my eyes did start—
They spoke as chords do from the string,
  And blood burnt round my heart.

Are flowers the winter's choice?

Is love’s bed always snow?
She seemed to hear my silent voice,
Not love's appeals to know.
I never saw so sweet a face
As that I stood before.
My heart has left its dwelling-place
And can return no more.

Love Lives Beyond the Tomb

By John Clare

Love lives beyond
The tomb, the earth, which fades like dew—
I love the fond,
The faithful, and the true

Love lives in sleep,
'Tis happiness of healthy dreams
Eve’s dews may weep,
But love delightful seems.

'Tis seen in flowers,
And in the even's pearly dew
On earth's green hours,
And in the heaven's eternal blue.

‘Tis heard in spring
When light and sunbeams, warm and kind,
On angels’ wing
Bring love and music to the wind.

And where is voice,
So young, so beautiful and sweet
As nature’s choice,
Where Spring and lovers meet?

Love lives beyond
The tomb, the earth, the flowers, and dew.
I love the fond,
The faithful, young and true.

At the Holiday Gas Station

By John Lee Clark

Near the Naked Juices I passed
A man my fingers walking
Across his back he turned and held up
A box said what
Might this be I said oh
You're tactile too what's your name
He said William Amos Miller I said
I thought you were born in 1872 he said so
You know who I am yes you're the man
Who journeyed to the center of Earth
In your mind he smiled on my arm said do
You know that the Earth also journeyed
To the center of my mind I said
I never thought of that he asked
Again about the box I shook it sniffed
Said Mike and Ike is it fruit
He inquired not exactly well
I think I shall have an apple wait
You haven't paid oh
My money nowadays is no money he pushed
Outside we walked across the ice
To the intersection he made to go across
Wait you can't go across we have to wait
For help oh help he said crouching
Until our hands touched the cold ground
He said I said we said we see
With our hands I jumped up and said you're the man

My Therapist Wants to Know about My Relationship to Work

By Tiana Clark

I hustle
upstream.
I grasp.
I grind.
I control & panic. Poke
balloons in my chest,
always popping there,
always my thoughts thump,
thump. I snooze — wake & go

boom. All day, like this I short
my breath. I scroll & scroll.
I see what you wrote — I like.
I heart. My thumb, so tired.
My head bent down, but not
in prayer, heavy from the looking.
I see your face, your phone-lit
faces. I tap your food, two times
for more hearts. I retweet.
I email: y*es* & *yes* & *yes*.
Then I cry & need to say: *no-no-no*.
Why does it take so long to reply?
I FOMO & shout. I read. I never
enough. New book. New post.
New ping. A new tab, then another.
Papers on the floor, scattered & stacked.
So many journals, unbroken white spines,
waiting. Did you hear that new new?
I start to text back. Ellipsis, then I forget.
I balk. I lazy the bed. I wallow when I write.
I truth when I lie. I throw a book
when a poem undoes me. I underline
Clifton: *today we are possible*. I start
from image. I begin with Phillis Wheatley.
I begin with Phillis Wheatley. I begin
with Phillis Wheatley reaching for coal.
I start with a napkin, receipt, or my hand.
I muscle memory. I stutter the page. I fail.
Hit delete — scratch out one more line. I sonnet,
then break form. I make tea, use two bags.
Rooibos again. I bathe now. Epsom salt.
No books or phone. Just water & the sound
of water filling, glory — be my buoyant body,
bowl of me. Yes, lavender, more bubbles
& bath bomb, of course some candles too.
All alone with Coltrane. My favorite, "Naima,"
for his wife, now for me, inside my own womb.
Again, I child back. I float. I sing. I simple
& humble. Eyes close. I low my voice,
was it a psalm? Don't know. But I stopped.

Then and Now

By Tom Clark

Then it was always

for now, later
for later.
And then years of now
passed, and it grew later
and later. Trapped
in the shrinking
chocolate box
the confused sardine
was unhappy. It
leapt, and banged its head
again. And afterward
they said shall we
repeat the experiment.
And it said
later for that.

[if mama / could see]

By Lucille Clifton

if mama
could see
she would see
lucy sprawling
limbs of lucy
decorating the
backs of chairs
lucy hair
holding the mirrors up
that reflect odd
aspects of lucy.

if mama
could hear
she would hear
lucysong rolled in the
corners like lint
exotic webs of lucysighs
long lucy spiders explaining
to obscure gods.

if mama
could talk
she would talk
good girl
good girl

good girl
clean up your room.

mulbery fields

By Lucille Clifton

they thought the field was wasting
and so they gathered the marker rocks and stones and
piled them into a barn they say that the rocks were shaped
some of them scratched with triangles and other forms they
must have been trying to invent some new language they say
the rocks went to build that wall there guarding the manor and
some few were used for the state house
crops refused to grow
i say the stones marked an old tongue and it was called eternity
and pointed toward the river i say that after that collection
no pillow in the big house dreamed i say that somewhere under
here moulders one called alice whose great grandson is old now
too and refuses to talk about slavery i say that at the
masters table only one plate is set for supper i say no seed
can flourish on this ground once planted then forsaken wild
berries warm a field of bones
bloom how you must i say

“oh antic God”

By Lucille Clifton

oh antic God
return to me
my mother in her thirties
leaned across the front porch
the huge pillow of her breasts
pressing against the rail
summoning me in for bed.

I am almost the dead woman’s age times two.

I can barely recall her song
the scent of her hands
though her wild hair scratches my dreams
at night. return to me, oh Lord of then
and now, my mother’s calling,
her young voice humming my name.

won’t you celebrate with me?

By Lucille Clifton

won't you celebrate with me
what i have shaped into
a kind of life? i had no model.
born in babylon
both nonwhite and woman
what did i see to be except myself?
i made it up
here on this bridge between
starshine and clay,
my one hand holding tight
my other hand; come celebrate
with me that everyday
something has tried to kill me
and has failed.

Say not the Struggle nought Availeth

By Arthur Hugh Clough

Say not the struggle nought availeth,
    The labour and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
    And as things have been they remain.

If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars;
    It may be, in yon smoke concealed,
Your comrades chase e'en now the fliers,
    And, but for you, possess the field.

For while the tired waves, vainly breaking
    Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back through creeks and inlets making,
    Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

And not by eastern windows only,
    When daylight comes, comes in the light,
In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly,
    But westward, look, the land is bright.

El Olvido

By Judith Ortiz Cofer

It is a dangerous thing
to forget the climate of your birthplace,
to choke out the voices of dead relatives
when in dreams they call you
by your secret name.
It is dangerous
to spurn the clothes you were born to wear
for the sake of fashion; dangerous
to use weapons and sharp instruments
you are not familiar with; dangerous
to disdain the plaster saints
before which your mother kneels
praying with embarrassing fervor
that you survive in the place you have chosen to live:
a bare, cold room with no pictures on the walls,
a forgetting place where she fears you will die
of loneliness and exposure.
Jesús, María, y José, she says,
el olvido is a dangerous thing.

Women Who Love Angels

By Judith Ortiz Cofer

They are thin
and rarely marry, living out
their long lives
in spacious rooms, French doors
giving view to formal gardens
where aromatic flowers
grow in profusion.
They play their pianos
in the late afternoon
tilting their heads
at a gracious angle
as if listening
to notes pitched above
the human range.
Age makes them translucent;
each palpitation of their hearts
visible at temple or neck.
When they die, it's in their sleep,
their spirits shaking gently loose

from a hostess too well bred
to protest.

American, I Sing You Back

By Allison Adelle Hedge Coke

for Phil Young and my father Robert Hedge Coke;
for Whitman and Hughes

America, I sing back. Sing back what sung you in.
Sing back the moment you cherished breath.
Sing you home into yourself and back to reason.

Before America began to sing, I sung her to sleep,
held her cradleboard, wept her into day.
My song gave her creation, prepared her delivery,
held her severed cord beautifully beaded.

My song helped her stand, held her hand for first steps,
nourished her very being, fed her, placed her three sisters strong.
My song comforted her as she battled my reason
broke my long-held footing sure, as any child might do.

As she pushed herself away, forced me to remove myself,
as I cried this country, my song grew roses in each tear's fall.

My blood-veined rivers, painted pipestone quarries
circled canyons, while she made herself maiden fine.

But here I am, here I am, here I remain high on each and every peak,
carefully rumbling her great underbelly, prepared to pour forth singing—

and sing again I will, as I have always done.
Never silenced unless in the company of strangers, singing
the stoic face, polite repose, polite while dancing deep inside, polite
Mother of her world. Sister of myself.

When my song sings aloud again. When I call her back to cradle.
Call her to peer into waters, to behold herself in dark and light,
day and night, call her to sing along, call her to mature, to envision—
then, she will quake herself over. My song will make it so.

When she grows far past her self-considered purpose,
I will sing her back, sing her back. I will sing. Oh I will—I do.
America, I sing back. Sing back what sung you in.

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

Haiku

By Henri Cole

After the sewage flowed into the sea
and took the oxygen away, the fishes fled,
but the jellies didn't mind. They stayed
and ate up the food the fishes left behind.
I sat on the beach in my red pajamas
and listened to the sparkling foam,
like feelings being fustigated. Nearby,
a crayfish tugged on a string. In the distance,
a man waved. Unnatural cycles seemed to be
establishing themselves, without regard to our lives.
Deep inside, I could feel a needle skip:
Autumn dark.
Murmur of the saw.
Poor humans.

Song of the Shattering Vessels

By Peter Cole

Either the world is coming together,
or else the world is falling apart —
here — now — along these letters,
against the walls of every heart.

Today, tomorrow, within its weather,
the end or beginning's about to start —
the world impossibly coming together
or very possibly falling apart.

Now the lovers' mouths are open —
maybe the miracle's about to start:
the world within us coming together,
because all around us it's falling apart.

Even as they speak, he wonders,
even as the fear departs:
Is that the world coming together?
Can they keep it from falling apart?

The image, gradually, is growing sharper;

now the sound is like a dart:
It seemed their world was coming together,
but in fact it was falling apart.

That's the nightmare, that's the terror,
that's the Isaac of this art —
which sees that the world might come together
if only we're willing to take it apart.

The dream, the lure, is the prayer's answer,
which can't be plotted on any chart —
as we know the world that's coming together
without our knowing is falling apart.

the ISM

By Wanda Coleman

tired i count the ways in which it determines my life
permeates everything. it's in the air
lives next door to me in stares of neighbors
meets me each day in the office. its music comes out the radio
drives beside me in my car. strolls along with me
down supermarket aisles
it's on television
and in the streets even when my walk is casual/undefined
it's overhead flashing lights
i find it in my mouth
when i would speak of other things

Constancy to an Ideal Object

By Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Since all that beat about in Nature's range,
Or veer or vanish; why should'st thou remain
The only constant in a world of change,
O yearning Thought! that liv'st but in the brain?
Call to the Hours, that in the distance play,
The faery people of the future day—
Fond Thought! not one of all that shining swarm
Will breathe on thee with life-enkindling breath,
Till when, like strangers shelt'ring from a storm,
Hope and Despair meet in the porch of Death!
Yet still thou haunt'st me; and though well I see,
She is not thou, and only thou are she,

Still, still as though some dear embodied Good,
Some living Love before my eyes there stood
With answering look a ready ear to lend,
I mourn to thee and say—'Ah! loveliest friend!
That this the meed of all my toils might be,
To have a home, an English home, and thee!'
Vain repetition! Home and Thou are one.
The peacefull'st cot, the moon shall shine upon,
Lulled by the thrush and wakened by the lark,
Without thee were but a becalméd bark,
Whose Helmsman on an ocean waste and wide
Sits mute and pale his mouldering helm beside.

And art thou nothing? Such thou art, as when
The woodman winding westward up the glen
At wintry dawn, where o'er the sheep-track's maze
The viewless snow-mist weaves a glist'ning haze,
Sees full before him, gliding without tread,
An image with a glory round its head;
The enamoured rustic worships its fair hues,
Nor knows he makes the shadow, he pursues!

Kubla Khan

By Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Or, a vision in a dream. A Fragment.

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
  Down to a sunless sea.
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round;
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e’er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!
And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,

As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
A mighty fountain momently was forced:
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:
And mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
It flung up momently the sacred river.
Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean;
And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
Ancestral voices prophesying war!
  The shadow of the dome of pleasure
  Floated midway on the waves;
  Where was heard the mingled measure
  From the fountain and the caves.
It was a miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!

  A damsel with a dulcimer
  In a vision once I saw:
  It was an Abyssinian maid
  And on her dulcimer she played,
  Singing of Mount Abora.
  Could I revive within me
  Her symphony and song,
  To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

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

Work without Hope

By Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Lines Composed 21st February 1825

All Nature seems at work. Slugs leave their lair—
The bees are stirring—birds are on the wing—
And Winter slumbering in the open air,
Wears on his smiling face a dream of Spring!
And I the while, the sole unbusy thing,
Nor honey make, nor pair, nor build, nor sing.

Yet well I ken the banks where amaranths blow,
Have traced the fount whence streams of nectar flow.
Bloom, O ye amaranths! bloom for whom ye may,
For me ye bloom not! Glide, rich streams, away!
With lips unbrightened, wreathless brow, I stroll:
And would you learn the spells that drowse my soul?
Work without Hope draws nectar in a sieve,
And Hope without an object cannot live.

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

Sestina in Prose

By Katharine Coles

It was like climbing a mountain to those of us who'd climbed one. To the others, it was like, I suppose, something else. In other words, we let everybody find her own figure of speech.

Not that it—speech—lay thick on the ground, or mountain; it presented itself one word at a time, far between. A body had to keep an eye out, like for firewood at dusk, or else

miss her chance. Nobody else, let's face it, cared about metaphor, or even simile, the like-it-or-not-ness of the mountain pretty much getting between a body and her musing, in its going. One

step at a time, anyone could lose herself or someone else just staring at her feet. And *if a body meet a body* is not mere speech but something that could happen, like hopping a bus—though on the mountain

you'll catch no rides, worse luck, the mountain requires to be climbed on foot, one after the other, nothing else will get you up it. There's nothing like such obduracy but in the wild, nobody can tell you otherwise. No simple figure,

this struggle: just a crag, your burden, and your own two feet. Say otherwise, talk through your hat, which I don't care for.

Snow Day

By Billy Collins

Today we woke up to a revolution of snow,
its white flag waving over everything,
the landscape vanished,
not a single mouse to punctuate the blankness,
and beyond these windows

the government buildings smothered,
schools and libraries buried, the post office lost
under the noiseless drift,
the paths of trains softly blocked,
the world fallen under this falling.

In a while, I will put on some boots
and step out like someone walking in water,
and the dog will porpoise through the drifts,
and I will shake a laden branch
sending a cold shower down on us both.

But for now I am a willing prisoner in this house,
a sympathizer with the anarchic cause of snow.
I will make a pot of tea
and listen to the plastic radio on the counter,
as glad as anyone to hear the news

that the Kiddie Corner School is closed,
the Ding-Dong School, closed.
the All Aboard Children's School, closed,
the Hi-Ho Nursery School, closed,
along with—some will be delighted to hear—

the Toadstool School, the Little School,
Little Sparrows Nursery School,
Little Stars Pre-School, Peas-and-Carrots Day School
the Tom Thumb Child Center, all closed,
and—clap your hands—the Peanuts Play School.

So this is where the children hide all day,
These are the nests where they letter and draw,
where they put on their bright miniature jackets,

all darting and climbing and sliding,
all but the few girls whispering by the fence.

And now I am listening hard
in the grandiose silence of the snow,
trying to hear what those three girls are plotting,
what riot is afoot,
which small queen is about to be brought down.

Today

By Billy Collins

If ever there were a spring day so perfect,
so uplifted by a warm intermittent breeze

that it made you want to throw
open all the windows in the house

and unlatch the door to the canary's cage,
indeed, rip the little door from its jamb,

a day when the cool brick paths
and the garden bursting with peonies

seemed so etched in sunlight
that you felt like taking

a hammer to the glass paperweight
on the living room end table,

releasing the inhabitants
from their snow-covered cottage

so they could walk out,
holding hands and squinting

into this larger dome of blue and white,
well, today is just that kind of day.

Ecology

By Jack Collom

Surrounded by bone, surrounded by cells,
by rings, by rings of hell, by hair, surrounded by

air-is-a-thing, surrounded by silhouette, by honey-wet bees, yet
by skeletons of trees, surrounded by actual, yes, for practical
purposes, people, surrounded by surreal
popcorn, surrounded by the reborn: Surrender in the center
to surroundings. O surrender forever, never
end her, let her blend around, surrender to the surroundings that
surround the tender endo-surrender, that
tumble through the tumbling to that blue that
curls around the crumbling, to that, the blue that
rumbles under the sun bounding the pearl that
we walk on, talk on; we can chalk that
up to experience, sensing the brown here that's
blue now, a drop of water surrounding a cow that's
black & white, the warbling Blackburnian twitter that's
machining midnight orange in the light that's
glittering in the light green visible wind. That's
the ticket to the tunnel through the thicket that's
a cricket's funnel of music to correct & pick it out
from under the wing that whirls up over & out.

son/daughter

By Kai Conradi

In a dream my dad fell

from the top of a steep white mountain

down into a blue crevasse
like the space between two waves
where the light shines through just enough
to tell you
you will miss this life dearly.

The falling took years.

I could hear him moving through air and then finally nothing.

In another dream my dad was an angel

his see-through body dangling in the air

floating above me face shimmery like tinfoil

and I cried and cried when he told me

I can't come back to earth now not ever.

When my dad told me

You will always be my daughter

maybe it was like that.

Will I be allowed to come back to earth

and be your son?

The Faithful

By Jane Cooper

Once you said joking slyly, *If I'm killed*
I'll come to haunt your solemn bed,
I'll stand and glower at the head
And see if my place is empty still, or filled.

What was it woke me in the early darkness
Before the first bird's twittering?
—A shape dissolving and flittering
Unsteady as a flame in a drafty house.

It seemed a concentration of the dark burning
By the bedpost at my right hand
While to my left that no man's land
Of sheet stretched palely as a false morning....

All day I have been sick and restless. This evening
Curtained, with all the lights on,
I start up—only to sit down.
Why should I grieve after ten years of grieving?

What if last night I was the one who lay dead
While the dead burned beside me
Trembling with passionate pity
At my blameless life and shaking its flamelike head?

Lissadell

By Wendy Cope

Last year we went to Lissadell.
The sun shone over Sligo Bay
And life was good and all was well.

The bear, the books, the dinner bell,
An air of dignified decay.
Last year we went to Lissadell.

This year the owners had to sell—
It calls to mind a Chekhov play.
Once life was good and all was well.

The house is now an empty shell,
The contents auctioned, shipped away.
Last year we went to Lissadell

And found it magical. “We fell
In love with it,” we sometimes say
When life is good and all is well.

The light of evening. A gazelle.
It seemed unchanged since Yeats’s day.
Last year we went to Lissadell
And life was good and all was well.

Wonderbread

By Alfred Corn

Loaf after loaf, in several sizes,
and never does it not look fresh,
as though its insides weren’t moist
or warm crust not the kind that spices
a room with the plump aroma of toast.

Found on the table; among shadows
next to the kitchen phone; dispatched
FedEx (without return address, though).
Someone, possibly more than one
person, loves me. Well then, who?

Amazing that bread should be so weightless,
down-light when handled, as a me

dying to taste it takes a slice.
Which lasts just long enough to reach
my mouth, but then, at the first bite,

Nothing! Nothing but air, thin air ....
Oh. One more loaf of wonderbread,
only a pun for bread, seductive
visually, but you could starve.
Get rid of it, throw it in the river—

Beyond which, grain fields. Future food for the just
and the unjust, those who love, and do not love.

NUMBERS

By Mary Cornish

I like the generosity of numbers.
The way, for example,
they are willing to count
anything or anyone:
two pickles, one door to the room,
eight dancers dressed as swans.

I like the domesticity of addition—
add two cups of milk and stir—
the sense of plenty: six plums
on the ground, three more
falling from the tree.

And multiplication's school
of fish times fish,
whose silver bodies breed
beneath the shadow
of a boat.

Even subtraction is never loss,
just addition somewhere else:
five sparrows take away two,
the two in someone else's
garden now.

There's an amplitude to long division,
as it opens Chinese take-out
box by paper box,
inside every folded cookie

a new fortune.

And I never fail to be surprised
by the gift of an odd remainder,
footloose at the end:
forty-seven divided by eleven equals four,
with three remaining.

Three boys beyond their mother's call,
two Italians off to the sea,
one sock that isn't anywhere you look.

To the Angelbeast

By Eduardo C. Corral

For Arthur Russell

All that glitters isn't music.

Once, hidden in tall grass,
I tossed fistfuls of dirt into the air:
doe after doe of leaping.

You said it was nothing
but a trick of the light. Gold
curves. Gold scarves.

Am I not your animal?

You'd wait in the orchard for hours
to watch a deer
break from the shadows.

You said it was like lifting a cello
out of its black case.

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

Under the Edge of February

By Jayne Cortez

Under the edge of february
in hawk of a throat

hidden by ravines of sweet oil
by temples of switchblades
beautiful in its sound of fertility
beautiful in its turban of funeral crepe
beautiful in its camouflage of grief
in its solitude of bruises
in its arson of alert

Who will enter its beautiful calligraphy of blood

Its beautiful mask of fish net
mask of hubcaps mask of ice picks mask
of watermelon rinds mask of umbilical cords
changing into a mask of rubber bands
Who will enter this beautiful beautiful mask of
punctured bladders moving with a mask of chapsticks

Compound of Hearts Compound of Hearts

Where is the lucky number for this shy love
this top-heavy beauty bathed with charcoal water
self-conscious against a mosaic of broken bottles
broken locks broken pipes broken
bloods of broken spirits broken through like
broken promises

Landlords Junkies Thieves
enthroning themselves in you
they burn up couches they burn down houses
and infuse themselves against memory
every thought
a pavement of old belts
every performance
a ceremonial pickup
how many more orphans how many more neglected shrines
how many stolen feet stolen fingers
stolen watchbands of death
in you how many times

Harlem

hidden by ravines of sweet oil
by temples of switchblades
beautiful in your sound of fertility
beautiful in your turban of funeral crepe
beautiful in your camouflage of grief

in your solitude of bruises
in your arson of alert
beautiful

Dr. Booker T. Washington to the National Negro Business League

By Joseph Seamon Cotter Sr.

’Tis strange indeed to hear us plead
  For selling and for buying
When yesterday we said: “Away
  With all good things but dying.”

The world’s ago, and we’re agog
  To have our first brief inning;
So let’s away through surge and fog
  However slight the winning.

What deeds have sprung from plow and pick!
  What bank-rolls from tomatoes!
No dainty crop of rhetoric
  Can match one of potatoes.

Ye orators of point and pith,
  Who force the world to heed you,
What skeletons you’ll journey with
  Ere it is forced to feed you.

A little gold won’t mar our grace,
  A little ease our glory.
This world’s a better biding place
  When money clinks its story.

Light Shining out of Darkness

By William Cowper

1
God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

2
Deep in unfathomable mines

Of never-failing skill,
He treasures up his bright designs,
And works his sov'reign will.

3
Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

4
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

5
His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding ev'ry hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flow'r.

6
Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain.

For the Climbers

By Kevin Craft

Among the many lives you'll never lead,
consider that of the wolverine, for whom avalanche
is opportunity, who makes a festival
of frozen marrow from the femur of an elk,
who wears the crooked North Star like an amulet

of teeth. In the game of which animal
would you return as, today I'm thinking
snowshoe hare, a scuffle in the underbrush,
one giant leap. You never see them
coming and going, only the crosshairs

of their having passed, ascending the ridge, lost
or not lost in succession forests giving way

to open meadow where deep snow
lingers and finally relents, uncovering
acres of lily — glacier yellow, avalanche

white — daylight restaking its earthly claim.
Every season swallows someone —
Granite Mountain with its blunderbuss
gullies, Tatoosh a lash on the tongue,
those climbers caught if not unawares

then perfectly hapless, not thinking of riding
that snowstorm to the summit, not thinking
wolverine fever in the shivering blood,
not thinking steelhead cutthroat rainbow
or the languid river that will carry them out.

Night Nurse

By Michael Earl Craig

This night nurse is different.
She walks into my room and does not turn the light on.
She thinks I am sleeping.
I have just barely opened my left eye,
am looking through the slightest slit,
as moonlight exposes the room
for what it really is — a collection
of surfaces; lines and planes, mostly.
The night nurse puts a foot up on the radiator
and braces her clipboard on her knee
as she appears to take down a few notes.
I imagine she is working on a sonnet,
and that her ankle looks like polished walnut.
You imagine she is working on a crossword,
and that her feet are killing her.
The slightest slit is like an old gate
at a Japanese tea garden at night,
in the rain, that is supposed to be closed,
that is supposed to be locked.
“Someone has locked up poorly,” you’d say.
“Incorrectly.” But no one has asked you.

At Melville's Tomb

By Hart Crane

Often beneath the wave, wide from this ledge
The dice of drowned men's bones he saw bequeath
An embassy. Their numbers as he watched,
Beat on the dusty shore and were obscured.

And wrecks passed without sound of bells,
The calyx of death's bounty giving back
A scattered chapter, livid hieroglyph,
The portent wound in corridors of shells.

Then in the circuit calm of one vast coil,
Its lashings charmed and malice reconciled,
Frosted eyes there were that lifted altars;
And silent answers crept across the stars.

Compass, quadrant and sextant contrive
No farther tides … High in the azure steeps
Monody shall not wake the mariner.
This fabulous shadow only the sea keeps.

In the Desert

By Stephen Crane

In the desert
I saw a creature, naked, bestial,
Who, squatting upon the ground,
Held his heart in his hands,
And ate of it.
I said, "Is it good, friend?"
"It is bitter—bitter," he answered;

"But I like it
"Because it is bitter,
"And because it is my heart."

The Properly Scholarly Attitude

By Adelaide Crapsey

The poet pursues his beautiful theme;
The preacher his golden beatitude;
And I run after a vanishing dream—

The glittering, will-o'-the-wispish gleam
Of the properly scholarly attitude—
The highly desirable, the very advisable,
The hardly acquirable, properly scholarly attitude.

I envy the savage without any clothes,
Who lives in a tropical latitude;
It's little of general culture he knows.
But then he escapes the worrisome woes
Of the properly scholarly attitude—
The unceasingly sighed over, wept over, cried over,
The futilely died over, properly scholarly attitude.

I work and I work till I nearly am dead,
And could say what the watchman said—that I could!
But still, with a sigh and a shake of the head,
"You don't understand," it is ruthlessly said,
"The properly scholarly attitude—
The aye to be sought for, wrought for and fought for,
The ne'er to be caught for, properly scholarly attitude—"

I really am sometimes tempted to say
That it's merely a glittering platitude;
That people have just fallen into the way,
When lacking a subject, to tell of the sway
Of the properly scholarly attitude—
The easily preachable, spread-eagle speechable,
In practice unreachable, properly scholarly attitude.

For Love

By Robert Creeley

for Bobbie

Yesterday I wanted to
speak of it, that sense above
the others to me
important because all

that I know derives
from what it teaches me.
Today, what is it that
is finally so helpless,

different, despairs of its own

statement, wants to
turn away, endlessly
to turn away.

If the moon did not ...
no, if you did not
I wouldn’t either, but
what would I not

do, what prevention, what
thing so quickly stopped.
That is love yesterday
or tomorrow, not

now. Can I eat
what you give me. I
have not earned it. Must
I think of everything

as earned. Now love also
becomes a reward so
remote from me I have
only made it with my mind.

Here is tedium,
despair, a painful
sense of isolation and
whimsical if pompous

self-regard. But that image
is only of the mind’s
vague structure, vague to me
because it is my own.

Love, what do I think
to say. I cannot say it.
What have you become to ask,
what have I made you into,

companion, good company,
crossed legs with skirt, or
soft body under
the bones of the bed.

Nothing says anything
but that which it wishes

would come true, fears
what else might happen in

some other place, some
other time not this one.
A voice in my place, an
echo of that only in yours.

Let me stumble into
not the confession but
the obsession I begin with
now. For you

also (also)
some time beyond place, or
place beyond time, no
mind left to

say anything at all,
that face gone, now.
Into the company of love
it all returns.

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

The Rain

By Robert Creeley

All night the sound had
come back again,
and again falls
this quiet, persistent rain.

What am I to myself
that must be remembered,
insisted upon
so often? Is it

that never the ease,
even the hardness,
of rain falling
will have for me

something other than this,

something not so insistent—
am I to be locked in this
final uneasiness.

Love, if you love me,
lie next to me.
Be for me, like rain,
the getting out

of the tiredness, the fatuousness, the semi-
lust of intentional indifference.
Be wet
with a decent happiness.

Self-Portrait

By Robert Creeley

He wants to be
a brutal old man,
an aggressive old man,
as dull, as brutal
as the emptiness around him,

He doesn't want compromise,
nor to be ever nice
to anyone. Just mean,
and final in his brutal,
his total, rejection of it all.

He tried the sweet,
the gentle, the "oh,
let's hold hands together"
and it was awful,
dull, brutally inconsequential.

Now he'll stand on
his own dwindling legs.
His arms, his skin,
shrink daily. And
he loves, but hates equally.

Somewhere

By Robert Creeley

The galloping collection of boards
are the house which I afforded
one evening to walk into
just as the night came down.

Dark inside, the candle
lit of its own free will, the attic
groaned then, the stairs
led me up into the air.

From outside, it must have seemed
a wonder that it was
the inside *he* as *me* saw
in the dark there.

The World

By Robert Creeley

I wanted so ably
to reassure you, I wanted
the man you took to be me,

to comfort you, and got
up, and went to the window,
pushed back, as you asked me to,

the curtain, to see
the outline of the trees
in the night outside.

The light, love,
the light we felt then,
greyly, was it, that

came in, on us, not
merely my hands or yours,
or a wetness so comfortable,

but in the dark then
as you slept, the grey
figure came so close

and leaned over,
between us, as you
slept, restless, and

my own face had to
see it, and be seen by it,
the man it was, your

grey lost tired bewildered
brother, unused, untaken—
hated by love, and dead,

but not dead, for an
instant, saw me, myself
the intruder, as he was not.

I tried to say, it is
all right, she is
happy, you are no longer

needed. I said,
he is dead, and he
went as you shifted

and woke, at first afraid,
then knew by my own knowing
what had happened—

and the light then
of the sun coming
for another morning
in the world.

Sparklers

By Barbara Crooker

We're writing our names with sizzles of light
to celebrate the fourth. I use the loops of cursive,
make a big *B* like the sloping hills on the west side
of the lake. The rest, little *a*, *r*, one small *b*,
spit and fizz as they scratch the night. On the side
of the shack where we bought them, a handmade sign:
Trailer Full of Sparkles Ahead, and I imagine crazy
chrysanthemums, wheels of fire, glitter bouncing
off metal walls. Here, we keep tracing in tiny

pyrotechnics the letters we were given at birth,
branding them on the air. And though my mother's
name has been erased now, I write it, too:
a big swooping *I*, a hissing *s*, an *a* that sighs
like her last breath, and then I ring
belle, belle, belle in the sulphuric smoky dark.

Strewn

By Barbara Crooker

It'd been a long winter, rags of snow hanging on; then, at the end
of April, an icy nor'easter, powerful as a hurricane. But now
I've landed on the coast of Maine, visiting a friend who lives
two blocks from the ocean, and I can't believe my luck,
out this mild morning, race-walking along the strand.
Every dog within fifty miles is off-leash, running
for the sheer dopey joy of it. No one's in the water,
but walkers and shellers leave their tracks on the hardpack.
The flat sand shines as if varnished in a painting. Underfoot,
strewn, are broken bits and pieces, deep indigo mussels, whorls
of whelk, chips of purple and white wampum, hinges of quahog,
fragments of sand dollars. Nothing whole, everything
broken, washed up here, stranded. The light pours down, a rinse
of lemon on a cold plate. All of us, broken, some way
or other. All of us dazzling in the brilliant slanting light.

Midnight Office

By Cynthia Cruz

The child is not dead.
She is sleeping.

Gone from this world
Which is broken.

The angel of Michael
Outside the garden
His circle of fire
Maddening around the tree.

He put the word
Back into her:
A heavy kind of music.

Then she was free.
As we all are.

All night I stood in the icy wind,
Praying for the storm to destroy me.

But the wind blew through me
Like I was a hologram.

If you say I am a mystic,
Then fine: I'm a mystic.

The trees are not trees, anyway.

Here is an Ear Hear

By Victor Hernández Cruz

Is the ocean really inside seashells
or is it all in your mind?
—PICHON DE LA ONCE

Behold and soak like a sponge.
I have discovered that the island of Puerto Rico
is the ears of Saru-Saru, a poet reputed to have lived
in Atlantis. On the day that the water kissed and
embraced and filled all the holes of that giant
missing link, this bard's curiosity was the greatest
for he kept swimming and listening for causes.
He picked up rocks before they sank and blew
wind viciously into them. Finally he blew so hard
into a rock that he busted his ear drums; angry,
he recited poems as he tried turning into a bird
to fly to green Brazil. His left ear opened up
like a canal and a rock lodged in it. Rock attracts
rock and many rocks attached to this rock. It got
like a rocket. His ear stayed with it in a horizontal
position. Finally after so many generations he got
to hear what he most wanted: the sounds made by flowers
as they stretched into the light. Behold, I have
discovered that the island of Puerto Rico is the
ears of Saru-Saru.

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

Two Guitars

By Victor Hernández Cruz

Two guitars were left in a room all alone
They sat on different corners of the parlor
In this solitude they started talking to each other
My strings are tight and full of tears
The man who plays me has no heart
I have seen it leave out of his mouth
I have seen it melt out of his eyes
It dives into the pores of the earth
When they squeeze me tight I bring
Down the angels who live off the chorus
The trios singing loosen organs
With melodious screwdrivers
Sentiment comes off the hinges
Because a song is a mountain put into
Words and landscape is the feeling that
Enters something so big in the harmony
We are always in danger of blowing up
With passion
The other guitar:
In 1944 New York
When the Trio Los Panchos started
With Mexican & Puerto Rican birds
I am the one that one of them held
Tight like a woman
Their throats gardenia gardens
An airport for dreams
I've been in theaters and cabarets
I played in an apartment on 102nd street
After a baptism pregnant with women
The men flirted and were offered
Chicken soup
Echoes came out of hallways as if from caves
Someone is opening the door now
The two guitars hushed and there was a
Resonance in the air like what is left by
The last chord of a bolero.

[Buffalo Bill ’s]

By E. E. Cummings

Buffalo Bill ’s
defunct

who used to
ride a watersmooth-silver
stallion
and break onetwothreefourfive pigeonsjustlikethat
Jesus

he was a handsome man
and what i want to know is
how do you like your blue-eyed boy
Mister Death

[i carry your heart wth me(i carry it in]

By E. E. Cummings

i carry your heart with me(i carry it in
my heart)i am never without it(anywhere
i go you go,my dear;and whatever is done
by only me is your doing,my darling)
i fear
no fate(for you are my fate,my sweet)i want
no world(for beautiful you are my world,my true)
and it’s you are whatever a moon has always meant
and whatever a sun will always sing is you

here is the deepest secret nobody knows
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life;which grows
higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart

i carry your heart(i carry it in my heart)

[in Just-]

By E. E. Cummings

in Just-
spring when the world is mud-
luscious the little
lame balloonman

whistles far and wee

and eddieandbill come
running from marbles and

piracies and it's
spring

when the world is puddle-wonderful

the queer
old balloonman whistles
far and wee
and bettyandisbel come dancing

from hop-scotch and jump-rope and

it's
spring
and

the

goat-footed

balloonMan whistles
far
and
wee

For My Contemporaries

By J. V. Cunningham

How time reverses
The proud in heart!
I now make verses
Who aimed at art.

But I sleep well.
Ambitious boys
Whose big lines swell
With spiritual noise,

Despise me not!
And be not queasy
To praise somewhat:
Verse is not easy.

But rage who will.
Time that procured me

Good sense and skill
Of madness cured me.

Tonight I Can Almost Hear the Singing

By Silvia Curbelo

There is a music to this sadness.
In a room somewhere two people dance.
I do not mean to say desire is everything.
A cup half empty is simply half a cup.
How many times have we been there and not there?
I have seen waitresses slip a night's
worth of tips into the jukebox, their eyes
saying *yes* to nothing in particular.
Desire is not the point.
Tonight your name is a small thing
falling through sadness. We wake alone
in houses of sticks, of straw, of wind.
How long have we stood at the end of the pier
watching that water going?
In the distance the lights curve along
Tampa Bay, a wishbone ready to snap
and the night riding on that half promise,
a half moon to light the whole damned sky.
This is the way things are with us.
Sometimes we love almost enough.
We say *I can do this, I can do*
more than this and faith feeds
on its own version of the facts.
In the end the heart turns on itself
like hunger to a spoon.
We make a wish in a vanishing landscape.
Sadness is one more reference point
like music in the distance.
Two people rise from a kitchen table
as if to dance. What do they know
about love?

The Garden

By H. D.

I

You are clear

O rose, cut in rock,
hard as the descent of hail.

I could scrape the colour
from the petals
like spilt dye from a rock.

If I could break you
I could break a tree.

If I could stir
I could break a tree—
I could break you.

II

O wind, rend open the heat,
cut apart the heat,
rend it to tatters.

Fruit cannot drop
through this thick air—
fruit cannot fall into heat
that presses up and blunts
the points of pears
and rounds the grapes.

Cut the heat—
plough through it,
turning it on either side
of your path.

Helen

By H. D.

All Greece hates
the still eyes in the white face,
the lustre as of olives
where she stands,
and the white hands.

All Greece reviles
the wan face when she smiles,
hating it deeper still

when it grows wan and white,
remembering past enchantments
and past ills.

Greece sees unmoved,
God's daughter, born of love,
the beauty of cool feet
and slenderest knees,
could love indeed the maid,
only if she were laid,
white ash amid funereal cypresses.

Leda

By H. D.

Where the slow river
meets the tide,
a red swan lifts red wings
and darker beak,
and underneath the purple down
of his soft breast
uncurls his coral feet.

Through the deep purple
of the dying heat
of sun and mist,
the level ray of sun-beam
has caressed
the lily with dark breast,
and flecked with richer gold
its golden crest.

Where the slow lifting
of the tide,
floats into the river
and slowly drifts
among the reeds,
and lifts the yellow flags,
he floats
where tide and river meet.

Ah kingly kiss—
no more regret
nor old deep memories
to mar the bliss;

where the low sedge is thick,
the gold day-lily
outspreads and rests
beneath soft fluttering
of red swan wings
and the warm quivering
of the red swan's breast.

Sheltered Garden

By H. D.

I have had enough.
I gasp for breath.

Every way ends, every road,
every foot-path leads at last
to the hill-crest—
then you retrace your steps,
or find the same slope on the other side,
precipitate.

I have had enough—
border-pinks, clove-pinks, wax-lilies,
herbs, sweet-cress.

O for some sharp swish of a branch—
there is no scent of resin
in this place,
no taste of bark, of coarse weeds,
aromatic, astringent—
only border on border of scented pinks.

Have you seen fruit under cover
that wanted light—
pears wadded in cloth,
protected from the frost,
melons, almost ripe,
smothered in straw?

Why not let the pears cling
to the empty branch?
All your coaxing will only make
a bitter fruit—
let them cling, ripen of themselves,
test their own worth,

nipped, shrivelled by the frost,
to fall at last but fair
with a russet coat.

Or the melon—
let it bleach yellow
in the winter light,
even tart to the taste—
it is better to taste of frost—
the exquisite frost—
than of wadding and of dead grass.

For this beauty,
beauty without strength,
chokes out life.
I want wind to break,
scatter these pink-stalks,
snap off their spiced heads,
fling them about with dead leaves—
spread the paths with twigs,
limbs broken off,
trail great pine branches,
hurled from some far wood
right across the melon-patch,
break pear and quince—
leave half-trees, torn, twisted
but showing the fight was valiant.

O to blot out this garden
to forget, to find a new beauty
in some terrible
wind-tortured place.

Passive Voice

By Laura Da’

I use a trick to teach students
how to avoid passive voice.

Circle the verbs.
Imagine inserting “by zombies”
after each one.

Have the words been claimed
by the flesh-hungry undead?

If so, passive voice.

I wonder if these
sixth graders will recollect,
on summer vacation,
as they stretch their legs
on the way home
from Yellowstone or Yosemite
and the byway's historical marker
beckons them to the
site of an Indian village—

Where *trouble was brewing.*
Where, *after further hostilities, the army was directed to enter.*
Where *the village was razed after the skirmish occurred.*
Where *most were women and children.*

Riveted bramble of passive verbs
etched in wood—
stripped hands
breaking up from the dry ground
to pinch the meat
of their young red tongues.

Delia 33: When men shall find thy flower, thy glory, pass

By Samuel Daniel

When men shall find thy flower, thy glory, pass,
And thou with careful brow sitting alone
Received hast this message from thy glass,
That tells thee truth and says that all is gone:
Fresh shalt thou see in me the wounds thou madest,
Though spent thy flame, in me the heat remaining;
I that have lov'd thee thus before thou fadest,
My faith shall wax when thou art in thy waning.
The world shall find this miracle in me,
That fire can burn when all the matter's spent;
Then what my faith hath been thyself shall see,
And that thou wast unkind thou mayst repent.
Thou mayst repent that thou hast scorn'd my tears,
When winter snows upon thy golden hairs.

The Robots are Coming

By Kyle Dargan

with clear-cased woofers for heads,
no eyes. They see us as a bat sees
a mosquito—a fleshy echo,
a morsel of sound. You've heard
their intergalactic tour busses
purring at our stratosphere's curb.
They await counterintelligence
transmissions from our laptops
and our blue teeth, await word
of humanity's critical mass,
our ripening. How many times
have we dreamed it this way:
the Age of the Machines,
postindustrial terrors whose
tempered paws—five welded fingers
—wrench back our roofs,
siderophilic tongues seeking blood,
licking the crumbs of us from our beds.
O, great nation, it won't be pretty.
What land will we now barter
for our lives ? A treaty inked
in advance of the metal ones' footfall.
Give them Gary. Give them Detroit,
Pittsburgh, Braddock—those forgotten
nurseries of girders and axels.
Tell the machines we honor their dead,
distant cousins. Tell them
we tendered those cities to repose
out of respect for welded steel's
bygone era. Tell them Ford
and Carnegie were giant men, that war
glazed their palms with gold.
Tell them we soft beings mourn
manufacture's death as our own.

Across the Bay

By Donald Davie

A queer thing about those waters: there are no
Birds there, or hardly any.
I did not miss them, I do not remember
Missing them, or thinking it uncanny.

The beach so-called was a blinding splinter of limestone,
A quarry outraged by hulls.
We took pleasure in that: the emptiness, the hardness
Of the light, the silence, and the water's stillness.

But this was the setting for one of our murderous scenes.
This hurt, and goes on hurting:
The venomous soft jelly, the undersides.
We could stand the world if it were hard all over.

Four Glimpses of Night

By Frank Marshall Davis

I

Eagerly
Like a woman hurrying to her lover
Night comes to the room of the world
And lies, yielding and content
Against the cool round face
Of the moon.

II

Night is a curious child, wandering
Between earth and sky, creeping
In windows and doors, daubing
The entire neighborhood
With purple paint.
Day
Is an apologetic mother
Cloth in hand
Following after.

III

Peddling
From door to door
Night sells
Black bags of peppermint stars
Heaping cones of vanilla moon
Until
His wares are gone
Then shuffles homeward

Jingling the gray coins
Of daybreak.

IV

Night's brittle song, sliver-thin
Shatters into a billion fragments
Of quiet shadows
At the blaring jazz
Of a morning sun.

Horns

By Kwame Dawes

In every crowd, there is the one
with horns, casually moving through
the bodies as if this is the living

room of a creature with horns,
a long cloak and the song of tongues
on the lips of the body. To see

the horns, one's heart rate must
reach one hundred and seventy
five beats per minute, at a rate

faster than the blink of an eye,
for the body with horns lives
in the space between the blink

and light — slow down the blink
and somewhere in the white space
between sight and sightlessness

is twilight, and in that place,
that gap, the stop-time, the horn-
headed creatures appear,

spinning, dancing, strolling
through the crowd; and in the
fever of revelation, you will

understand why the shaman
is filled with the hubris
of creation, why the healer

forgets herself and feels like
angels about to take flight.
My head throbs under

the mosquito mesh, the drums
do not stop through the night,
the one with horns feeds

me sour porridge and nuts
and sways, *Welcome, welcome*.

Vagrants and Loiterers

By Kwame Dawes

South Carolina, c.1950

You got that clean waistcoat,
the bright white of a well-tailored
shirt, you got those loose-as-sacks
slacks and some spit-polished shoes,
and you know, whether you are looking
like money, or about to take a stroll,
to tilt that hat like you own
the world; yeah, smoke your pipe,
roll your tobacco, and hold loose
as authority, your muscles, lithe
and hard; and every so often, when
you feel the urge, you reach into the waist
pocket and pull out that watch on its
chain, then look in the sky and say
Gonna be a cold one when it come,
like God gave you that fancy clock
to tell the future. These are the easy
boys of the goodly South; waiting for
what is out of frame to happen:
the sheriff with his questions, the
paddy wagon, the chain gang, the weight
of the world. Waiting, with such delicate
dignity, fickle as the seasonal sky.

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

Portrait of My Gender as [Inaudible]

By Meg Day

I knew I was a god
when you could not
agree on my name

& still, none you spoke
could force me to listen
closer. Is this the nothing

the antelope felt when
Adam, lit on his own
entitling, dubbed family,

genus, species? So many
descendants became
doctors, delivered

babies, bestowed bodies
names as if to say it is to make it
so. Can it be a comfort between

us, the fact of my creation?
I was made in the image
of a thing without

an image & silence, too,
is your invention. Who prays
for a god except to appear

with answers, but never
a body? A voice? If I told you
you wouldn't believe me

because I was the one
to say it. On the first day
there was no sound

worth mentioning. If I, too,
am a conductor of air, the only
praise I know is in stereo

(one pair—an open hand & closed
fist—will have to do). I made
a photograph of my name:

there was a shadow in a field
& I put my shadow in it. You
can’t hear me, but I’m there.

Inheritance

By Tyree Daye

My mother will leave me her mother's deep-black
cast-iron skillet someday,
                I will fry okra in it,
weigh my whole life on its black handle,
lift it up to feel a people in my hand.
I will cook dinner
for my mother on her rusting, bleached stove
with this oiled star.
My mother made her body crooked
all her life to afford this little wooden blue house.
I want her green thumbs

wound around a squash's neck

to be wound around my wrist

telling me to stay longer. O what she grew with the dust

dancing in blue hours. What will happen to her body

left in the ground, to the bodies in the street,

the uncles turned to ash on the fireplace mantles

the cousins we've misplaced?

How many people make up this wound?

No one taught my mother how to bring us back to life,

so no one taught me.

O what we gather and O Lord

bless what we pass on.

The Listeners

By Walter de La Mare

‘Is there anybody there?’ said the Traveller,
  Knocking on the moonlit door;
And his horse in the silence champed the grasses
  Of the forest’s ferny floor:
And a bird flew up out of the turret,
  Above the Traveller’s head:
And he smote upon the door again a second time;
  ‘Is there anybody there?’ he said.
But no one descended to the Traveller;
  No head from the leaf-fringed sill
Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes,
  Where he stood perplexed and still.
But only a host of phantom listeners
  That dwelt in the lone house then
Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight
  To that voice from the world of men:
Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair,
  That goes down to the empty hall,
Hearkening in an air stirred and shaken
  By the lonely Traveller’s call.
And he felt in his heart their strangeness,
  Their stillness answering his cry,
While his horse moved, cropping the dark turf,
  ’Neath the starred and leafy sky;
For he suddenly smote on the door, even
  Louder, and lifted his head:—
‘Tell them I came, and no one answered,
  That I kept my word,’ he said.
Never the least stir made the listeners,
  Though every word he spake
Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house
  From the one man left awake:
Ay, they heard his foot upon the stirrup,
  And the sound of iron on stone,
And how the silence surged softly backward,
  When the plunging hoofs were gone.

Under the Lemon Tree

By Marsha De La O

Not rain, but fine mist
falls from my lemon tree,

a balm of droplets in green shadow.

Six years now my mother gone to earth.
This dew, light as footsteps of the dead.
She often walked out here, craned her neck,
considered the fruit, hundreds of globes
in their leathery hides, figuring on
custard and pudding, meringue and
hollandaise.

But her plans didn't work out.

The tree goes on unceasingly—lemons fall
and fold into earth and begin again—
me, I come here as a salve against heat,
come to languish, to let the soft bursts—
essence of citrus, summer's distillate—
drift into my face and settle. Water and gold
brew in the quiet deeps at the far end
of the season. Leaves swallow the body
of light and the breath of water brims over.

My hands cup each other the way hers did.

How I Learned Bliss

By Oliver de la Paz

I spied everything. The North Dakota license,

the “Baby on Board” signs, dead raccoons, and deer carcasses.

The Garfields clinging to car windows—the musky traces of old coffee.

I was single-minded in the buzz saw tour I took through

the flatlands of the country to get home. I just wanted to get there.

Never mind the antecedent. I had lost stations miles ago

and was living on cassettes and caffeine. Ahead, brushstrokes

of smoke from annual fires. Only ahead to the last days of summer

and to the dying theme of youth. How pitch-perfect

the tire-on-shoulder sound was to mask the hiss of the tape deck ribbons.

Everything. Perfect. As Wyoming collapses over the car

like a wave. And then another mile marker. Another.

How can I say this more clearly? It was like opening a heavy book,

letting the pages feather themselves and finding a dried flower.

Bent to the Earth

By Blas Manuel De Luna

They had hit Ruben
with the high beams, had blinded
him so that the van
he was driving, full of Mexicans
going to pick tomatoes,
would have to stop. Ruben spun

the van into an irrigation ditch,
spun the five-year-old me awake
to immigration officers,
their batons already out,
already looking for the soft spots on the body,
to my mother being handcuffed
and dragged to a van, to my father
trying to show them our green cards.

They let us go. But Alvaro
was going back.
So was his brother Fernando.
So was their sister Sonia. Their mother
did not escape,
and so was going back. Their father
was somewhere in the field,
and was free. There were no great truths

revealed to me then. No wisdom
given to me by anyone. I was a child
who had seen what a piece of polished wood
could do to a face, who had seen his father
about to lose the one he loved, who had lost
some friends who would never return,
who, later that morning, bent

to the earth and went to work.

Grain Memory

By Marlanda Dekine-Sapient Soul

A wishbone branch falls
from my Grandma Thelma's oak
for me.

What do you know about magic? e[1] asks.

E bends e old body down, turns
the wishbone branch into
a cross, places it around my neck.
I am strapped at the Black River's right shoulder,
remembering my Grandpa Mose never wore anything
but church.

My purple head begins to feel
cold as clergy, parched. I ask for water.
E gives me water and rice, says to repeat
after em:

I am fly from nature. Nature fly. I am fly from

nature. Nature

fly. *I am fly from nature.* *Nature*

fly. I am fly

from nature. Nature fly. *I am*

fly from nature. Nature fly. I am fly from nature. Nature fly.

Ah, I get it! It's an affirmation, I say

and e laughs in windoceansongs.

E whispers, *Do not be trapped by language*.

E voice begins to beat my chest
cavity in rhythm, chaff threshed from grain,
separating me from need.

I thought I'd snapped that wishbone branch myself. No.

I am fly from nature. Nature fly.

At dusk,
gleaming marigolds gathered
beneath my feet, singing:

We were stolen shipped across the Atlantic

invasive is a word I heard

stolen thrash thrash thrash and we speak in bloom

Poem Note: In Gullah-Geechee language, "e/em" are gender-neutral pronouns.

Peculiar Properties

By Juan Delgado

On my cutting board, I discovered them,
the tiniest of ants, roaming dots of lead.
At first, they were too few to classify, hiding
under crumbs, these scavengers of leftovers.
Admiring their labor, I immediately granted them
citizenship, these tailgaters of a kitchen's routines.

In Miami, I had no stove, working far from my home.
My wife was a midnight call to San Bernardino.
While searching for crumbs, especially for
the taste of apricot jelly, they fell into a line
across my cutting board; I saw it again,
saw the line my sixth-grade teacher drew
on the board, pointing to each end.

While he planted himself on his desk, he leaned
his face toward us, telling us in a low voice:

"You don't see it yet, you're too young
still, but that line in front of you continues
infinitely on either side. And if there is
the slightest slope in that line, either way,
it will slowly begin to sag, then curve and veer
and eventually one end will find the other.

And lines, lines are never perfect, they are

like us, never completely straight. So just
imagine the searching that goes on all
around us, every day. And to happen on
that union is really to witness the most earthly
of forms you'll ever get to know. If you're lucky,
you'll see that, even luckier if you're part
of that union."

Eve Revisited

By Alison Hawthorne Deming

Pomegranates fell from the trees
in our sleep. If we stayed
in the sun too long
there were aloes
to cool the burn.
Henbane for predators
and succulents when the rain was scarce.

There was no glorified past
to point the way
true and natural
for the sexes to meet.
He kept looking to the heavens
as if the answer were anywhere
but here. I was so bored
with our goodness
I couldn’t suck the juice
from one more pear.

It’s *here,* I kept telling him,
here, rooted in the soil
like every other tree
you know. And I wove us
a bed of its uppermost branches.

Candles

By Carl Dennis

If on your grandmother's birthday you burn a candle
To honor her memory, you might think of burning an extra
To honor the memory of someone who never met her,
A man who may have come to the town she lived in
Looking for work and never found it.

Picture him taking a stroll one morning,
After a month of grief with the want ads,
To refresh himself in the park before moving on.
Suppose he notices on the gravel path the shards
Of a green glass bottle that your grandmother,
Then still a girl, will be destined to step on
When she wanders barefoot away from her school picnic
If he doesn't stoop down and scoop the mess up
With the want-ad section and carry it to a trash can.

For you to burn a candle for him
You needn't suppose the cut would be a deep one,
Just deep enough to keep her at home
The night of the hay ride when she meets Helen,
Who is soon to become her dearest friend,
Whose brother George, thirty years later,
Helps your grandfather with a loan so his shoe store
Doesn't go under in the Great Depression
And his son, your father, is able to stay in school
Where his love of learning is fanned into flames,
A love he labors, later, to kindle in you.

How grateful you are for your father's efforts
Is shown by the candles you've burned for him.
But today, for a change, why not a candle
For the man whose name is unknown to you?
Take a moment to wonder whether he died at home
With friends and family or alone on the road,
On the look-out for no one to sit at his bedside
And hold his hand, the very hand
It's time for you to imagine holding.

Black Boys Play the Classics

By Toi Derricotte

The most popular “act” in
Penn Station
is the three black kids in ratty
sneakers & T-shirts playing
two violins and a cello—Brahms.
White men in business suits
have already dug into their pockets
as they pass and they toss in
a dollar or two without stopping.
Brown men in work-soiled khakis

stand with their mouths open,
arms crossed on their bellies
as if they themselves have always
wanted to attempt those bars.
One white boy, three, sits
cross-legged in front of his
idols—in ecstasy—
their slick, dark faces,
their thin, wiry arms,
who must begin to look
like angels!
Why does this trembling
pull us?
A: *Beneath the surface we are one.*
B: *Amazing! I did not think that they could speak this tongue.*

The Minks

By Toi Derricotte

In the backyard of our house on Norwood,
there were five hundred steel cages lined up,
each with a wooden box
roofed with tar paper;
inside, two stories, with straw
for a bed. Sometimes the minks would pace
back and forth wildly, looking for a way out;
or else they'd hide in their wooden houses, even when
we'd put the offering of raw horse meat on their trays, as if
they knew they were beautiful
and wanted to deprive us.
In spring the placid kits
drank with glazed eyes.
Sometimes the mothers would go mad
and snap their necks.
My uncle would lift the roof like a god
who might lift our roof, look down on us
and take us out to safety.
Sometimes one would escape.
He would go down on his hands and knees,
aiming a flashlight like
a bullet of light, hoping to catch
the orange gold of its eyes.
He wore huge boots, gloves
so thick their little teeth couldn't bite through.
"They're wild," he'd say. "Never trust them."

Each afternoon when I put the scoop of raw meat rich
with eggs and vitamins on their trays,
I'd call to each a greeting.
Their small thin faces would follow as if slightly curious.
In fall they went out in a van, returning
sorted, matched, their skins hanging down on huge metal
hangers, pinned by their mouths.
My uncle would take them out when company came
and drape them over his arm—the sweetest cargo.
He'd blow down the pelts softly
and the hairs would part for his breath
and show the shining underlife which, like
the shining of the soul, gives us each
character and beauty.

Passing

By Toi Derricotte

A professor invites me to his "Black Lit" class; they're
reading Larson's *Passing*. One of the black
students says, "Sometimes light-skinned blacks
think they can fool other blacks,
but *I* can always tell," looking
right through me.
After I tell them I am black,
I ask the class, "Was I passing
when I was just sitting here,
before I told you?" A white woman
shakes her head desperately, as if
I had deliberately deceived her.
She keeps examining my face,
then turning away
as if she hopes I'll disappear. Why presume
"passing" is based on what I leave out
and not what she fills in?
In one scene in the book, in a restaurant,
she's "passing,"
though no one checked her at the door—
"Hey, you black?"
My father, who looked white,
told me this story: every year
when he'd go to get his driver's license,
the man at the window filling
out the form would ask,
"White or black?" pencil poised, without looking up.

My father wouldn't pass, but he might
use silence to trap a devil.
When he didn't speak, the man
would look up at my father's face.
"What did he write?"
my father quizzed me.

After the Disaster

By Abigail Deutsch

New York City, 2001

One night, not long after the disaster,
as our train was passing Astor,
the car door opened with a shudder
and a girl came flying down the aisle,
hair that looked to be all feathers
and a half-moon smile
making open air of our small car.

The crowd ignored her or they muttered
"Hey, excuse me" as they passed her
when the train had paused at Rector.
The specter crowed "Excuse *me*," swiftly
turned, and ran back up the corridor,
then stopped for me.
We dove under the river.

She took my head between her fingers,
squeezing till the birds began to stir.
And then from out my eyes and ears
a flock came forth — I couldn't think or hear
or breathe or see within that feather-world
so silently I thanked her.

Such things were common after the disaster.

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

Big City Speech

By W. S. Di Piero

Use me

Abuse me
Turn wheels of fire
on manhole hotheads

Sing me
Sour me
Secrete dark matter's sheen
on our smarting skin

Rise and shine
In puddle shallows
under every Meryl Cheryl Caleb Syd
somnambulists and sleepyheads

Wake us
Speak to us
Bless what you've nurtured in your pits
the rats voles roaches and all outlivers
of your obscene ethic and politics

Crawl on us
Fall on us
you elevations that break and vein
down to sulfuric fiber-optic wrecks
through drill-bit dirt to bedrock

Beat our brows
Flee our sorrows

Sleep tight with your ultraviolets
righteous mica and drainage seeps

your gorgeous color-chart container ships
and cab-top numbers squinting in the mist

Chicago and December

By W. S. Di Piero

Trying to find my roost
one lidded, late afternoon,
the consolation of color
worked up like neediness,
like craving chocolate,
I'm at Art Institute favorites:

Velasquez's "Servant,"
her bashful attention fixed
to place things just right,
Beckmann's "Self-Portrait,"
whose fishy fingers seem
never to do a day's work,
the great stone lions outside
monumentally pissed
by jumbo wreaths and ribbons
municipal good cheer
yoked around their heads.
Mealy mist. Furred air.
I walk north across
the river, Christmas lights
crushed on skyscraper glass,
bling stringing Michigan Ave.,
sunlight's last-gasp sighing
through the artless fog.
Vague fatigued promise hangs
in the low darkened sky
when bunched scrawny starlings
rattle up from trees,
switchback and snag
like tossed rags dressing
the bare wintering branches,
black-on-black shining,
and I'm in a moment
more like a fore-moment:
from the sidewalk, watching them
poised without purpose,
I feel lifted inside the common
hazards and orders of things
when from their stillness,
the formal, aimless, not-waiting birds
erupt again, clap, elated weather-
making wing-clouds changing,
smithereened back and forth,
now already gone to follow
the river's running course.

Turning the Tables

By Joel Dias-Porter

For Eardrum

First hold the needle
    like a lover's hand
Lower it slowly
    let it tongue
    the record's ear
Then cultivate
    the sweet beats
    blooming in the valley
    of the groove
Laugh at folks
    that make requests
What chef would let
    the diners determine
Which entrees
    make up the menu?
Young boys
    think it's about
    flashy flicks
    of the wrist
But it's about filling the floor
    with the manic
    language of dance
About knowing the beat
    of every record
    like a mama knows
    her child's cries
Nobody cares
    how fast you scratch
Cuz it ain't about
    soothing any itch
It's about how many hairstyles
    are still standing
At the end of the night.

Abecedarian Requiring Further Examination of Anglikan Seraphym Subjugation of a Wild Indian Rezervation

By Natalie Diaz

Angels don't come to the reservation.
Bats, maybe, or owls, boxy mottled things.
Coyotes, too. They all mean the same thing—
death. And death
eats angels, I guess, because I haven't seen an angel
fly through this valley ever.
Gabriel? Never heard of him. Know a guy named Gabe though—

he came through here one powwow and stayed, typical
Indian. Sure he had wings,
jailbird that he was. He flies around in stolen cars. Wherever he stops,
kids grow like gourds from women's bellies.
Like I said, no Indian I've ever heard of has ever been or seen an angel.
Maybe in a Christmas pageant or something—
Nazarene church holds one every December,
organized by Pastor John's wife. It's no wonder
Pastor John's son is the angel—everyone knows angels are white.
Quit bothering with angels, I say. They're no good for Indians.
Remember what happened last time
some white god came floating across the ocean?
Truth is, there may be angels, but if there are angels
up there, living on clouds or sitting on thrones across the sea wearing
velvet robes and golden rings, drinking whiskey from silver cups,
we're better off if they stay rich and fat and ugly and
'xactly where they are—in their own distant heavens.
You better hope you never see angels on the rez. If you do, they'll be marching you off to
Zion or Oklahoma, or some other hell they've mapped out for us.

The Heaven of Animals

By James L. Dickey

Here they are. The soft eyes open.
If they have lived in a wood
It is a wood.
If they have lived on plains
It is grass rolling
Under their feet forever.

Having no souls, they have come,
Anyway, beyond their knowing.
Their instincts wholly bloom
And they rise.
The soft eyes open.

To match them, the landscape flowers,
Outdoing, desperately
Outdoing what is required:
The richest wood,
The deepest field.

For some of these,
It could not be the place
It is, without blood.

These hunt, as they have done,
But with claws and teeth grown perfect,

More deadly than they can believe.
They stalk more silently,
And crouch on the limbs of trees,
And their descent
Upon the bright backs of their prey

May take years
In a sovereign floating of joy.
And those that are hunted
Know this as their life,
Their reward: to walk

Under such trees in full knowledge
Of what is in glory above them,
And to feel no fear,
But acceptance, compliance.
Fulfilling themselves without pain

At the cycle's center,
They tremble, they walk
Under the tree,
They fall, they are torn,
They rise, they walk again.

The Hospital Window

By James L. Dickey

I have just come down from my father.
Higher and higher he lies
Above me in a blue light
Shed by a tinted window.
I drop through six white floors
And then step out onto pavement.

Still feeling my father ascend,
I start to cross the firm street,
My shoulder blades shining with all
The glass the huge building can raise.
Now I must turn round and face it,
And know his one pane from the others.

Each window possesses the sun

As though it burned there on a wick.
I wave, like a man catching fire.
All the deep-dyed windowpanes flash,
And, behind them, all the white rooms
They turn to the color of Heaven.

Ceremoniously, gravely, and weakly,
Dozens of pale hands are waving
Back, from inside their flames.
Yet one pure pane among these
Is the bright, erased blankness of nothing.
I know that my father is there,

In the shape of his death still living.
The traffic increases around me
Like a madness called down on my head.
The horns blast at me like shotguns,
And drivers lean out, driven crazy—
But now my propped-up father

Lifts his arm out of stillness at last.
The light from the window strikes me
And I turn as blue as a soul,
As the moment when I was born.
I am not afraid for my father—
Look! He is grinning; he is not

Afraid for my life, either,
As the wild engines stand at my knees
Shredding their gears and roaring,
And I hold each car in its place
For miles, inciting its horn
To blow down the walls of the world

That the dying may float without fear
In the bold blue gaze of my father.
Slowly I move to the sidewalk
With my pin-tingling hand half dead
At the end of my bloodless arm.
I carry it off in amazement,

High, still higher, still waving,
My recognized face fully mortal,
Yet not; not at all, in the pale,
Drained, otherworldly, stricken,
Created hue of stained glass.

I have just come down from my father.

The Strength of Fields

By James L. Dickey

... a separation from the world,
a penetration to some source of power
and a life-enhancing return ...
Van Gennep: Rites de Passage

Moth-force a small town always has,

Given the night.

What field-forms can be,
Outlying the small civic light-decisions over
A man walking near home?
Men are not where he is
Exactly now, but they are around him around him like the strength

Of fields. The solar system floats on
Above him in town-moths.
Tell me, train-sound,
With all your long-lost grief,
what I can give.
Dear Lord of all the fields
what am I going to *do*?
Street-lights, blue-force and frail
As the homes of men, tell me how to do it how
To withdraw how to penetrate and find the source
Of the power you always had
light as a moth, and rising
With the level and moonlit expansion
Of the fields around, and the sleep of hoping men.

You? I? What difference is there? We can all be saved

By a secret blooming. Now as I walk
The night and you walk with me we know simplicity
Is close to the source that sleeping men
Search for in their home-deep beds.
We know that the sun is away we know that the sun can be conquered
By moths, in blue home-town air.
The stars splinter, pointed and wild. The dead lie under

The pastures. They look on and help. Tell me, freight-train,
When there is no one else
To hear. Tell me in a voice the sea
Would have, if it had not a better one: as it lifts,
Hundreds of miles away, its fumbling, deep-structured roar
Like the profound, unstoppable craving
Of nations for their wish.
Hunger, time and the moon:

The moon lying on the brain
as on the excited sea as on
The strength of fields. Lord, let me shake
With purpose. Wild hope can always spring
From tended strength. Everything is in that.
That and nothing but kindness. More kindness, dear Lord
Of the renewing green. That is where it all has to start:
With the simplest things. More kindness will do nothing less
Than save every sleeping one
And night-walking one

Of us.
My life belongs to the world. I will do what I can.

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

"Hope" is the thing with feathers – (314)

By Emily Dickinson

"Hope" is the thing with feathers –
That perches in the soul –
And sings the tune without the words –
And never stops – at all –

And sweetest – in the Gale – is heard –
And sore must be the storm –
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm –

I've heard it in the chillest land –
And on the strangest Sea –
Yet – never – in Extremity,
It asked a crumb – of me.

Note to Poetry Out Loud students: *The inclusion or omission of the numeral in the title of the poem should not affect the accuracy score. It is optional during recitation.*

How many times these low feet staggered – (238)

By Emily Dickinson

How many times these low feet staggered –
Only the soldered mouth can tell –
Try – can you stir the awful rivet –
Try – can you lift the hasps of steel!

Stroke the cool forehead – hot so often –
Lift – if you care – the listless hair –
Handle the adamantine fingers
Never a thimble – more – shall wear –

Buzz the dull flies – on the chamber window –
Brave – shines the sun through the freckled pane –
Fearless – the cobweb swings from the ceiling –
Indolent Housewife – in Daisies – lain!

Note to Poetry Out Loud students: *The inclusion or omission of the numeral in the title of the poem should not affect the accuracy score. It is optional during recitation.*

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain, (340)

By Emily Dickinson

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
And Mourners to and fro
Kept treading – treading – till it seemed
That Sense was breaking through –

And when they all were seated,
A Service, like a Drum –
Kept beating – beating – till I thought
My mind was going numb –

And then I heard them lift a Box
And creak across my Soul
With those same Boots of Lead, again,
Then Space – began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell,
And Being, but an Ear,
And I, and Silence, some strange Race,
Wrecked, solitary, here –

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,

And I dropped down, and down –
And hit a World, at every plunge,
And Finished knowing – then –

Note to Poetry Out Loud students: *The inclusion or omission of the numeral in the title of the poem should not affect the accuracy score. It is optional during recitation.*

I heard a Fly buzz – when I died – (591)

By Emily Dickinson

I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air –
Between the Heaves of Storm –

The Eyes around – had wrung them dry –
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset – when the King
Be witnessed – in the Room –

I willed my Keepsakes – Signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable – and then it was
There interposed a Fly –

With Blue – uncertain – stumbling Buzz –
Between the light – and me –
And then the Windows failed – and then
I could not see to see –

Note to Poetry Out Loud students: *The inclusion or omission of the numeral in the title of the poem should not affect the accuracy score. It is optional during recitation.*

It sifts from Leaden Sieves – (291)

By Emily Dickinson

It sifts from Leaden Sieves –
It powders all the Wood.
It fills with Alabaster Wool
The Wrinkles of the Road –

It makes an even Face
Of Mountain, and of Plain –
Unbroken Forehead from the East
Unto the East again –

It reaches to the Fence –
It wraps it Rail by Rail
Till it is lost in Fleeces –
It deals Celestial Vail

To Stump, and Stack – and Stem –
A Summer's empty Room –
Acres of Joints, where Harvests were,
Recordless, but for them –

It Ruffles Wrists of Posts
As Ankles of a Queen –
Then stills it's Artisans – like Ghosts –
Denying they have been –

Note to Poetry Out Loud students: *The inclusion or omission of the numeral in the title of the poem should not affect the accuracy score. It is optional during recitation.*

It was not Death, for I stood up, (355)

By Emily Dickinson

It was not Death, for I stood up,
And all the Dead, lie down –
It was not Night, for all the Bells
Put out their Tongues, for Noon.

It was not Frost, for on my Flesh
I felt Siroccos – crawl –
Nor Fire - for just my marble feet
Could keep a Chancel, cool –

And yet, it tasted, like them all,
The Figures I have seen
Set orderly, for Burial
Reminded me, of mine –

As if my life were shaven,
And fitted to a frame,
And could not breathe without a key,
And 'twas like Midnight, some –

When everything that ticked – has stopped –
And space stares – all around –
Or Grisly frosts – first Autumn morns,

Repeal the Beating Ground –

But most, like Chaos – Stopless – cool –
Without a Chance, or spar –
Or even a Report of Land –
To justify – Despair.

Note to Poetry Out Loud students: *The inclusion or omission of the numeral in the title of the poem should not affect the accuracy score. It is optional during recitation.*

Much Madness is divinest Sense – (620)

By Emily Dickinson

Much Madness is divinest Sense –
To a discerning Eye –
Much Sense – the starkest Madness –
'Tis the Majority
In this, as all, prevail –
Assent – and you are sane –
Demur – you're straightway dangerous –
And handled with a Chain –

Note to Poetry Out Loud students: *The inclusion or omission of the numeral in the title of the poem should not affect the accuracy score. It is optional during recitation.*

A narrow Fellow in the Grass (1096)

By Emily Dickinson

A narrow Fellow in the Grass
Occasionally rides –
You may have met him? Did you not
His notice instant is –

The Grass divides as with a Comb,
A spotted Shaft is seen,
And then it closes at your Feet
And opens further on –

He likes a Boggy Acre –
A Floor too cool for Corn –
But when a Boy and Barefoot
I more than once at Noon

Have passed I thought a Whip Lash
Unbraiding in the Sun

When stooping to secure it
It wrinkled And was gone –

Several of Nature's People
I know, and they know me
I feel for them a transport
Of Cordiality

But never met this Fellow
Attended or alone
Without a tighter Breathing
And Zero at the Bone.

Note to Poetry Out Loud students: *The inclusion or omission of the numeral in the title of the poem should not affect the accuracy score. It is optional during recitation.*

The Poets light but Lamps – (930)

By Emily Dickinson

The Poets light but Lamps –
Themselves – go out –
The Wicks they stimulate
If vital Light

Inhere as do the Suns –
Each Age a Lens
Disseminating their
Circumference –

Note to Poetry Out Loud students: *The inclusion or omission of the numeral in the title of the poem should not affect the accuracy score. It is optional during recitation.*

Safe in their Alabaster Chambers – (124)

By Emily Dickinson

Safe in their Alabaster Chambers –
Untouched by Morning –
and untouched by noon –
Sleep the meek members of the Resurrection,
Rafter of Satin and Roof of Stone –

Grand go the Years,
In the Crescent above them –
Worlds scoop their Arcs –
and Firmaments – row –

Diadems – drop –
And Doges surrender –
Soundless as Dots,
On a Disk of Snow.

Note to Poetry Out Loud students: *The inclusion or omission of the numeral in the title of the poem should not affect the accuracy score. It is optional during recitation.*

We Who Weave

By LeConté Dill

On Tyrone Geter's "The Basket Maker #2"

Weave me closer
to you
with hands dyed indigo
that rake oyster beds
awake
Smell you long
before
I see you
Vanilla sweet
Sweetgrass weaving
wares that keep Yankees coming
on ferries, no bridge
Waters been troubled
Makes you wonder
who put the root on whom first
with doors dyed indigo
Pray the evil spirits away
at the praise house
Make John Hop to stave off John Deere
We migrants
fighting to stay put
Even nomads come home
for a Lowcountry boil
a feast for hungry
prodigal sons
and daughters
with hearts dyed indigo
Dying for you to
weave us closer

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

1969

By Alex Dimitrov

The summer everyone left for the moon
even those yet to be born. And the dead
who can't vacation here but met us all there
by the veil between worlds. The number one song
in America was "In the Year 2525"
because who has ever lived in the present
when there's so much of the future
to continue without us.
How the best lover won't need to forgive you
and surely take everything off your hands
without having to ask, without knowing
your name, no matter the number of times
you married or didn't, your favorite midnight movie,
the cigarettes you couldn't give up,
wanting to kiss other people you shouldn't
and now to forever be kissed by the Earth.
In the Earth. With the Earth.
When we all briefly left it
to look back on each other from above,
shocked by how bright even our pain is
running wildly beside us like an underground river.
And whatever language is good for,
a sign, a message left up there that reads:
HERE MEN FROM THE PLANET EARTH
FIRST SET FOOT UPON THE MOON
JULY 1969, A.D.
WE CAME IN PEACE FOR ALL MANKIND.
Then returned to continue the war.

Tiger Mask Ritual

By Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

When you put on the mask the thunder starts.
Through the nostril's orange you can smell
the far hope of rain. Up in the Nilgiris,
glisten of eucalyptus, drip of pine, spiders tumbling
from their silver webs.

The mask is raw and red as bark against your facebones.
You finger the stripes ridged like weals
out of your childhood. A wind is rising

in the north, a scarlet light
like a fire in the sky.

When you look through the eyeholes it is like falling.
Night gauzes you in black. You are blind
as in the beginning of the world. Sniff. Seek the moon.
After a while you will know
that creased musky smell is rising
from your skin.

Once you locate the ears the drums begin.
Your fur stiffens. A roar from the distant left,
like monsoon water. You swivel your sightless head.
Under your sheathed paw
the ground shifts wet.

What is that small wild sound
sheltering in your skull
against the circle that always closes in
just before dawn?

Note: The poem refers to a ritual performed by some Rajasthani hill tribes to ensure rain and a good harvest.

Mrs. Caldera's House of Things

By Gregory Djanikian

You are sitting in Mrs. Caldera's kitchen,
you are sipping a glass of lemonade
and trying not to be too curious about
the box of plastic hummingbirds behind you,
the tray of tineless forks at your elbow.

You have heard about the backroom
where no one else has ever gone
and whatever enters, remains,
refrigerator doors, fused coils,
mower blades, milk bottles, pistons, gears.

"You never know," she says, rummaging
through a cedar chest of recipes,
"when something will come of use."

There is a vase of pencil tips on the table,
a bowl full of miniature wheels and axles.

Upstairs, where her children slept,
the doors will not close,
the stacks of magazines are burgeoning,
there are snow shoes and lampshades,
bedsprings and picture tubes,
and boxes and boxes of irreducibles!

You imagine the headline in the *Literalist Express:*
House Founders Under Weight Of Past.

But Mrs Caldera is baking cookies,
she is humming a song from childhood,
her arms are heavy and strong,
they have held babies, a husband,
tractor parts and gas tanks,
what have they not found a place for?

It is getting dark, you have sat for a long time.
If you move, you feel something will be disturbed,
there is room enough only for your body.
"Stay awhile," Mrs. Caldera says,
and never have you felt so valuable.

Rickshaw Boy

By Duy Doan

The man I pulled tonight
carried a load of books.

When I felt him watching
me uphill, I grimaced.

He gave me lunar
cakes the size

of two camel humps.
When I answered him,

I smiled to his face.
He wore the moonlight

in his specs. Pant
seams clean as the embroidery

work of his book covers.
One cannot grow rich

without a bit of cleverness.
Should I have shown

him the secret of my deft
touch? The Circling Moon,

the Graceful Swan? How East
Wind beats West Wind

if other two winds say so?
Snow falls on cedars.

Mi Historia

By David Dominguez

My red pickup choked on burnt oil
as I drove down Highway 99.
In wind-tattered garbage bags
I had packed my whole life:
two pairs of jeans, a few T-shirts,
an a pair of work boots.
My truck needed work, and through
the blue smoke rising from under the hood,
I saw almond orchards, plums,
and raisins spread out on paper trays,
and acres of Mendota cotton my mother picked as a child.

My mother crawled through the furrows
and plucked cotton balls that filled
the burlap sack she dragged,
shoulder-slung, through dried-up bolls,
husks, weevils, dirt clods,
and dust that filled the air with thirst.
But when she grew tired,
she slept on her mother's burlap,
stuffed thick as a mattress,
and Grandma dragged her over the land
where time was told by the setting sun….

History cried out to me from the earth,
in the scream of starling flight,
and pounded at the hulls of seeds to be set free.

History licked the asphalt with rubber,
sighed in the windows of abandoned barns,
slumped in the wind-blasted palms,
groaned in the heat, and whispered its soft curses.
I wanted my own history—not the earth's,
nor the history of blood, nor of memory,
and not the job founded for me at Galdini Sausage.
I sought my own—a new bruise to throb hard
as the asphalt that pounded the chassis of my truck.

Break of Day

By John Donne

'Tis true, 'tis day, what though it be?
O wilt thou therefore rise from me?
Why should we rise because 'tis light?
Did we lie down because 'twas night?
Love, which in spite of darkness brought us hither,
Should in despite of light keep us together.

Light hath no tongue, but is all eye;
If it could speak as well as spy,
This were the worst that it could say,
That being well I fain would stay,
And that I loved my heart and honour so,
That I would not from him, that had them, go.

Must business thee from hence remove?
Oh, that's the worst disease of love,
The poor, the foul, the false, love can
Admit, but not the busied man.
He which hath business, and makes love, doth do
Such wrong, as when a married man doth woo.

The Good-Morrow

By John Donne

I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I
Did, till we loved? Were we not weaned till then?
But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers' den?
'Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be.
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.

And now good-morrow to our waking souls,
Which watch not one another out of fear;
For love, all love of other sights controls,
And makes one little room an everywhere.
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown,
Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;
Where can we find two better hemispheres,
Without sharp north, without declining west?
Whatever dies, was not mixed equally;
If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die.

Holy Sonnets: Batter my heart, three-person's God

By John Donne

Batter my heart, three-person'd God, for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
I, like an usurp'd town to another due,
Labor to admit you, but oh, to no end;
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captiv'd, and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly I love you, and would be lov'd fain,
But am betroth'd unto your enemy;
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

Holy Sonnets: Death, be not proud

By John Donne

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,

And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

Hymn to God, My God, in My Sickness

By John Donne

Since I am coming to that holy room,
Where, with thy choir of saints for evermore,
I shall be made thy music; as I come
I tune the instrument here at the door,
And what I must do then, think here before.

Whilst my physicians by their love are grown
Cosmographers, and I their map, who lie
Flat on this bed, that by them may be shown
That this is my south-west discovery,
Per fretum febris, by these straits to die,

I joy, that in these straits I see my west;
For, though their currents yield return to none,
What shall my west hurt me? As west and east
In all flat maps (and I am one) are one,
So death doth touch the resurrection.

Is the Pacific Sea my home? Or are
The eastern riches? Is Jerusalem?
Anyan, and Magellan, and Gibraltar,
All straits, and none but straits, are ways to them,
Whether where Japhet dwelt, or Cham, or Shem.

We think that Paradise and Calvary,
Christ's cross, and Adam's tree, stood in one place;
Look, Lord, and find both Adams met in me;
As the first Adam's sweat surrounds my face,
May the last Adam's blood my soul embrace.

So, in his purple wrapp'd, receive me, Lord;
By these his thorns, give me his other crown;
And as to others' souls I preach'd thy word,

Be this my text, my sermon to mine own:
"Therefore that he may raise, the Lord throws down."

A Hymn to God the Father

By John Donne

Wilt thou forgive that sin where I begun,
Which was my sin, though it were done before?
Wilt thou forgive that sin, through which I run,
And do run still, though still I do deplore?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For I have more.

Wilt thou forgive that sin which I have won
Others to sin, and made my sin their door?
Wilt thou forgive that sin which I did shun
A year or two, but wallow'd in, a score?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For I have more.

I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;
But swear by thyself, that at my death thy Son
Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore;
And, having done that, thou hast done;
I fear no more.

Lovers' Infiniteness

By John Donne

If yet I have not all thy love,
Dear, I shall never have it all;
I cannot breathe one other sigh, to move,
Nor can intreat one other tear to fall;
And all my treasure, which should purchase thee—
Sighs, tears, and oaths, and letters—I have spent.
Yet no more can be due to me,
Than at the bargain made was meant;
If then thy gift of love were partial,
That some to me, some should to others fall,
Dear, I shall never have thee all.

Or if then thou gavest me all,
All was but all, which thou hadst then;

But if in thy heart, since, there be or shall
New love created be, by other men,
Which have their stocks entire, and can in tears,
In sighs, in oaths, and letters, outbid me,
This new love may beget new fears,
For this love was not vow'd by thee.
And yet it was, thy gift being general;
The ground, thy heart, is mine; whatever shall
    Grow there, dear, I should have it all.

Yet I would not have all yet,
He that hath all can have no more;
And since my love doth every day admit
New growth, thou shouldst have new rewards in store;
Thou canst not every day give me thy heart,
If thou canst give it, then thou never gavest it;
Love's riddles are, that though thy heart depart,
It stays at home, and thou with losing savest it;
But we will have a way more liberal,
Than changing hearts, to join them; so we shall
    Be one, and one another's all.

Song: Go and catch a falling star

By John Donne

Go and catch a falling star,
  Get with child a mandrake root,
Tell me where all past years are,
  Or who cleft the devil's foot,
Teach me to hear mermaids singing,
Or to keep off envy's stinging,
    And find
    What wind
Serves to advance an honest mind.

If thou be'st born to strange sights,
  Things invisible to see,
Ride ten thousand days and nights,
  Till age snow white hairs on thee,
Thou, when thou return'st, wilt tell me,
All strange wonders that befell thee,
    And swear,
    No where
Lives a woman true, and fair.

If thou find'st one, let me know,
Such a pilgrimage were sweet;
Yet do not, I would not go,
Though at next door we might meet;
Though she were true, when you met her,
And last, till you write your letter,
Yet she
Will be
False, ere I come, to two, or three.

The Sun Rising

By John Donne

Busy old fool, unruly sun,
Why dost thou thus,
Through windows, and through curtains call on us?
Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?
Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide
Late school boys and sour prentices,
Go tell court huntsmen that the king will ride,
Call country ants to harvest offices,
Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime,
Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

Thy beams, so reverend and strong
Why shouldst thou think?
I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink,
But that I would not lose her sight so long;
If her eyes have not blinded thine,
Look, and tomorrow late, tell me,
Whether both th' Indias of spice and mine
Be where thou leftst them, or lie here with me.
Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,
And thou shalt hear, All here in one bed lay.

She's all states, and all princes, I,
Nothing else is.
Princes do but play us; compared to this,
All honor's mimic, all wealth alchemy.
Thou, sun, art half as happy as we,
In that the world's contracted thus.
Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be
To warm the world, that's done in warming us.
Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;
This bed thy center is, these walls, thy sphere.

A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning

By John Donne

As virtuous men pass mildly away,
  And whisper to their souls to go,
Whilst some of their sad friends do say
  The breath goes now, and some say, No:

So let us melt, and make no noise,
  No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move;
'Twere profanation of our joys
  To tell the laity our love.

Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears,
  Men reckon what it did, and meant;
But trepidation of the spheres,
  Though greater far, is innocent.

Dull sublunary lovers' love
  (Whose soul is sense) cannot admit
Absence, because it doth remove
  Those things which elemented it.

But we by a love so much refined,
  That our selves know not what it is,
Inter-assured of the mind,
  Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss.

Our two souls therefore, which are one,
  Though I must go, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
  Like gold to airy thinness beat.

If they be two, they are two so
  As stiff twin compasses are two;
Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
  To move, but doth, if the other do.

And though it in the center sit,
  Yet when the other far doth roam,
It leans and hearkens after it,
  And grows erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must,
  Like th' other foot, obliquely run;
Thy firmness makes my circle just,

And makes me end where I begun.

Brian Age Seven

By Mark Doty

Grateful for their tour
of the pharmacy,
the first-grade class
has drawn these pictures,
each self-portrait taped
to the window-glass,
faces wide to the street,
round and available,
with parallel lines for hair.

I like this one best: Brian,
whose attenuated name
fills a quarter of the frame,
stretched beside impossible
legs descending from the ball
of his torso, two long arms
springing from that same
central sphere. He breathes here,

on his page. It isn't craft
that makes this figure come alive;
Brian draws just balls and lines,
in wobbly crayon strokes.
Why do some marks
seem to thrill with life,
possess a portion
of the nervous energy
in their maker's hand?

That big curve of a smile
reaches nearly to the rim
of his face; he holds
a towering ice cream,
brown spheres teetering
on their cone,
a soda fountain gift
half the length of him
—as if it were the flag

of his own country held high

by the unadorned black line
of his arm. Such naked support
for so much delight! Artless boy,
he's found a system of beauty:
he shows us pleasure
and what pleasure resists.
The ice cream is delicious.
He's frail beside his relentless standard.

A Display of Mackerel

By Mark Doty

They lie in parallel rows,
on ice, head to tail,
each a foot of luminosity

barred with black bands,
which divide the scales'
radiant sections

like seams of lead
in a Tiffany window.
Iridescent, watery

prismatics: think abalone,
the wildly rainbowed
mirror of a soapbubble sphere,

think sun on gasoline.
Splendor, and splendor,
and not a one in any way

distinguished from the other
—nothing about them
of individuality. Instead

they're *all* exact expressions
of the one soul,
each a perfect fulfilment

of heaven's template,
mackerel essence. As if,
after a lifetime arriving

at this enameling, the jeweler's

made uncountable examples,
each as intricate

in its oily fabulation
as the one before
Suppose we could iridesce,

like these, and lose ourselves
entirely in the universe
of shimmer—would you want

to be yourself only,
unduplicatable, doomed
to be lost? They'd prefer,

plainly, to be flashing participants,
multitudinous. Even now
they seem to be bolting

forward, heedless of stasis.
They don't care they're dead
and nearly frozen,

just as, presumably,
they didn't care that they were living:
all, all for all,

the rainbowed school
and its acres of brilliant classrooms,
in which no verb is singular,

or every one is. How happy they seem,
even on ice, to be together, selfless,
which is the price of gleaming.

Bannerker

By Rita Dove

What did he do except lie
under a pear tree, wrapped in
a great cloak, and meditate
on the heavenly bodies?
Venerable, the good people of Baltimore
whispered, shocked and more than
a little afraid. After all it was said

he took to strong drink.
Why else would he stay out
under the stars all night
and why hadn't he married?

But who would want him! Neither
Ethiopian nor English, neither
lucky nor crazy, a capacious bird
humming as he penned in his mind
another enflamed letter
to President Jefferson—he imagined
the reply, polite and rhetorical.
Those who had been to Philadelphia
reported the statue
of Benjamin Franklin
before the library

his very size and likeness.
A wife? No, thank you.
At dawn he milked
the cows, then went inside
and put on a pot to stew
while he slept. The clock
he whittled as a boy
still ran. Neighbors
woke him up
with warm bread and quilts.
At nightfall he took out

his rifle—a white-maned
figure stalking the darkened
breast of the Union—and
shot at the stars, and by chance
one went out. Had he killed?
I assure thee, my dear Sir!
Lowering his eyes to fields
sweet with the rot of spring, he could see
a government's domed city
rising from the morass and spreading
in a spiral of lights....

Flirtation

By Rita Dove

After all, there's no need

to say anything

at first. An orange, peeled
and quartered, flares

like a tulip on a wedgewood plate
Anything can happen.

Outside the sun
has rolled up her rugs

and night strewn salt
across the sky. My heart

is humming a tune
I haven't heard in years!

Quiet's cool flesh—
let's sniff and eat it.

There are ways
to make of the moment

a topiary
so the pleasure's in

walking through.

The Secret Garden

By Rita Dove

I was ill, lying on my bed of old papers,
when you came with white rabbits in your arms;
and the doves scattered upwards, flying to mothers,
and the snails sighed under their baggage of stone . . .

Now your tongue grows like celery between us:
Because of our love-cries, cabbage darkens in its nest;
the cauliflower thinks of her pale, plump children
and turns greenish-white in a light like the ocean's.

I was sick, fainting in the smell of teabags,
when you came with tomatoes, a good poetry.
I am being wooed. I am being conquered
by a cliff of limestone that leaves chalk on my breasts.

April Love

By Ernest Dowson

We have walked in Love's land a little way,
We have learnt his lesson a little while,
And shall we not part at the end of day,
With a sigh, a smile?
A little while in the shine of the sun,
We were twined together, joined lips, forgot
How the shadows fall when the day is done,
And when Love is not.
We have made no vows--there will none be broke,
Our love was free as the wind on the hill,
There was no word said we need wish unspoke,
We have wrought no ill.
So shall we not part at the end of day,
Who have loved and lingered a little while,
Join lips for the last time, go our way,
With a sigh, a smile?

Idea 20: An evil spirit, your beauty, haunts me still

By Michael Drayton

An evil spirit, your beauty, haunts me still,
Wherewith, alas, I have been long possess'd,
Which ceaseth not to tempt me to each ill,
Nor gives me once but one poor minute's rest.
In me it speaks, whether I sleep or wake;
And when by means to drive it out I try,
With greater torments then it me doth take,
And tortures me in most extremity.
Before my face it lays down my despairs,
And hastes me on unto a sudden death;
Now tempting me to drown myself in tears,
And then in sighing to give up my breath.
Thus am I still provok'd to every evil
By this good-wicked spirit, sweet angel-devil.

Idea 43: Why should your fair eyes with such soverign grace

By Michael Drayton

Why should your fair eyes with such sovereign grace
Disperse their rays on every vulgar spirit,
Whilst I in darkness in the self-same place

Get not one glance to recompense my merit?
So doth the ploughman gaze the wandering star,
And only rest contented with the light,
That never learned what constellations are,
Beyond the bent of his unknowing sight,
O! why should beauty, custom to obey,
To their gross sense apply herself so ill?
Would God I were as ignorant as they,
When I am made unhappy by my skill;
Only compelled on this poor good to boast,
Heavens are not kind to them that know them most.

Idea 61: Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part

By Michael Drayton

Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part.
Nay, I have done, you get no more of me;
And I am glad, yea glad with all my heart,
That thus so cleanly I myself can free.
Shake hands for ever, cancel all our vows,
And when we meet at any time again,
Be it not seen in either of our brows
That we one jot of former love retain.
Now at the last gasp of Love's latest breath,
When, his pulse failing, Passion speechless lies;
When Faith is kneeling by his bed of death,
And Innocence is closing up his eyes—
Now, if thou wouldst, when all have given him over,
From death to life thou might'st him yet recover!

Song: "You charm'd me not with that fair face"

By John Dryden

from An Evening's Love

You charm'd me not with that fair face
Though it was all divine:
To be another's is the grace,
That makes me wish you mine.

The Gods and Fortune take their part
Who like young monarchs fight;
And boldly dare invade that heart
Which is another's right.

First mad with hope we undertake
To pull up every bar;
But once possess'd, we faintly make
A dull defensive war.

Now every friend is turn'd a foe
In hope to get our store:
And passion makes us cowards grow,
Which made us brave before.

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

To the Memory of Mr. Oldham

By John Dryden

Farewell, too little and too lately known,
Whom I began to think and call my own;
For sure our souls were near ally'd; and thine
Cast in the same poetic mould with mine.
One common note on either lyre did strike,
And knaves and fools we both abhorr'd alike:
To the same goal did both our studies drive,
The last set out the soonest did arrive.
Thus Nisus fell upon the slippery place,
While his young friend perform'd and won the race.
O early ripe! to thy abundant store
What could advancing age have added more?
It might (what nature never gives the young)
Have taught the numbers of thy native tongue.
But satire needs not those, and wit will shine
Through the harsh cadence of a rugged line.
A noble error, and but seldom made,
When poets are by too much force betray'd.
Thy generous fruits, though gather'd ere their prime
Still show'd a quickness; and maturing time
But mellows what we write to the dull sweets of rhyme.
Once more, hail and farewell; farewell thou young,
But ah too short, Marcellus of our tongue;
Thy brows with ivy, and with laurels bound;
But fate and gloomy night encompass thee around.

The Song of the Smoke

By W.E.B. Du Bois

I am the Smoke King
I am black!
I am swinging in the sky,
I am wringing worlds awry;
I am the thought of the throbbing mills,
I am the soul of the soul-toil kills,
Wraith of the ripple of trading rills;
Up I'm curling from the sod,
I am whirling home to God;
I am the Smoke King
I am black.

I am the Smoke King,
I am black!
I am wreathing broken hearts,
I am sheathing love's light darts;
Inspiration of iron times
Wedding the toil of toiling climes,
Shedding the blood of bloodless crimes—
Lurid lowering 'mid the blue,
Torrid towering toward the true,
I am the Smoke King,
I am black.

I am the Smoke King,
I am black!
I am darkening with song,
I am hearkening to wrong!
I will be black as blackness can—
The blacker the mantle, the mightier the man!
For blackness was ancient ere whiteness began.
I am daubing God in night,
I am swabbing Hell in white:
I am the Smoke King
I am black.

I am the Smoke King
I am black!
I am cursing ruddy morn,
I am hearsing hearts unborn:
Souls unto me are as stars in a night,
I whiten my black men—I blacken my white!
What's the hue of a hide to a man in his might?

Hail! great, gritty, grimy hands—
Sweet Christ, pity toiling lands!
I am the Smoke King
I am black.

Fairy Tale with Laryngitis and Resignation Letter

By Jehanne Dubrow

You remember the mermaid makes a deal,
her tongue evicted from her throat,
and moving is a knife-cut with every step.
This is what escape from water means.
Dear Colleagues, you write, for weeks
I've been typing this letter in the bright
kingdom of my imagination. Your body
is a ship of pain. Pleasure is when you climb
the rocks and watch the moonlight
touching everywhere you want to go,
a silver world called faraway. Dear Colleagues,
you write, this place is a few sentences
contained by the cursor's rippling barrier—
what happened here is only beaks
and brackets, the serif's liquid stroke.
The old story has witches, a prince in love
with the surging silence of women,
a knife that turns the water red. You write,
Dear Colleagues, now these years are filed
in the infinite oceans of bureaucracy.
Everything bleaches or fades. In other words,
goodbye. Sometimes it's possible to walk,
although you've been told inside the oyster
shell of your heart there is no soul.
Creatures like you must end as a spray of salt,
green droplets floating breathless in the air.

Prison Song

By Alan Dugan

The skin ripples over my body like moon-wooed water,
rearing to escape me. Where could it find another
animal as naked as the one it hates to cover?
Once it told me what was happening outside,
who was attacking, who caressing, and what the air
was doing to feed or freeze me. Now I wake up

dark at night, in a textureless ocean of ignorance,
or fruit bites back and water bruises like a stone.
It's jealousy, because I look for other tools to know
with, and other armor, better girded to my wish.
So let it lie, turn off the clues or try to leave:
sewn on me seamless like those painful shirts
the body-hating saints wore, the sheath of hell
is pierced to my darkness nonetheless: what traitors
labor in my face, what hints they smuggle through
its arching guard! But even in the night it jails,
with nothing but its lies and silences to feed upon,
the jail itself can make a scenery, sing prison songs,
and set off fireworks to praise a homemade day.

Dawn Chorus

By Sasha Dugdale

March 29, 2010

Every morning since the time changed
I have woken to the dawn chorus
And even before it sounded, I dreamed of it
Loud, unbelievably loud, shameless, raucous

And once I rose and twitched the curtains apart
Expecting the birds to be pressing in fright
Against the pane like passengers
But the garden was empty and it was night

Not a slither of light at the horizon
Still the birds were bawling through the mists
Terrible, invisible
A million small evangelists

How they sing: as if each had pecked up a smoldering coal
Their throats singed and swollen with song
In dissonance as befits the dark world
Where only travelers and the sleepless belong

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

The Zebra Goes Wild Where the Sidewalk Ends

By Henry Dumas

I
Neon stripes tighten my wall
where my crayon landlord hangs
from a bent nail.

My black father sits crooked
in the kitchen
drunk on Jesus' blood turned
to cheap wine.

In his tremor he curses
the landlord who grins
from inside the rent book.

My father's eyes are
bolls of cotton.

He sits upon the landlord's
operating table,
the needle of the nation
sucking his soul.

II
Chains of light race over
my stricken city.
Glittering web spun by
the white widow spider.

I see this wild arena
where we are harnessed
by alien electric shadows.

Even when the sun washes
the debris
I will recall my landlord
hanging in my room
and my father moaning in
Jesus' tomb.

In America all zebras
are in the zoo.

I hear the piston bark

and ibm spark:
let us program rabies.
the madness is foaming now.

No wild zebras roam the American plain.
The mad dogs are running.
The African zebra is gone into the dust.

I see the shadow thieves coming
and my father on the specimen table.

Invitation to Love

By Paul Laurence Dunbar

Come when the nights are bright with stars
Or come when the moon is mellow;
Come when the sun his golden bars
Drops on the hay-field yellow.
Come in the twilight soft and gray,
Come in the night or come in the day,
Come, O love, whene'er you may,
And you are welcome, welcome.

You are sweet, O Love, dear Love,
You are soft as the nesting dove.
Come to my heart and bring it to rest
As the bird flies home to its welcome nest.

Come when my heart is full of grief
Or when my heart is merry;
Come with the falling of the leaf
Or with the redd'ning cherry.
Come when the year's first blossom blows,
Come when the summer gleams and glows,
Come with the winter's drifting snows,
And you are welcome, welcome.

The Paradox

By Paul Laurence Dunbar

I am the mother of sorrows,
  I am the ender of grief;
I am the bud and the blossom,
  I am the late-falling leaf.

I am thy priest and thy poet,
  I am thy serf and thy king;
I cure the tears of the heartsick,
  When I come near they shall sing.

White are my hands as the snowdrop;
  Swart are my fingers as clay;
Dark is my frown as the midnight,
  Fair is my brow as the day.

Battle and war are my minions,
  Doing my will as divine;
I am the calmer of passions,
  Peace is a nursling of mine.

Speak to me gently or curse me,
  Seek me or fly from my sight;
I am thy fool in the morning,
  Thou art my slave in the night.

Down to the grave will I take thee,
  Out from the noise of the strife;
Then shalt thou see me and know me—
  Death, then, no longer, but life.

Then shalt thou sing at my coming,
  Kiss me with passionate breath,
Clasp me and smile to have thought me
  Aught save the foeman of Death.

Come to me, brother, when weary,
  Come when thy lonely heart swells;
I'll guide thy footsteps and lead thee
  Down where the Dream Woman dwells.

Thou Art My Lute

By Paul Laurence Dunbar

Thou art my lute, by thee I sing,—
    My being is attuned to thee.
Thou settest all my words a-wing,
    And meltest me to melody.

Thou art my life, by thee I live,

From thee proceed the joys I know;
Sweetheart, thy hand has power to give
The meed of love—the cup of woe.

Thou art my love, by thee I lead
My soul the paths of light along,
From vale to vale, from mead to mead,
And home it in the hills of song.

My song, my soul, my life, my all,
Why need I pray or make my plea,
Since my petition cannot fall;
For I'm already one with thee!

The Idler

By Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson

An idle lingerer on the wayside's road,
He gathers up his work and yawns away;
A little longer, ere the tiresome load
Shall be reduced to ashes or to clay.

No matter if the world has marched along,
And scorned his slowness as it quickly passed;
No matter, if amid the busy throng,
He greets some face, infantile at the last.

His mission? Well, there is but one,
And if it is a mission he knows it, nay,
To be a happy idler, to lounge and sun,
And dreaming, pass his long-drawn days away.

So dreams he on, his happy life to pass
Content, without ambitions painful sighs,
Until the sands run down into the glass;
He smiles—content—unmoved and dies.

And yet, with all the pity that you feel
For this poor mothling of that flame, the world;
Are you the better for your desperate deal,
When you, like him, into infinitude are hurled?

To the Negro Farmers of the United States

By Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson

God washes clean the souls and hearts of you,
His favored ones, whose backs bend o'er the soil,
Which grudging gives to them requite for toil
In sober graces and in vision true.
God places in your hands the pow'r to do
A service sweet. Your gift supreme to foil
The bare-fanged wolves of hunger in the moil
Of Life's activities. Yet all too few
Your glorious band, clean sprung from Nature's heart;
The hope of hungry thousands, in whose breast
Dwells fear that you should fail. God placed no dart
Of war within your hands, but pow'r to start
Tears, praise, love, joy, enwoven in a crest
To crown you glorious, brave ones of the soil.

Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow

By Robert Duncan

as if it were a scene made-up by the mind,
that is not mine, but is a made place,

that is mine, it is so near to the heart,
an eternal pasture folded in all thought
so that there is a hall therein

that is a made place, created by light
wherefrom the shadows that are forms fall.

Wherefrom fall all architectures I am
I say are likenesses of the First Beloved
whose flowers are flames lit to the Lady.

She it is Queen Under The Hill
whose hosts are a disturbance of words within words
that is a field folded.

It is only a dream of the grass blowing
east against the source of the sun
in an hour before the sun's going down

whose secret we see in a children's game
of ring a round of roses told.

Often I am permitted to return to a meadow
as if it were a given property of the mind
that certain bounds hold against chaos,

that is a place of first permission,
everlasting omen of what is.

Requiem

By Camille T. Dungy

Sing the mass—
light upon me washing words
now that I am gone.

The sky was a hot, blue sheet the summer breeze fanned
out and over the town. I could have lived forever
under that sky. Forgetting where I was,
I looked left, not right, crossed into a street
and stepped in front of the bus that ended me.

Will you believe me when I tell you it was beautiful—
my left leg turned to uselessness and my right shoe flung
some distance down the road? Will you believe me
when I tell you I had never been so in love
with anyone as I was, then, with everyone I saw?

The way an age-worn man held his wife's shaking arm,
supporting the weight that seemed to sing from the heart
she clutched. Knowing her eyes embraced the pile
that was me, he guided her sacked body through the crowd.
And the way one woman began a fast the moment she looked

under the wheel. I saw her swear off decadence.
I saw her start to pray. You see, I was so beautiful
the woman sent to clean the street used words
like police tape to keep back a young boy
seconds before he rounded the grisly bumper.

The woman who cordoned the area feared my memory
would fly him through the world on pinions of passion
much as, later, the sight of my awful beauty pulled her down
to tears when she pooled my blood with water
and swiftly, swiftly washed my stains away.

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

Always Something More Beautiful

By Stephen Dunn

This time I came to the starting place
with my best running shoes, and pure speed
held back for the finish, came with only love
of the clock and the underfooting
and the other runners. Each of us would
be testing excellence and endurance

in the other, though in the past I'd often
veer off to follow some feral distraction
down a side path, allowing myself
to pursue something odd or beautiful,
becoming acquainted with a few of the ways
not to blame myself for failing to succeed.

I had come to believe what's beautiful
had more to do with daring
to take yourself seriously, to stay
the course, whatever the course might be.
The person in front seemed ready to fade,
his long, graceful stride shortening

as I came up along his side. I was sure now
I'd at least exceed my best time.
But the man with the famous final kick
already had begun his move. *Beautiful*, I heard
a spectator say, as if something inevitable
about to come from nowhere was again on its way.

In Love, His Grammar Grew

By Stephen Dunn

In love, his grammar grew
rich with intensifiers, and adverbs fell
madly from the sky like pheasants
for the peasantry, and he, as sated
as they were, lolled under shade trees
until roused by moonlight
and the beautiful fraternal twins
and and *but*. Oh that was when

he knew he couldn't resist
a conjunction of any kind.
One said *accumulate*, the other
was a doubter who loved the wind
and the mind that cleans up after it.
For love
he wanted to break all the rules,
light a candle behind a sentence
named Sheila, always running on
and wishing to be stopped
by the hard button of a period.
Sometimes, in desperation, he'd look
toward a mannequin or a window dresser
with a penchant for parsing.
But mostly he wanted you, Sheila,
and the adjectives that could precede
and change you: *bluesy*, *fly-by-night*,
queen of all that is and might be.

Propositions

By Stephen Dunn

Anyone who begins a sentence with, "In all honesty ... "
is about to tell a lie. Anyone who says, "This is how I feel"
had better love form more than disclosure. Same for anyone
who thinks he thinks well because he had a thought.

If you say, "You're ugly" to an ugly person — no credit
for honesty, which must always be a discovery, an act
that qualifies as an achievement. If you persist
you're just a cruel bastard, a pig without a mirror,

somebody who hasn't examined himself enough.
A hesitation hints at an attempt to be honest, suggests
a difficulty is present. A good sentence needs
a clause or two, interruptions, set off by commas,

evidence of a slowing down, a rethinking.
Before I asked my wife to marry me, I told her
I'd never be fully honest. No one, she said,
had ever said that to her. I was trying

to be radically honest, I said, but in fact
had another motive. A claim without a "but" in it
is, at best, only half true. In all honesty,

I was asking in advance to be forgiven.

Sweetness

By Stephen Dunn

Just when it has seemed I couldn't bear
  one more friend
waking with a tumor, one more maniac

with a perfect reason, often a sweetness
  has come
and changed nothing in the world

except the way I stumbled through it,
  for a while lost
in the ignorance of loving

someone or something, the world shrunk
  to mouth-size,
hand-size, and never seeming small.

I acknowledge there is no sweetness
  that doesn't leave a stain,
no sweetness that's ever sufficiently sweet ....

Tonight a friend called to say his lover
  was killed in a car
he was driving. His voice was low

and guttural, he repeated what he needed
  to repeat, and I repeated
the one or two words we have for such grief

until we were speaking only in tones.
  Often a sweetness comes
as if on loan, stays just long enough

to make sense of what it means to be alive,
  then returns to its dark
source. As for me, I don't care

where it's been, or what bitter road
  it's traveled
to come so far, to taste so good.

Chord

By Stuart Dybek

A man steps out of sunlight,
sunlight that streams like grace,

still gaping at blue sky
staked across the emptiness of space,

into a history where shadows
assume a human face.

A man slips into silence
that began as a cry,

still trailing music
although reduced to the sigh

of an accordion
as it folds into its case.

Clothespins

By Stuart Dybek

I once hit clothespins
for the Chicago Cubs.
I'd go out after supper
when the wash was in
and collect clothespins
from under four stories
of clothesline.
A swing-and-a-miss
was a strike-out;
the garage roof, Willie Mays,
pounding his mitt
under a pop fly.
Bushes, a double,
off the fence, triple,
and over, home run.
The bleachers roared.
I was all they ever needed for the flag.
New records every game—
once, 10 homers in a row!
But sometimes I'd tag them
so hard they'd explode,

legs flying apart in midair,
pieces spinning crazily
in all directions.
Foul Ball! What else
could I call it?
The bat was real.

Peligro

By Stuart Dybek

Fire ran horrified
from its ashes.

In the afterglow,
cinematic shadows fled

from flesh and blood.
Scars appeared,

followed years later
by their wounds.

Blinks of red
dinged relentlessly,

but there was
nowhere to stop

for the train
pulling its wreckage.

Their Story

By Stuart Dybek

They were nearing the end of their story.
The fire was dying, like the fire in the story.
Each page turned was torn and fed
to flames, until word by word the book
burned down to an unmade bed of ash.
Wet kindling from an orchard of wooden spoons,
snow stewing, same old wind on the Gramophone,
same old wounds. Turn up the blue dial
under the kettle until darkness boils
with fables, and mirrors defrost to the quick

before fogging with steam, and dreams
rattle their armor of stovepipes and ladles.
Boots in the corner kick in their sleep.
A jacket hangs from a question mark.

Windy City

By Stuart Dybek

The garments worn in flying dreams
were fashioned there—
overcoats that swooped like kites,
scarves streaming like vapor trails,
gowns ballooning into spinnakers.

In a city like that one might sail
through life led by a runaway hat.
The young scattered in whatever directions
their wild hair pointed, and gusting
into one another, fell in love.

At night, wind rippled saxophones
that hung like windchimes in pawnshop
windows, hooting through each horn
so that the streets seemed haunted
not by nighthawks, but by doves.

Pinwheels whirled from steeples
in place of crosses. At the pinnacles
of public buildings, snagged underclothes—
the only flag—flapped majestically.
And when it came time to disappear

one simply chose a thoroughfare
devoid of memories, raised a collar,
and turned his back on the wind.
I closed my eyes and stepped
into a swirl of scuttling leaves.

The Racist Bone

By Cornelius Eady

I know this is a real thing, because
When I was a kid, my big sister took me
To the Capitol Theater, in my hometown

Of Rochester, NY,

And there was a movie that afternoon,
The Tingler, which starred Vincent Price,
And what I remember best about the film
Was that it was about this extra, insect-like gland, that

We all appeared to have been born with,
But nobody but sci-fi movie scientists knew about.
If it wasn't fed properly, it would crawl up
Your leg, and choke you to death with its claws!

Your only hope was if you saw it coming, and knew
What it was, you could scream—loud.
Which we did, when it crawled across the screen.
Then the lights blacked out, and Vincent Price

Shouted it had skittered off the screen, hungry—which it hadn't;
The Capitol was the Black movie house—25 cents a seat,
The last drop of profit squeezed from the theatrical run.
No need to pull Mr. Castle's hokey string and rubber model

Down the aisle for the likes of us.
In our heads The Tingler scurried, our darkest screams,
The horror we know, but won't talk about,
From the mouth of the corpse

Like a weevil, looking for a home.
So many characters perished
In that movie—they never believed they had it in them
Until those pincers closed.

Let Us Consider

By Russell Edson

Let us consider the farmer who makes his straw hat his sweetheart; or the old woman who makes a floor lamp her son; or the young woman who has set herself the task of scraping her shadow off a wall....

Let us consider the old woman who wore smoked cows' tongues for shoes and walked a meadow gathering cow chips in her apron; or a mirror grown dark with age that was given to a blind man who spent his nights looking into it, which saddened his mother, that her son should be so lost in

vanity....

Let us consider the man who fried roses for his dinner, whose kitchen smelled like a burning rose garden; or the man who disguised himself as a moth and ate his overcoat, and for dessert served himself a chilled fedora....

Sweet Tooth

By Russell Edson

A little girl made of sugar and spice and everything nice was eaten by someone with a sweet tooth the size of an elephant's tusk.

Ah, he said, this darn tooth, it's driving me nuts.

Then another voice is heard. It's the little girl's father who says, have you seen a little girl made of sugar and spice and everything nice?--Incidentally, what's that thing sticking out of your mouth like an elephant's tusk?

My sweet tooth, and it's really driving me nuts.

You ought to see a dentist.

But he might want to pull it, and I don't like people pulling at me. If they want to pull they should pull at their own pullables.

So true, said the little girl's father, people should pull at their own pullables and let other people's pullables alone. But still, he asked again, I wonder if you've seen a little girl made of sugar and spice and everything nice?

The Unforgiven

By Russell Edson

After a series of indiscretions a man stumbled homeward, thinking, now that I am going down from my misbehavior I am to be forgiven, because how I acted was not the true self, which I am now returning to. And I am not to be blamed for the past, because I'm to be seen as one redeemed in the present...

But when he got to the threshold of his house his house said, go away, I am not at home.

Not at home? A house is always at home; where else can it be? said the man.

I am not at home to you, said his house.

And so the man stumbled away into another series of indiscretions...

Beautiful Wreckage

By W. D. Ehrhart

What if I didn't shoot the old lady
running away from our patrol,

or the old man in the back of the head,
or the boy in the marketplace?

Or what if the boy—but he didn't
have a grenade, and the woman in Hue
didn't lie in the rain in a mortar pit
with seven Marines just for food,

Gaffney didn't get hit in the knee,
Ames didn't die in the river, Ski
didn't die in a medevac chopper
between Con Thien and Da Nang.

In Vietnamese, Con Thien means
place of angels. What if it really was
instead of the place of rotting sandbags,
incoming heavy artillery, rats and mud.

What if the angels were Ames and Ski,
or the lady, the man, and the boy,
and they lifted Gaffney out of the mud
and healed his shattered knee?

What if none of it happened the way I said?
Would it all be a lie?
Would the wreckage be suddenly beautiful?
Would the dead rise up and walk?

The Farmer

By W. D. Ehrhart

Each day I go into the fields
to see what is growing
and what remains to be done.
It is always the same thing: nothing
is growing, everything needs to be done.
Plow, harrow, disc, water, pray
till my bones ache and hands rub
blood-raw with honest labor—
all that grows is the slow
intransigent intensity of need.
I have sown my seed on soil
guaranteed by poverty to fail.
But I don't complain—except
to passersby who ask me why

I work such barren earth.
They would not understand me
if I stooped to lift a rock
and hold it like a child, or laughed,
or told them it is their poverty
I labor to relieve. For them,
I complain. A farmer of dreams
knows how to pretend. A farmer of dreams
knows what it means to be patient.
Each day I go into the fields.

In a London Drawingroom

By George Eliot

The sky is cloudy, yellowed by the smoke.
For view there are the houses opposite
Cutting the sky with one long line of wall
Like solid fog: far as the eye can stretch
Monotony of surface & of form
Without a break to hang a guess upon.
No bird can make a shadow as it flies,
For all is shadow, as in ways o'erhung
By thickest canvass, where the golden rays
Are clothed in hemp. No figure lingering
Pauses to feed the hunger of the eye
Or rest a little on the lap of life.
All hurry on & look upon the ground,
Or glance unmarking at the passers by
The wheels are hurrying too, cabs, carriages
All closed, in multiplied identity.
The world seems one huge prison-house & court
Where men are punished at the slightest cost,
With lowest rate of colour, warmth & joy.

La Figlia che Piange

By T. S. Eliot

O quam te memorem virgo ...

Stand on the highest pavement of the stair—
Lean on a garden urn—
Weave, weave the sunlight in your hair—
Clasp your flowers to you with a pained surprise—
Fling them to the ground and turn

With a fugitive resentment in your eyes:
But weave, weave the sunlight in your hair.

So I would have had him leave,
So I would have had her stand and grieve,
So he would have left
As the soul leaves the body torn and bruised,
As the mind deserts the body it has used.
I should find
Some way incomparably light and deft,
Some way we both should understand,
Simple and faithless as a smile and shake of the hand.

She turned away, but with the autumn weather
Compelled my imagination many days,
Many days and many hours:
Her hair over her arms and her arms full of flowers.
And I wonder how they should have been together!
I should have lost a gesture and a pose.
Sometimes these cogitations still amaze
The troubled midnight and the noon's repose.

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

The Doubt of Future Foes

By Queen Elizabeth I

The doubt of future foes exiles my present joy,
And wit me warns to shun such snares as threaten mine annoy;
For falsehood now doth flow, and subjects' faith doth ebb,
Which should not be if reason ruled or wisdom weaved the web.
But clouds of joys untried do cloak aspiring minds,
Which turn to rain of late repent by changed course of winds.
The top of hope supposed the root upreared shall be,
And fruitless all their grafted guile, as shortly ye shall see.
The dazzled eyes with pride, which great ambition blinds,
Shall be unsealed by worthy wights whose foresight falsehood finds.
The daughter of debate that discord aye doth sow
Shall reap no gain where former rule still peace hath taught to know.
No foreign banished wight shall anchor in this port;
Our realm brooks not seditious sects, let them elsewhere resort.
My rusty sword through rest shall first his edge employ
To poll their tops that seek such change or gape for future joy.

On Monsieur's Depart

By Queen Elizabeth I

I grieve and dare not show my discontent,
I love and yet am forced to seem to hate,
I do, yet dare not say I ever meant,
I seem stark mute but inwardly do prate.
I am and not, I freeze and yet am burned,
Since from myself another self I turned.

My care is like my shadow in the sun,
Follows me flying, flies when I pursue it,
Stands and lies by me, doth what I have done.
His too familiar care doth make me rue it.
No means I find to rid him from my breast,
Till by the end of things it be supprest.

Some gentler passion slide into my mind,
For I am soft and made of melting snow;
Or be more cruel, love, and so be kind.
Let me or float or sink, be high or low.
Or let me live with some more sweet content,
Or die and so forget what love ere meant.

Or

By Thomas Sayers Ellis

Or Oreo, or
worse. Or ordinary.
Or your choice
of category

or
Color

or any color
other than Colored
or Colored Only.
Or "Of Color"

or
Other

or theory or discourse
or oral territory.

Oregon or Georgia
or Florida Zora

or
Opportunity

or born poor
or Corporate. Or Moor.
Or a Noir Orpheus
or Senghor

or
Diaspora

or a horrendous
and tore-up journey.
Or performance. Or allegory's armor
of ignorant comfort

or
Worship

or reform or a sore chorus.
Or Electoral Corruption
or important ports
of Yoruba or worry

or
Neighbor

or fear of . . .
of terror or border.
Or all organized
minorities.

Early Elegy: Headmistress

By Claudia Emerson

The word itself: prim, retired, its artifact
her portrait above the fireplace, on her face
the boredom she abhorred, then perfected,
her hands held upward—their emptiness
a revision, cigarette and brandy snifter
painted, intolerably, out, to leave her this
lesser gesture: *What next?* or shrugged *Whatever*.

From the waist down she was never there.

Concord Hymn

By Ralph Waldo Emerson

Sung at the Completion of the Battle Monument, July 4, 1837

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
  Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood
  And fired the shot heard round the world.

The foe long since in silence slept;
  Alike the conqueror silent sleeps;
And Time the ruined bridge has swept
  Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.

On this green bank, by this soft stream,
  We set today a votive stone;
That memory may their deed redeem,
  When, like our sires, our sons are gone.

Spirit, that made those heroes dare
  To die, and leave their children free,
Bid Time and Nature gently spare
  The shaft we raise to them and thee.

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

Experience

By Ralph Waldo Emerson

The lords of life, the lords of life,—
I saw them pass,
In their own guise,
Like and unlike,
Portly and grim,—
Use and Surprise,
Surface and Dream,
Succession swift and spectral Wrong,
Temperament without a tongue,
And the inventor of the game
Omnipresent without name;—

Some to see, some to be guessed,
They marched from east to west:
Little man, least of all,
Among the legs of his guardians tall,
Walked about with puzzled look.
Him by the hand dear Nature took,
Dearest Nature, strong and kind,
Whispered, ‘Darling, never mind!
To-morrow they will wear another face,
The founder thou; these are thy race!’

Give All to Love

By Ralph Waldo Emerson

Give all to love;
Obey thy heart;
Friends, kindred, days,
Estate, good-fame,
Plans, credit and the Muse,—
Nothing refuse.

’T is a brave master;
Let it have scope:
Follow it utterly,
Hope beyond hope:
High and more high
It dives into noon,
With wing unspent,
Untold intent:
But it is a god,
Knows its own path
And the outlets of the sky.

It was never for the mean;
It requireth courage stout.
Souls above doubt,
Valor unbending,
It will reward,—
They shall return
More than they were,
And ever ascending.

Leave all for love;
Yet, hear me, yet,
One word more thy heart behoved,

One pulse more of firm endeavor,—
Keep thee to-day,
To-morrow, forever,
Free as an Arab
Of thy beloved.

Cling with life to the maid;
But when the surprise,
First vague shadow of surmise
Flits across her bosom young,
Of a joy apart from thee,
Free be she, fancy-free;
Nor thou detain her vesture's hem,
Nor the palest rose she flung
From her summer diadem.

Though thou loved her as thyself,
As a self of purer clay,
Though her parting dims the day,
Stealing grace from all alive;
Heartily know,
When half-gods go,
The gods arrive.

The Snow-Storm

By Ralph Waldo Emerson

Announced by all the trumpets of the sky,
Arrives the snow, and, driving o'er the fields,
Seems nowhere to alight: the whited air
Hides hills and woods, the river, and the heaven,
And veils the farm-house at the garden's end.
The sled and traveller stopped, the courier's feet
Delayed, all friends shut out, the housemates sit
Around the radiant fireplace, enclosed
In a tumultuous privacy of storm.

Come see the north wind's masonry.
Out of an unseen quarry evermore
Furnished with tile, the fierce artificer
Curves his white bastions with projected roof
Round every windward stake, or tree, or door.
Speeding, the myriad-handed, his wild work
So fanciful, so savage, nought cares he
For number or proportion. Mockingly,

On coop or kennel he hangs Parian wreaths;
A swan-like form invests the hidden thorn;
Fills up the farmer's lane from wall to wall,
Maugre the farmer's sighs; and, at the gate,
A tapering turret overtops the work.
And when his hours are numbered, and the world
Is all his own, retiring, as he were not,
Leaves, when the sun appears, astonished Art
To mimic in slow structures, stone by stone,
Built in an age, the mad wind's night-work,
The frolic architecture of the snow.

Now I Pray

By Kathy Engel

Ashen face, wool hat bobbing,
the young boy’s eyes dart to me,
then up at the man pulling a rolling
suitcase, whose hand he holds,
then back at me. His legs move
as if without gravity. The man asks:
Do you know a church on this street
that serves free food? I want to say
I know. That the names of churches
on an Avenue called Americas roll
out of me. I want to tell you
it is temporary, their condition:
suitcase, darting eyes, seeking free
food at 9 pm in a big city on a school night.
I want to tell you I don’t for a moment
wonder if that is really the boy’s father
or uncle or legitimate caretaker —
something in the handholding and
eyes, having watched too many
episodes of *Law and Order*. I want
to tell you I take them to a restaurant
and pay for a warm meal or empty
my wallet not worrying how
offensive that might be because
in the end hunger is hunger.
I want to tell you I call someone
who loves them — that there is someone —
and say your guys are lost, can
you come? I want to tell you I sit
down on the sidewalk at the corner

of Waverly and pray — that all
passing by, anonymous shoes
marking the pavement, join
in a chorus of prayer humming
like cicadas in the Delta. I want to
tell you the boy and the man eat food
encircled by the warmth of bodies.
I want to turn the cold night into a feast.
I will tell you I am praying.

Turtle Came to See Me

By Margarita Engel

The first story I ever write
is a bright crayon picture
of a dancing tree, the branches
tossed by island wind.

I draw myself standing beside the tree,
with a colorful parrot soaring above me,
and a magical turtle clasped in my hand,
and two yellow wings fluttering
on the proud shoulders of my ruffled
Cuban rumba dancer's
fancy dress.

In my California kindergarten class,
the teacher scolds me: REAL TREES
DON'T LOOK LIKE THAT.

It's the moment
when I first
begin to learn
that teachers
can be wrong.

They have never seen
the dancing plants
of Cuba.

Earth, You Have Returned to Me

By Elaine Equi

Can you imagine waking up

every morning on a different planet,
each with its own gravity?

Slogging, wobbling,
wavering. Atilt
and out-of-sync
with all that moves
and doesn't.

Through years of trial
and mostly error
did I study this unsteady way —

changing pills, adjusting the dosage,
never settling.

A long time we were separate,
O Earth,
but now you have returned to me.

Intimate Detail

By Heid E. Erdrich

Late summer, late afternoon, my work
interrupted by bees who claim my tea,
even my pen looks flower-good to them.
I warn a delivery man that my bees,
who all summer have been tame as cows,
now grow frantic, aggressive, difficult to shoo
from the house. I blame the second blooms
come out in hot colors, defiant vibrancy—
unexpected from cottage cosmos, nicotianna,
and bean vine. But those bees know, I'm told
by the interested delivery man, they have only
so many days to go. He sighs at sweetness untasted.

Still warm in the day, we inspect the bees.
This kind stranger knows them in intimate detail.
He can name the ones I think of as *shopping ladies*.
Their fur coats ruffed up, yellow packages tucked
beneath their wings, so weighted with their finds
they ascend in slow circles, sometimes drop, while
other bees whirl madly, dance the blossoms, ravish
broadly so the whole bed bends and bounces alive.

He asks if I have kids, I say not yet. He has five,
all boys. He calls the honeybees his girls although
he tells me they're *ungendered workers*
who never produce offspring. Some hour drops,
the bees shut off. In the long, cool slant of sun,
spent flowers fold into cups. He asks me if I've ever
seen a *Solitary Bee* where it sleeps. I say I've not.
The nearest bud's a long-throated peach hollyhock.
He cradles it in his palm, holds it up so I spy
the intimacy of the sleeping bee. Little life safe in a petal,
little girl, your few furious buzzings as you stir
stay with me all winter, remind me of my work undone.

Last Snow

By Heid E. Erdrich

Dumped wet and momentary on a dull ground
that's been clear but clearly sleeping, for days.
Last snow melts as it falls, piles up slush, runs in first light
making a music in the streets we wish we could keep.
Last snow. That's what we'll think for weeks to come.
Close sun sets up a glare that smarts like a good cry.
We could head north and north and never let this season go.
Stubborn beast, the body reads the past in the change of light,
knows the blow of grief in the time of trees' tight-fisted leaves.
Stubborn calendar of bone. Last snow. Now it must always be so.

Windigo

By Louise Erdrich

For Angela

The Windigo is a flesh-eating, wintry demon with a man buried deep inside of it. In some Chippewa stories, a young girl vanquishes this monster by forcing boiling lard down its throat, thereby releasing the human at the core of ice.

You knew I was coming for you, little one,
when the kettle jumped into the fire.
Towels flapped on the hooks,
and the dog crept off, groaning,
to the deepest part of the woods.

In the hackles of dry brush a thin laughter started up.
Mother scolded the food warm and smooth in the pot

and called you to eat.
But I spoke in the cold trees:
New one, I have come for you, child hide and lie still.

The sumac pushed sour red cones through the air.
Copper burned in the raw wood.
You saw me drag toward you.
Oh touch me, I murmured, and licked the soles of your feet.
You dug your hands into my pale, melting fur.

I stole you off, a huge thing in my bristling armor.
Steam rolled from my wintry arms, each leaf shivered
from the bushes we passed
until they stood, naked, spread like the cleaned spines of fish.

Then your warm hands hummed over and shoveled themselves full
of the ice and the snow. I would darken and spill
all night running, until at last morning broke the cold earth
and I carried you home,
a river shaking in the sun.

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

Who Burns for the Perfection of Paper

By Martín Espada

At sixteen, I worked after high school hours
at a printing plant
that manufactured legal pads:
Yellow paper
stacked seven feet high
and leaning
as I slipped cardboard
between the pages,
then brushed red glue
up and down the stack.
No gloves: fingertips required
for the perfection of paper,
smoothing the exact rectangle.
Sluggish by 9 PM, the hands
would slide along suddenly sharp paper,
and gather slits thinner than the crevices
of the skin, hidden.
Then the glue would sting,

hands oozing
till both palms burned
at the punchclock.

Ten years later, in law school,
I knew that every legal pad
was glued with the sting of hidden cuts,
that every open lawbook
was a pair of hands
upturned and burning.

“Find Work”

By Rhina P. Espaillat

I tie my Hat—I crease my Shawl—
Life's little duties do—precisely
As the very least
Were infinite—to me—
—Emily Dickinson, #443

My mother’s mother, widowed very young
of her first love, and of that love’s first fruit,
moved through her father’s farm, her country tongue
and country heart anaesthetized and mute
with labor. So her kind was taught to do—
“Find work,” she would reply to every grief—
and her one dictum, whether false or true,
tolled heavy with her passionate belief.
Widowed again, with children, in her prime,
she spoke so little it was hard to bear
so much composure, such a truce with time
spent in the lifelong practice of despair.
But I recall her floors, scrubbed white as bone,
her dishes, and how painfully they shone.

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

Weighing In

By Rhina P. Espaillat

What the scale tells you is how much the earth
has missed you, body, how it wants you back
again after you leave it to go forth

into the light. Do you remember how
earth hardly noticed you then? Others would rock
you in their arms, warm in the flow

that fed you, coaxed you upright. Then earth began
to claim you with spots and fevers, began to lick
at you with a bruised knee, a bloody shin,

and finally to stoke you, body, drumming
intimate coded messages through music
you danced to unawares, there in your dreaming

and your poems and your obedient blood.
Body, how useful you became, how lucky,
heavy with news and breakage, rich, and sad,

sometimes, imagining that greedy zero
you must have been, that promising empty sack
of possibilities, never-to-come tomorrow.

But look at you now, body, soft old shoe
that love wears when it's stirring, look down, look
how earth wants what you weigh, needs what you know.

to the notebook kid

By Eve L. Ewing

yo chocolate milk for breakfast kid.
one leg of your sweatpants rolled up
scrounging at the bottom of your mama's purse
for bus fare and gum
pen broke and you got ink on your thumb kid

what's good, hot on the cement kid
White Castle kid
tongue stained purple
cussin on the court
till your little brother shows up
with half a candy bar kid

got that good B in science kid
you earned it kid
etch your name in a tree
hug your granny on her birthday

think of Alaska when they shootin
curled-up dreams of salmon
safety
tundra
the farthest away place you ever saw in a book
polar bears your new chess partners
pickax in the ice
Northern Lights kid

keep your notebook where your cousins won't find it.
leave it on my desk if you want
shuffle under carbon paper
and a stamp that screams late

yellow and red to draw the eye from the ocean
you keep hidden in a jacked-up five star.
your mama thought there was a secret in there
thought they would laugh
but that ain't it.

it's that flows and flows and flows
and lines like those rip-roaring
bits you got
bars till the end of time
you could rap like
helium bout to spring
all of it
down to you
none left in the sun — fuelless
while the last light pushes from your belly

climbing your ribs

and you laugh into the microphone
and who is ready for that?

Angels

By B. H. Fairchild

Elliot Ray Neiderland, home from college
one winter, hauling a load of Herefords
from Hogtown to Guymon with a pint of
Ezra Brooks and a copy of Rilke's *Duineser*
Elegien on the seat beside him, saw the ass-end
of his semi gliding around in the side mirror

as he hit ice and knew he would never live
to see graduation or the castle at Duino.

In the hospital, head wrapped like a gift
(the nurses had stuck a bow on top), he said
four flaming angels crouched on the hood, wings
spread so wide he couldn't see, and then
the world collapsed. We smiled and passed a flask
around. Little Bill and I sang *Your Cheatin'*
Heart and laughed, and then a sudden quiet
put a hard edge on the morning and we left.

Siehe, ich lebe, *Look, I'm alive*, he said,
leaping down the hospital steps. The nurses
waved, white dresses puffed out like pigeons
in the morning breeze. We roared off in my Dodge,
Behold, I come like a thief! he shouted to the town
and gave his life to poetry. He lives, now,
in the south of France. His poems arrive
by mail, and we read them and do not understand.

Early Occult Memory Systems of the Lower Midwest

By B. H. Fairchild

In his fifth year the son, deep in the backseat
of his father's Ford and the *mysterium*
of time, holds time in memory with words,
night, this night, on the way to a stalled rig south
of Kiowa Creek where the plains wind stacks
the skeletons of weeds on barbed-wire fences
and rattles the battered DeKalb sign to make
the child think of time in its passing, of death.

Cattle stare at flat-bed haulers gunning clumps
of black smoke and lugging damaged drill pipe
up the gullied, mud-hollowed road. *Road, this*
road. Roustabouts shouting from the crow's nest
float like Ascension angels on a ring of lights.
Chokecherries gouge the purpled sky, cloud-
swags running the moon under, and starlight
rains across the Ford's blue hood. *Blue, this blue.*

Later, where black flies haunt the mud tank,
the boy walks along the pipe rack dragging
a stick across the hollow ends to make a kind

of music, and the creek throbs with frog songs,
locusts, the rasp of tree limbs blown and scattered.
The great horse people, his father, these sounds,
these shapes saved from time's dark creek as the car
moves across the moving earth: *world, this world*.

Old Men Playing Basketball

By B. H. Fairchild

The heavy bodies lunge, the broken language
of fake and drive, glamorous jump shot
slowed to a stutter. Their gestures, in love
again with the pure geometry of curves,

rise toward the ball, falter, and fall away.
On the boards their hands and fingertips
tremble in tense little prayers of reach
and balance. Then, the grind of bone

and socket, the caught breath, the sigh,
the grunt of the body laboring to give
birth to itself. In their toiling and grand
sweeps, I wonder, do they still make love

to their wives, kissing the undersides
of their wrists, dancing the old soft-shoe
of desire? And on the long walk home
from the VFW, do they still sing

to the drunken moon? Stands full, clock
moving, the one in army fatigues
and houseshoes says to himself, *pick and roll*,
and the phrase sounds musical as ever,

radio crooning songs of love after the game,
the girl leaning back in the Chevy's front seat
as her raven hair flames in the shuddering
light of the outdoor movie, and now he drives,

gliding toward the net. A glass wand
of autumn light breaks over the backboard.
Boys rise up in old men, wings begin to sprout
at their backs. The ball turns in the darkening air.

The Poem You've Been Waiting For

By Tarfia Faizullah

I saw then the white-eyed man
leaning in to see if I was ready

yet to go where he has been waiting
to take me. I saw then the gnawing

sounds my faith has been making
and I saw too that the shape it sings

in is the color of cast-iron mountains
I drove so long to find I forgot I had

been looking for them, for the you
I once knew and the you that was born

waiting for me to find you. I have been
twisting and turning across these lifetimes

where forgetting me is what you do
so you don't have to look at yourself. I saw

that I would drown in a creek carved out
of a field our incarnations forged the first path

through to those mountains. I invited you to stroll
with me there again for the first time, to pause

and sprawl in the grass while I read to you
the poem you hadn't known you'd been waiting

to hear. I read until you finally slept
and all your jagged syntaxes softened into rest.

You're always driving so far from me towards
the me I worry, without you, is eternity. I lay there,

awake, keeping watch while you snored.
I waited, as I always seem to, for you

to wake up and come back to me.

Pigeons

By Huang Fan
Translated By Huang Fan and Margaret Ross

I've never seen pigeons argue
I only see them soar
I don't know if a pigeon is naïve or worldly
I just know it has no past to make it toil through life

Maybe they're the tongues of the air
Lazily expressing cars' sighs
Maybe they're lined up on the roof
Vying to perform snow's wedding

One day I stick my head out the window
And realize their nation is the act of soaring
Soaring makes my silence meaningless
Thank god, they've taught me how to talk about nations!

Standing under a flock of pigeons, I think *oh*
People aren't even worth one flower blooming toward them

Note: *Translated from the Chinese*

Money Tree

By Chanda Feldman

After David Hammons
A shine to the bark, silver leaves aflicker
and the wound that made the basketball hoop:
a bicycle's metal wheel gouged in the tree,
the trunk's burred lip that clamps it.

Whose childhood monument is this?
In the foreground of whose childhood home,
its blind-drawn windows? Where is the adolescent
of the grass and weeds, after school? The adolescent

of the fluid leap and jump shot? Of the glissando
stride and lay-up? The plosive *woop woop* cries sent up
when the body satisfies the calculating eye?
O the tree ashimmer in hypotheticals' blooms—

where's the undissuaded youth who sought

a scarce grace here? Who sought to make bank?
The shoulder and arm and wrist on repeat
even as day went thoroughly dark

who refused to come inside until they exhausted
the audience of their mind? *O* extraordinary dunk,
O hard slam, shudder the immovable tree.
Where is the glimmer of a sign

one might one day rise among the ordinals
to be ranked *first, first, first*? Wouldn't
it be possible? Because *if not, if not, if not*.

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

Constantly Risking Absurdity (#15)

By Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Constantly risking absurdity
and death
whenever he performs
above the heads
of his audience
the poet like an acrobat
climbs on rime
to a high wire of his own making
and balancing on eyebeams
above a sea of faces
paces his way
to the other side of day
performing entrechats
and sleight-of-foot tricks
and other high theatrics
and all without mistaking
any thing
for what it may not be

For he's the super realist
who must perforce perceive
taut truth
before the taking of each stance or step
in his supposed advance
toward that still higher perch
where Beauty stands and waits

with gravity
to start her death-defying leap

And he
a little charleychaplin man
who may or may not catch
her fair eternal form
spreadeagled in the empty air
of existence

I Genitory Perduti

By Lawrence Ferlinghetti

The dove-white gulls
on the wet lawn in Washington Square
in the early morning fog
each a little ghost in the gloaming
Souls transmigrated maybe
from Hudson's shrouded shores
across all the silent years—
Which one's my maybe mafioso father
in his so white suit and black shoes
in his real estate office Forty-second Street
or at the front table wherever he went—
Which my dear lost mother with faded smile
locked away from me in time—
Which my big brother Charley
selling switching-signals all his life
on the New York Central—
And which good guy brother Clem
sweating in Sing Sing's darkest offices
deputy-warden thirty years
watching executions in the wooden armchair
(with leather straps and black hood)
He too gone mad with it in the end—
And which my nearest brother Harry
still kindest and dearest in a far suburb—
I see them now all turn to me at last
gull-eyed in the white dawn
about to call to me
across the silent grass

Queens Cemetery, Setting Sun

By Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Airport bus from JFK
cruising through Queens
passing huge endless cemetery
by Long Island's old expressway
(once a dirt path for wheelless Indians)
myriad small tombstones tilted up
gesturing statues on parapets
stone arms or wings upraised
lost among illegible inscriptions
And the setting yellow sun
painting all of them
on one side only
with an ochre brush
Rows and rows and rows and rows
of small stone slabs
tilted toward the sun forever
While on the far horizon
Mannahatta's great stone slabs
skyscraper tombs and parapets
casting their own long black shadows
over all these long-haired graves
the final restless places
of old-country potato farmers
dustbin pawnbrokers
dead dagos and Dublin bouncers
tinsmiths and blacksmiths and roofers
house painters and house carpenters
cabinet makers and cigar makers
garment workers and streetcar motormen
railroad switchmen and signal salesmen
swabbers and sweepers and swampers
steam-fitters and key-punch operators
ward heelers and labor organizers
railroad dicks and smalltime mafiosi
shopkeepers and saloon keepers and doormen
icemen and middlemen and conmen
housekeepers and housewives and dowagers
French housemaids and Swedish cooks
Brooklyn barmaids and Bronxville butlers
opera singers and gandy dancers
pitchers and catchers
in the days of ragtime baseball
poolroom hustlers and fight promoters

Catholic sisters of charity
parish priests and Irish cops
Viennese doctors of delirium
now all abandoned in eternity
parcels in a dead-letter office
inscrutable addresses on them
beyond further deliverance
in an America wheeling past them
and disappearing oblivious
into East River's echoing tunnels
down the great American drain

Retired Ballerinas, Central Park West

By Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Retired ballerinas on winter afternoons
walking their dogs
in Central Park West
(or their cats on leashes—
the cats themselves old highwire artists)
The ballerinas
leap and pirouette
through Columbus Circle
while winos on park benches
(laid back like drunken Goudonovs)
hear the taxis trumpet together
like horsemen of the apocalypse
in the dusk of the gods
It is the final witching hour
when swains are full of swan songs
And all return through the dark dusk
to their bright cells
in glass highrises
or sit down to oval cigarettes and cakes
in the Russian Tea Room
or climb four flights to back rooms
in Westside brownstones
where faded playbill photos
fall peeling from their frames
like last year's autumn leaves

Courtesy

By David Ferry

It is an afternoon toward the end of August:
Autumnal weather, cool following on,
And riding in, after the heat of summer,
Into the empty afternoon shade and light,

The shade full of light without any thickness at all;
You can see right through and right down into the depth
Of the light and shade of the afternoon; there isn't
Any weight of the summer pressing down.

In the backyard of the house next door there's a kid,
Maybe eleven or twelve, and a young man,
Visitors at the house whom I don't know,
The house in which the sound of some kind of party,

Perhaps even a wedding, is going on.
Somehow you can tell from the tone of their voices
That they don't know each other very well—
Two guests at the party, one of them, maybe,

A friend of the bride or groom, the other the son
Or the younger brother, maybe, of somebody there.
A couple of blocks away the wash of traffic
Dimly sounds, as if we were near the ocean.

They're shooting baskets, amiably and mildly.
The noise of the basketball, though startlingly louder
Than the voices of the two of them as they play,
Is peaceable as can be, something like meter.

The earnest voice of the kid, girlish and manly,
And the voice of the young man, carefully playing the game
Of having a grown-up conversation with him:
I can tell the young man is teaching the boy by example,

The easy way he dribbles the ball and passes it
Back with a single gesture of wrist to make it
Easy for the kid to be in synch;
Giving and taking, perfectly understood.

Seen Through a Window

By David Ferry

A man and a woman are sitting at a table.
It is supper time. The air is green. The walls
Are white in the green air, as rocks under water
Retain their own true color, though washed in green.
I do not know either the man or the woman,
Nor do I know whatever they know of each other.
Though washed in my eye they keep their own true color.

The man is all his own hunched strength, the body's
Self and strength, that bears, like weariness,
Itself upon itself, as a stone's weight
Bears heavily on itself to be itself.
Heavy the strength that bears the body down.
And the way he feeds is like a dreamless sleep.
The dreaming of a stone is how he feeds.

The woman's arms are plump, mottled a little
The flesh, like standing milk, and on one arm
A blue bruise, got in some household labor or other,
Flowering in the white. Her staring eye,
Like some bird's cry called from some deepest wood,
Says nothing of what it is but what it is.
Such silence is the bird's cry of the stone.

What It Does

By David Ferry

The sea bit,
As they said it would,
And the hill slid,
As they said it would,
And the poor dead
Nodded agog
The poor head.

O topmost lofty
Tower of Troy,
The poem apparently
Speaks with joy
Of terrible things.
Where is the pleasure
The poetry brings?

Tell if you can,
What does it make?
A city of man
That will not shake,
Or if it shake,
Shake with the splendor
Of the poem’s pleasure.

The Tree

By Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea

Fair tree! for thy delightful shade
'Tis just that some return be made;
Sure some return is due from me
To thy cool shadows, and to thee.
When thou to birds dost shelter give,
Thou music dost from them receive;
If travellers beneath thee stay
Till storms have worn themselves away,
That time in praising thee they spend
And thy protecting pow'r commend.
The shepherd here, from scorching freed,
Tunes to thy dancing leaves his reed;
Whilst his lov'd nymph, in thanks, bestows
Her flow'ry chaplets on thy boughs.
Shall I then only silent be,
And no return be made by me?
No; let this wish upon thee wait,
And still to flourish be thy fate.
To future ages may'st thou stand
Untouch'd by the rash workman's hand,
Till that large stock of sap is spent,
Which gives thy summer's ornament;
Till the fierce winds, that vainly strive
To shock thy greatness whilst alive,
Shall on thy lifeless hour attend,
Prevent the axe, and grace thy end;
Their scatter'd strength together call
And to the clouds proclaim thy fall;
Who then their ev'ning dews may spare
When thou no longer art their care,
But shalt, like ancient heroes, burn,
And some bright hearth be made thy urn.

Coy Mistress

By Annie Finch

Sir, I am not a bird of prey:
a Lady does not seize the day.
I trust that brief Time will unfold
our youth, before he makes us old.
How could we two write lines of rhyme
were we not fond of numbered Time
and grateful to the vast and sweet
trials his days will make us meet?
The Grave's not just the body's curse;
no skeleton can pen a verse!
So while this numbered World we see,
let's sweeten Time with poetry,
and Time, in turn, may sweeten Love
and give us time our love to prove.
You've praised my eyes, forehead, breast:
you've all our lives to praise the rest.

Insect

By Annie Finch

That hour-glass-backed,
orchard-legged,
heavy-headed will,

paper-folded,
wedge-contorted,
savage—dense to kill—

pulls back on backward-moving,
arching
high legs still,

lowered through a deep, knees-reaching,
feathered down
green will,

antenna-honest,
thread-descending,
carpeted as if with skill,

a focus-changing,
sober-reaching,

tracing, killing will.

Scintilla, Star

By Jameson Fitzpatrick

In the old place, there was no place
that did not see me.
Wherever I went mothers whispered
about me like a Greek chorus:
I heard that boy ... I heard that.
I was just a boy. But it was
true, what they said, that I liked
other boys, that I had stolen Sarah's,
though he was four years older
and they were very much in love.
I made him break up with her
in a Chili's parking lot
while I waited inside. I was
fourteen. How embarrassing
to have been fourteen, to have eaten
at that Chili's, often. That summer
I had no taste for anything
but him. Faintly of chlorine.
When he left for college
I had no one. Sarah's friends
stared me down at school.
I found it was better,
if I could not be no one,
to be someone. Small, but
particular. Specified, which was
an apprenticeship for special.
Cold, another word for cool.

Cartoon Physics, part 1

By Nick Flynn

Children under, say, *ten*, shouldn't know
that the universe is ever-expanding,
inexorably pushing into the vacuum, galaxies

swallowed by galaxies, whole

solar systems collapsing, all of it

acted out in silence. At ten we are still learning

the rules of cartoon animation,

that if a man draws a door on a rock
only he can pass through it.
Anyone else who tries

will crash into the rock. Ten-year-olds
should stick with burning houses, car wrecks,
ships going down—earthbound, tangible

disasters, arenas

where they can be heroes. You can run
back into a burning house, sinking ships

have lifeboats, the trucks will come
with their ladders, if you jump

you will be saved. A child

places her hand on the roof of a schoolbus,
& drives across a city of sand. She knows

the exact spot it will skid, at which point
the bridge will give, who will swim to safety
& who will be pulled under by sharks. She will learn

that if a man runs off the edge of a cliff
he will not fall

until he notices his mistake.

Cathedral of Salt

By Nick Flynn

Beneath all this I'm carving a cathedral
of salt. I keep

the entrance hidden, no one seems to notice
the hours I'm missing ... I'll

bring you one night, it's where
I go when I

hang up the phone ...

Neither you
nor your soul is waiting for me at

the end of this, I know that, the salt
nearly clear after I

chisel out the pews, the see-through
altar, the opaque

panes of glass that depict the stations of
our cross — *Here is the day*

we met, here is the day we remember we
met ... The air down here

will kill us, some say, some wear paper
masks, some still imagine the air above the green

trees, thick with bees

building solitary nests out of petals. What's
the name for this? *Ineffable?* The endless

white will blind you, some say,
but what is there to see we haven't already

seen? Some say it's
like poking a stick into a river — you might as well

simply write about the stick.

Or the river.

The Other Side

By Jennifer Elise Foerster

My crown.
My room.
Surrounding snow.

These are not my
hands, my winter shoes

carried off by uncertain music.

There was a meadow
behind my house
and if I should see myself there
she would tell me
there was never a meadow

and then walk through me
as if through a cloud
and carry on in her own
solitary direction.

Crows still caw
in her palace garden—
tram rails, rain,
stammering moon.

Once lilacs bloomed
their huge white knuckles
breaking the winter of my room—

it was a dream—French windows
on a Viennese street.

Every street I cross
angling alongside
smoggy postwar artifices

branches scratch
against my sleep.

How my body was a branch
in my sleep.

And when I woke
years later
I peered down upon it
leafless and stiff.

No roosts left, no caw.
No birds blooming
in my dream's green crooks.

Afternoons alone
are labyrinthine.

I wander the city, searching
for what? Friends,
we knew where to find each other,
tapping the window of the winter room.

We were thinner then,
younger than the chestnut trees.

Everything has its seed
much later
and on the other side of time.

The Card Players

By Calvin Forbes

A fourth was needed so one of the three
Invited a friend and I came along as a spare
In case a chair was empty since I could fill
In as easily as I could shout out a rhyme.

As the jive flowed like the River Jordan
And Joshua and his trumpets sounded the alarm
The winning cards slam damned on the table
And I laughed along with morning noon and night.

My three big brothers: bold smart handsome.
One slim as a stick of dynamite, the second solid
As a line backer and the third crazy enough
To fight them both if they let it roll beyond talk.

Treated me like a child even after I had my first.
The three of them (ace king and a wild card)
Improbably born within four years as if Daddy
And Momma were trying to break a record

Or win a bet about how many diapers a woman
Could change in a single day without cursing
The hand God had dealt her; the odds were even
Until I came along years later to tell their story.

Momma Said

By Calvin Forbes

The slice I ate I want it back

Those crumbs I swept up
I'd like my share again
I can still taste it like it was

The memory by itself is delicious
Each bite was a small miracle
Both nourishing and sweet
I wish I had saved just a little bit

I know it wasn't a literal cake
It's the thought that counts
Like a gift that's not store-bought
Making it even more special

Like a dream that makes you
Want to go back to sleep
You can't have your cake
And eat it too Momma said

I was defiant and hardheaded
And answered yes I can too
The look she gave me said boy
I hope you aren't a fool all your life

The Other Side of This World

By Calvin Forbes

Put my glad rags in a cardboard box—
This old jiggerboo never grew mature.
Is everthing in its place except me?
Don't be surprised; I called all day

And the only person I could reach was
The operator; and it's a sorry day when
Nothing is coming down but your foot.
And how deep is your stomach cause

That's how far your heart will fall!
When I'm gone I might come back cause
I'm always forgetting something special.
A crease in my overalls, my collar stiff,

I cried as many tears as I have teeth.
And I only got two in my mouth. Son of the
Sun look out: as you get black you burn.

Is everything in its place except me?

The Coming Woman

By Mary Weston Fordham

Just look, ’tis quarter past six, love—
  And not even the fires are caught;
Well, you know I must be at the office—
  But, as usual, the breakfast ’ll be late.

Now hurry and wake up the children;
  And dress them as fast as you can;
‘Poor dearies,’ I know they’ll be tardy,
  Dear me, ‘what a slow, poky man!’

Have the tenderloin broiled nice and juicy—
  Have the toast browned and buttered all right;
And be sure you settle the coffee:
  Be sure that the silver is bright.

When ready, just run up and call me—
  At eight, to the office I go,
Lest poverty, grim, should o’ertake us—
  ‘’Tis bread and butter,’ you know.

The bottom from stocks may fall out,
  My bonds may get below par;
Then surely, I seldom could spare you
  A nickel, to buy a cigar.

All ready? Now, while I am eating,
  Just bring up my wheel to the door;
Then wash up the dishes; and, mind now,
  Have dinner promptly at four;

For tonight is our Woman’s Convention,
  And I am to speak first, you know—
The men veto us in private,
  But in public they shout, ‘That’s so.’

So ‘by-by’ – In case of a rap, love,
  Before opening the door, you must look;
O! how could a civilized woman
  Exist, without a man cook.

Serenade

By Mary Weston Fordham

Sleep, love sleep,
The night winds sigh,
In soft lullaby.
The Lark is at rest
With the dew on her breast.
So close those dear eyes,
That borrowed their hue
From the heavens so blue,
Sleep, love sleep.

Sleep, love sleep,
The pale moon looks down
On the valleys around,
The Glow Moth is flying,
The South wind is sighing,
And I am low lying,
With lute deftly strung,
To pour out my song,
Sleep, love sleep.

Ant

By Matthew Francis

After Robert Hooke

All afternoon a reddish trickle
out of the roots of the beech

and across the lawn,

a sort of rust that shines and dances.
Close up, it proves to be ant,

each droplet a horned

traveler finicking its way round
the crooked geometry

of a grass forest.

A finger felled in their path rocks them,
amazed, back on their haunches.

I see them tasting

the air for subtle intelligence,
till one ventures to scale it,

and others follow.

They are fidgety subjects to draw.
If you sink the feet in glue

the rest twists and writhes;

kill one, the juices evaporate
in seconds, leaving only

the shriveled casing.

I dunked one in brandy. It struggled
till the air rose from its mouth

in pinprick bubbles.

I let it soak an hour, then dried it,
observed the spherical head,

the hairlike feelers,

the grinning vice of its sideways jaw,
the coppery armor plate

with its scattered spines.

Some draft stirred it then. It rose to all
its feet, and set off across

the rough miles of desk.

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

Eagle Plain

By Robert Francis

The American eagle is not aware he is
the American eagle. He is never tempted
to look modest.

When orators advertise the American eagle's
virtues, the American eagle is not listening.
This is his virtue.

He is somewhere else, he is mountains away
but even if he were near he would never
make an audience.

The American eagle never says he will serve
if drafted, will dutifully serve etc. He is
not at our service.

If we have honored him we have honored one
who unequivocally honors himself by
overlooking us.

He does not know the meaning of magnificent.
Perhaps we do not altogether either
who cannot touch him.

Part for the Whole

By Robert Francis

When others run to windows or out of doors
To catch the sunset whole, he is content
With any segment anywhere he sits.

From segment, fragment, he can reconstruct
The whole, prefers to reconstruct the whole,
As if to say, I see more seeing less.

A window to the east will serve as well
As window to the west, for eastern sky
Echoes the western sky. And even less—

A patch of light that picture-glass happens
To catch from window-glass, fragment of fragment,
Flawed, distorted, dulled, nevertheless

Gives something unglassed nature cannot give:
The old obliquity of art, and proves
Part may be more than whole, least may be best.

Another Antipastoral

By Vievee Francis

I want to put down what the mountain has awakened.

My mouthful of grass.
My curious tale. I want to stand still but find myself moved patch by patch.
There's a bleat in my throat. Words fail me here. Can you understand? I sink to
my knees tired or not. I now know the ragweed from the goldenrod, and the blinding
beauty of green. Don't you see? I am shedding my skins. I am a paper hive, a wolf spider,
the creeping ivy, the ache of a birch, a heifer, a doe. I have fallen from my dream
of progress: the clear-cut glass, the potted and balconied tree, the lemon-waxed
wood over a marbled pillar, into my own nocturne. The lullabies I had forgotten.
How could I know what slept inside? What would rend my fantasies to cud and up
from this belly's wet straw-strewn field—

these soundings.

The Heart Shows No Signs

By Ru Freeman

The heart, the surgeon says, does not reveal
the small rifts, the hairline cracks which

split the hairline cracks they conceal cops
and robbers in a stretch of skin flaunting

star-scars with show of blood bone
the ledges of what it holds tight in checkmate

moves: bend this and break
fight first and bleed to earn

needle finger wrap caress balm
the salvation of sight Behold what beauty

lasts, what outlasts itself The curtain
calls the ovation Seize the beginning

that ends this way: off center stage above
fractured ribs the heart succumbs in silence

All is dark. Listen a *kommos* sung solo
It is too late to repair anything.

The American Soldier

By Philip Freneau

A Picture from the Life
To serve with love,
And shed your blood,
Approved may be above,
But here below
(Example shew,)
'Tis dangerous to be good.

--*Lord Oxford*

Deep in a vale, a stranger now to arms,
Too poor to shine in courts, too proud to beg,
He, who once warred on *Saratoga's* plains,
Sits musing o'er his scars, and wooden leg.

Remembering still the toil of former days,
To other hands he sees his earnings paid;--
They share the due reward—*he* feeds on praise.
Lost in the abyss of want, misfortune's shade.

Far, far from domes where splendid tapers glare,
'Tis his from dear bought *peace* no wealth to win,
Removed alike from courtly cringing 'squires,
The great-man's *Levee*, and the proud man's grin.

Sold are those arms which once on Britons blazed,
When, flushed with conquest, to the charge they came;
That power repelled, and *Freedom's* fabrick raised,
She leaves her soldier—*famine and a name!*

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

Accquainted with the Night

By Robert Frost

I have been one acquainted with the night.
I have walked out in rain—and back in rain.
I have outwalked the furthest city light.

I have looked down the saddest city lane.
I have passed by the watchman on his beat
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet
When far away an interrupted cry
Came over houses from another street,

But not to call me back or say good-bye;
And further still at an unearthly height,
One luminary clock against the sky

Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.
I have been one acquainted with the night.

After Apple-Picking

By Robert Frost

My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree
Toward heaven still,
And there's a barrel that I didn't fill
Beside it, and there may be two or three
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.
But I am done with apple-picking now.
Essence of winter sleep is on the night,
The scent of apples: I am drowsing off.
I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight
I got from looking through a pane of glass
I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough
And held against the world of hoary grass.
It melted, and I let it fall and break.
But I was well
Upon my way to sleep before it fell,
And I could tell
What form my dreaming was about to take.
Magnified apples appear and disappear,
Stem end and blossom end,
And every fleck of russet showing clear.

My instep arch not only keeps the ache,
It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.
I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.
And I keep hearing from the cellar bin
The rumbling sound
Of load on load of apples coming in.
For I have had too much
Of apple-picking: I am overtired
Of the great harvest I myself desired.
There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,
Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.
For all
That struck the earth,
No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,
Went surely to the cider-apple heap
As of no worth.
One can see what will trouble
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.
Were he not gone,
The woodchuck could say whether it's like his
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
Or just some human sleep.

Fire and Ice

By Robert Frost

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

Mowing

By Robert Frost

There was never a sound beside the wood but one,
And that was my long scythe whispering to the ground.
What was it it whispered? I knew not well myself;
Perhaps it was something about the heat of the sun,
Something, perhaps, about the lack of sound—

And that was why it whispered and did not speak.
It was no dream of the gift of idle hours,
Or easy gold at the hand of fay or elf:
Anything more than the truth would have seemed too weak
To the earnest love that laid the swale in rows,
Not without feeble-pointed spikes of flowers
(Pale orchises), and scared a bright green snake.
The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows.
My long scythe whispered and left the hay to make.

The Road Not Taken

By Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

By Robert Frost

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

Flaxman

By Margaret Fuller

We deemed the secret lost, the spirit gone,
Which spake in Greek simplicity of thought,
And in the forms of gods and heroes wrought
Eternal beauty from the sculptured stone,—
A higher charm than modern culture won
With all the wealth of metaphysic lore,
Gifted to analyze, dissect, explore.
A many-colored light flows from one sun;
Art, 'neath its beams, a motley thread has spun;
The prism modifies the perfect day;
But thou hast known such mediums to shun,
And cast once more on life a pure, white ray.
Absorbed in the creations of thy mind,
Forgetting daily self, my truest self I find.

Choices

By Tess Gallagher

I go to the mountain side
of the house to cut saplings,
and clear a view to snow
on the mountain. But when I look up,
saw in hand, I see a nest clutched in
the uppermost branches.
I don't cut that one.

I don’t cut the others either.
Suddenly, in every tree,
an unseen nest
where a mountain
would be.

for Drago Štambuk

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

Refusing Silence

By Tess Gallagher

Heartbeat trembling
your kingdom
of leaves
near the ceremony
of water, I never
insisted on you. I admit
I delayed. I was the Empress
of Delay. But it can’t be
put off now. On the sacred branch
of my only voice – I insist.
Insist for us all,
which is the job
of the voice, and especially
of the poet. Else
what am I for, what use
am I if I don’t
insist?
There are messages to send.
Gatherings and songs.
Because we need
to insist. Else what are we
for? What use
are we?

After the War

By Rachel Galvin

For Joseph Flum

When he got to the farmhouse, he rifled through

the cabinets, drawers, and cupboards,
and his buddies did too. The place was abandoned,
or so he thought, and his buddies did too.

He tried to talk to people in town, and his buddies did too,
but he was the only one whose Yiddish made it
across into German. They took his meaning.
He, in the farmhouse, took a camera and a gun,

but his buddies, who knows. About the gun,
it's also hard to say, but after the war he took up
photography, why not, and shot beautiful women
for years. Got pretty good at it, and how.

Won prizes and engraved plates, put them in a drawer, forgot
the war, forgot his buddies, forgot the women, forgot the drawer.

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

And If I Did, What Then?

By George Gascoigne

"And if I did, what then?
Are you aggriev'd therefore?
The sea hath fish for every man,
And what would you have more?"

Thus did my mistress once,
Amaze my mind with doubt;
And popp'd a question for the nonce
To beat my brains about.

Whereto I thus replied:
"Each fisherman can wish
That all the seas at every tide
Were his alone to fish.

"And so did I (in vain)
But since it may not be,
Let such fish there as find the gain,
And leave the loss for me.

"And with such luck and loss
I will content myself,

Till tides of turning time may toss
Such fishers on the shelf.

"And when they stick on sands,
That every man may see,
Then will I laugh and clap my hands,
As they do now at me."

A Poem in which I Try to Express My Glee at the Music My Friend Has Given Me

By Ross Gay

—for Patrick Rosal

Because I must not
get up to throw down in a café in the Midwest,
I hold something like a clownfaced herd
of bareback and winged elephants
stomping in my chest,
I hold a thousand
kites in a field loosed from their tethers
at once, I feel
my skeleton losing track
somewhat of the science I've made of tamp,
feel it rising up shriek and groove,
rising up a river guzzling a monsoon,
not to mention the butterflies
of the loins, the hummingbirds
of the loins, the thousand
dromedaries of the loins, oh body
of sunburst, body
of larkspur and honeysuckle and honeysuccor
bloom, body of treetop holler,
oh lightspeed body
of gasp and systole, the mandible's ramble,
the clavicle swoon, the spine's
trillion teeth oh, drift
of hip oh, trill of ribs,
oh synaptic clamor and juggernaut
swell oh gutracket
blastoff and sugartongue
syntax oh throb and pulse and rivulet
swing and glottal thing
and kick-start heart and heel-toe heart
ooh ooh ooh a bullfight

where the bull might
take flight and win!

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

Sorrow is Not My Name

By Ross Gay

—after Gwendolyn Brooks

No matter the pull toward brink. No
matter the florid, deep sleep awaits.
There is a time for everything. Look,
just this morning a vulture
nodded his red, grizzled head at me,
and I looked at him, admiring
the sickle of his beak.
Then the wind kicked up, and,
after arranging that good suit of feathers
he up and took off.
Just like that. And to boot,
there are, on this planet alone, something like two
million naturally occurring sweet things,
some with names so generous as to kick
the steel from my knees: agave, persimmon,
stick ball, the purple okra I bought for two bucks
at the market. Think of that. The long night,
the skeleton in the mirror, the man behind me
on the bus taking notes, yeah, yeah.
But look; my niece is running through a field
calling my name. My neighbor sings like an angel
and at the end of my block is a basketball court.
I remember. My color's green. I'm spring.

—for Walter Aikens

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

Wedding Poem

By Ross Gay

for Keith and Jen

Friends I am here to modestly report
seeing in an orchard
in my town
a goldfinch kissing
a sunflower
again and again
dangling upside down
by its tiny claws
steadying itself by snapping open
like an old-timey fan
its wings
again and again,
until, swooning, it tumbled off
and swooped back to the very same perch,
where the sunflower curled its giant
swirling of seeds
around the bird and leaned back
to admire the soft wind
nudging the bird's plumage,
and friends I could see
the points on the flower's stately crown
soften and curl inward
as it almost indiscernibly lifted
the food of its body
to the bird's nuzzling mouth
whose fervor
I could hear from
oh 20 or 30 feet away
and see from the tiny hulls
that sailed from their
good racket,
which good racket, I have to say
was making me blush,
and rock up on my tippy-toes,
and just barely purse my lips
with what I realize now
was being, simply, glad,
which such love,
if we let it,
makes us feel.

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

“No, I wasn’t meant to love and be loved”

By Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib
Tranlsated by Vijay Seshadri

No, I wasn’t meant to love and be loved.
If I’d lived longer, I would have waited longer.

Knowing you are faithless keeps me alive and hungry.
Knowing you faithful would kill me with joy.

Delicate are you, and your vows are delicate, too,
so easily do they break.

You are a laconic marksman. You leave me
not dead but perpetually dying.

I want my friends to heal me, succor me.
Instead, I get analysis.

Conflagrations that would make stones drip blood
are campfires compared to my anguish.

Two-headed, inescapable anguish!—
Love’s anguish or the anguish of time.

Another dark, severing, incommunicable night.
Death would be fine, if I only died once.

I would have liked a solitary death,
not this lavish funeral, this grave anyone can visit.

You are mystical, Ghalib, and, also, you speak beautifully.
Are you a saint, or just drunk as usual?

At Noon

By Reginald Gibbons

The thick-walled room’s cave-darkness,
cool in summer, soothes
by saying, This is the truth, not the taut
cicada-strummed daylight.
Rest here, out of the flame—the thick air’s
stirred by the fan’s four
slow-moving spoons; under the house the stone

has its feet in deep water.
Outside, even the sun god, dressed in this life
as a lizard, abruptly rises
on stiff legs and descends blasé toward the shadows.

Harold & the Purple Crayon

By D. Gilson

Berkeley psychologists told Harold
his anger was justified. What parents
let their child go for a midnight walk
under no moon? *I couldn't have*
been more than four, Harold told
the doctor in her crisp beige office.
Doctor, could it ever be OK
for a four-year-old to eat nine
different types of pie? Harold asked her.
Call me Lisa, the doctor replied.
Everyone knew Harold could draw.
By sophomore year, he was critiquing
grad students. By twenty, Harold knew
exactly when to quote Sontag. Standing
in front of a professor's latest pastel
of Mojave succulents: *This just makes me think*
how in place of a hermeneutics, we need
an erotics of art. Harold's professors
would hum & nod their dragon heads
(though none of them understood, exactly,
what Harold said). By senior year, Harold
became distant, his work increasingly angry:
apple trees, their fruit rotting in monochrome
purple, under the notable lack of a moon.

Where the Wild Things Go

By D. Gilson

The night Max wore his wolf suit
made him infamous, bred the child star
never sent to bed. Middle school,
Max started drinking. *Not in my house*,
his mother begged, *No, no, no, wild thing.*
Max reminded her who bought
this condo, who paid for her meds.
Freshman year, Max raved. Roared

his terrible roar, rolled, and almost
wound up in a warehouse dead.
Where, oh where, do the wild things
go? To rehab in high school.
To college on residual book sales.
Max kept his head down. Laughed
at drunken frat boys. *Bro, let the wild*
rumpus start. Max said, *No thanks*,
and volunteered for the Peace Corps
instead. Two years in Kenya, one
in Belarus, the president thought
Max might be of some use. Max
moved to Washington, appointed
at the State Department a cultural
attaché. One important day Max wore
his wolf-gray suit, then drove home
well past rush hour in a freak snow storm.
Max drove on the deserted beltway,
thought it his throne. *Yes*, Max belted,
this is where the wild things roam.

Photo of a Girl on a Beach

By Carmen Giménez Smith

Once when I was harmless
and didn't know any better,

a mirror to the front of me
and an ocean behind,

I lay wedged in the middle of daylight,
paper-doll thin, dreaming,

then I vanished. I gave the day a fingerprint,
then forgot.

I sat naked on a towel
on a hot June Monday.

The sun etched the inside of my eyelids,
while a boy dozed at my side.

The smell of all oceans was around us—
steamy salt, shell, and sweat,

but I reached for the distant one.
A tide rose while I slept,

and soon I was alone. Try being
a figure in memory. It's hollow there.

For truth's sake, I'll say she was on a beach
and her eyes were closed.

She was bare in the sand, long,
and the hour took her bit by bit.

Becoming a Redwood

By Dana Gioia

Stand in a field long enough, and the sounds
start up again. The crickets, the invisible
toad who claims that change is possible,

And all the other life too small to name.
First one, then another, until innumerable
they merge into the single voice of a summer hill.

Yes, it's hard to stand still, hour after hour,
fixed as a fencepost, hearing the steers
snort in the dark pasture, smelling the manure.

And paralyzed by the mystery of how a stone
can bear to be a stone, the pain
the grass endures breaking through the earth's crust.

Unimaginable the redwoods on the far hill,
rooted for centuries, the living wood grown tall
and thickened with a hundred thousand days of light.

The old windmill creaks in perfect time
to the wind shaking the miles of pasture grass,
and the last farmhouse light goes off.

Something moves nearby. Coyotes hunt
these hills and packs of feral dogs.
But standing here at night accepts all that.

You are your own pale shadow in the quarter moon,
moving more slowly than the crippled stars,

part of the moonlight as the moonlight falls,

Part of the grass that answers the wind,
part of the midnight's watchfulness that knows
there is no silence but when danger comes.

The End of the World

By Dana Gioia

"We're going," they said, "to the end of the world."
So they stopped the car where the river curled,
And we scrambled down beneath the bridge
On the gravel track of a narrow ridge.

We tramped for miles on a wooded walk
Where dog-hobble grew on its twisted stalk.
Then we stopped to rest on the pine-needle floor
While two ospreys watched from an oak by the shore.

We came to a bend, where the river grew wide
And green mountains rose on the opposite side.
My guides moved back. I stood alone,
As the current streaked over smooth flat stone.

Shelf by stone shelf the river fell.
The white water goosetailed with eddying swell.
Faster and louder the current dropped
Till it reached a cliff, and the trail stopped.

I stood at the edge where the mist ascended,
My journey done where the world ended.
I looked downstream. There was nothing but sky,
The sound of the water, and the water's reply.

Insomnia

By Dana Gioia

Now you hear what the house has to say.
Pipes clanking, water running in the dark,
the mortgaged walls shifting in discomfort,
and voices mounting in an endless drone
of small complaints like the sounds of a family
that year by year you've learned how to ignore.

But now you must listen to the things you own,
all that you've worked for these past years,
the murmur of property, of things in disrepair,
the moving parts about to come undone,
and twisting in the sheets remember all
the faces you could not bring yourself to love.

How many voices have escaped you until now,
the venting furnace, the floorboards underfoot,
the steady accusations of the clock
numbering the minutes no one will mark.
The terrible clarity this moment brings,
the useless insight, the unbroken dark.

Pity the Beautiful

By Dana Gioia

Pity the beautiful,
the dolls, and the dishes,
the babes with big daddies
granting their wishes.

Pity the pretty boys,
the hunks, and Apollos,
the golden lads whom
success always follows.

The hotties, the knock-outs,
the tens out of ten,
the drop-dead gorgeous,
the great leading men.

Pity the faded,
the bloated, the blowsy,
the paunchy Adonis
whose luck's gone lousy.

Pity the gods,
no longer divine.
Pity the night
the stars lose their shine.

BLK History Month

By Nikki Giovanni

If Black History Month is not
viable then wind does not
carry the seeds and drop them
on fertile ground
rain does not
dampen the land
and encourage the seeds
to root
sun does not
warm the earth
and kiss the seedlings
and tell them plain:
You’re As Good As Anybody Else
You’ve Got A Place Here, Too

Note to Poetry Out Loud students: *The title of this poem may be recited "BLK History Month" or "Black History Month." Either is acceptable and should not affect your accuracy score.*

Mothers

By Nikki Giovanni

the last time i was home
to see my mother we kissed
exchanged pleasantries
and unpleasantries pulled a warm
comforting silence around
us and read separate books

i remember the first time
i consciously saw her
we were living in a three room
apartment on burns avenue

mommy always sat in the dark
i don’t know how i knew that but she did

that night i stumbled into the kitchen
maybe because i’ve always been
a night person or perhaps because i had wet
the bed
she was sitting on a chair
the room was bathed in moonlight diffused through

those thousands of panes landlords who rented
to people with children were prone to put in windows
she may have been smoking but maybe not
her hair was three-quarters her height
which made me a strong believer in the samson myth
and very black

i'm sure i just hung there by the door
i remember thinking: what a beautiful lady

she was very deliberately waiting
perhaps for my father to come home
from his night job or maybe for a dream
that had promised to come by
"come here" she said "i'll teach you
a poem: *i see the moon*
the moon sees me
god bless the moon
and god bless me"
i taught it to my son
who recited it for her
just to say we must learn
to bear the pleasures
as we have borne the pains

The Song of the Feet

By Nikki Giovanni

It is appropriate that I sing
The song of the feet

The weight of the body
And what the body chooses to bear
Fall on me

I trampled the American wilderness
Forged frontier trails
Outran the mob in Tulsa
Got caught in Philadelphia

And am still unreparated

I soldiered on in Korea
Jungled through Vietman sweated out Desert Storm
Caved my way through Afghanistan

Tunneled the World Trade Center

And on the worst day of my life
Walked behind JFK
Shouldered MLK
Stood embracing Sister Betty

I wiggle my toes
In the sands of time
Trusting the touch that controls my motion
Basking in the warmth of the embrace
Day's end offers with warm salty water

It is appropriate I sing
The praise of the feet

I am a Black woman

Consider the Hands that Write this Letter

By Aracelis Girmay

after Marina Wilson

Consider the hands
that write this letter.

Left palm pressed flat against paper,
as we have done before, over my heart,

in peace or reverence to the sea,
some beautiful thing

I saw once, felt once: snow falling
like rice flung from the giants' wedding,

or strangest of strange birds. & consider, then,
the right hand, & how it is a fist,

within which a sharpened utensil,
similar to the way I've held a spade,

the horse's reins, loping, the very fists
I've seen from roads through Limay & Estelí.

For years, I have come to sit this way:

one hand open, one hand closed,

like a farmer who puts down seeds & gathers up;
food will come from that farming.

Or, yes, it is like the way I've danced
with my left hand opened around a shoulder,

my right hand closed inside
of another hand. & how I pray,

I pray for this to be my way: sweet
work alluded to in the body's position to its paper:

left hand, right hand
like an open eye, an eye closed:

one hand flat against the trapdoor,
the other hand knocking, knocking.

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

Indian Summer

By Diane Glancy

There's a farm auction up the road.
Wind has its bid in for the leaves.
Already bugs flurry the headlights
between cornfields at night.
If this world were permanent,
I could dance full as the squaw dress
on the clothesline.
I would not see winter
in the square of white yard-light on the wall.
But something tugs at me.
The world is at a loss and I am part of it
migrating daily.
Everything is up for grabs
like a box of farm tools broken open.
I hear the spirits often in the garden
and along the shore of corn.
I know this place is not mine.
I hear them up the road again.
This world is a horizon, an open sea.

Behind the house, the white iceberg of the barn.

Nocturne

By Louise Glück

Mother died last night,
Mother who never dies.

Winter was in the air,
many months away
but in the air nevertheless.

It was the tenth of May.
Hyacinth and apple blossom
bloomed in the back garden.

We could hear
Maria singing songs from Czechoslovakia —

How alone I am —
songs of that kind.

How alone I am,
no mother, no father —
my brain seems so empty without them.

Aromas drifted out of the earth;
the dishes were in the sink,
rinsed but not stacked.

Under the full moon
Maria was folding the washing;
the stiff sheets became
dry white rectangles of moonlight.

How alone I am, but in music
my desolation is my rejoicing.

It was the tenth of May
as it had been the ninth, the eighth.

Mother slept in her bed,
her arms outstretched, her head
balanced between them.

Town of Frijoles

By Ray Gonzalez

For Juan Felipe Herrera

In the town of frijoles,
men eat their meals without
washing their hands, wanting
to bless their mothers' food
with soil from the fields.

In the town of frijoles,
boys beat on hollow pots,
the last wiping of their sides
with a piece of tortilla as
holy a moment as taking
the wafer in church.

In the town of frijoles,
women undress to keep
their babies warm, stories
whispered into bald heads
revealed as poems decades
later, when it is early.

In the town of frijoles,
old men cry for their
fathers and mothers,
tombstone ranches dotting
the night moon where
the pinto aromas extend
beyond the bowl of the sun.

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

(to crave what the light does crave)

By Kevin Goodan

to crave what the light does crave
to shelter, to flee
to gain desire of every splayed leaf
to calm cattle, to heat the mare
to coax dead flies back from slumber
to turn the gaze of each opened bud

to ripe the fruit to rot the fruit
and drive down under the earth
to lord gentle dust
to lend a glancing grace to llamas
to gather dampness from fields
and divide birds
and divide the ewes from slaughter
and raise the corn and bend the wheat
and drive tractors to ruin
burnish the fox, brother the hawk
shed the snake, bloom the weed
and drive all wind diurnal
to blanch the fire and clot the cloud
to husk, to harvest,
sheave and chaff
to choose the bird
and voice the bird
to sing us, veery, into darkness

More Lies

By Karin Gottshall

Sometimes I say I'm going to meet my sister at the café—
even though I have no sister—just because it's such
a beautiful thing to say. I've always thought so, ever since

I read a novel in which two sisters were constantly meeting
in cafés. Today, for example, I walked alone
on the wet sidewalk, wearing my rain boots, expecting

someone might ask where I was headed. I bought
a steno pad and a watch battery, the store windows
fogged up. Rain in April is a kind of promise, and it costs

nothing. I carried a bag of books to the café and ordered
tea. I like a place that's lit by lamps. I like a place
where you can hear people talk about small things,

like the difference between azure and cerulean,
and the price of tulips. It's going down. I watched
someone who could be my sister walk in, shaking the rain

from her hair. I thought, even now florists are filling
their coolers with tulips, five dollars a bundle. All over
the city there are sisters. Any one of them could be mine.

Poem

By Jorie Graham

The earth said
remember me.
The earth said
don’t let go,

said it one day
when I was
accidentally
listening, I

heard it, I felt it
like temperature,
all said in a
whisper—build to-

morrow, make right be-
fall, you are not
free, other scenes
are not taking

place, time is not filled,
time is not late, there is
a thing the emptiness
needs as you need

emptiness, it
shrinks from light again &
again, although all things
are present, a

fact a day a
bird that warps the
arithmetic of per-
fection with its

arc, passing again &
again in the evening
air, in the pre-
vailing wind, making no

mistake—yr in-
difference is yr
principal beauty

the mind says all the

time—I hear it—I
hear it every-
where. The earth
said remember

me. I am the
earth it said. Re-
member me.

The Kiss

By Robert Graves

Are you shaken, are you stirred
   By a whisper of love,
Spellbound to a word
   Does Time cease to move,
Till her calm grey eye
   Expands to a sky
And the clouds of her hair
   Like storms go by?

Then the lips that you have kissed
   Turn to frost and fire,
And a white-steaming mist
   Obscures desire:
So back to their birth
   Fade water, air, earth,
And the First Power moves
   Over void and dearth.

Is that Love? no, but Death,
   A passion, a shout,
The deep in-breath,
   The breath roaring out,
And once that is flown,
   You must lie alone,
Without hope, without life,
   Poor flesh, sad bone.

Vain and Careless

By Robert Graves

Lady, lovely lady,
  Careless and gay!
Once when a beggar called
  She gave her child away.

The beggar took the baby,
  Wrapped it in a shawl,
"Bring her back," the lady said,
  "Next time you call."

Hard by lived a vain man,
  So vain and so proud,
He walked on stilts
  To be seen by the crowd.

Up above the chimney pots,
  Tall as a mast,
And all the people ran about
  Shouting till he passed.

"A splendid match surely,"
  Neighbours saw it plain,
"Although she is so careless,
  Although he is so vain."

But the lady played bobcherry,
  Did not see or care,
As the vain man went by her
  Aloft in the air.

This gentle-born couple
  Lived and died apart.
Water will not mix with oil,
  Nor vain with careless heart.

On the Death of Richard West

By Thomas Gray

In vain to me the smiling Mornings shine,
And reddening Phœbus lifts his golden fire;
The birds in vain their amorous descant join;
Or cheerful fields resume their green attire;

These ears, alas! for other notes repine,
A different object do these eyes require;
My lonely anguish melts no heart but mine;
And in my breast the imperfect joys expire.
Yet Morning smiles the busy race to cheer,
And new-born pleasure brings to happier men;
The fields to all their wonted tribute bear;
To warm their little loves the birds complain;
I fruitless mourn to him that cannot hear,
And weep the more because I weep in vain.

For a Traveler

By Jessica Greenbaum

I only have a moment so let me tell you the shortest story,
about arriving at a long loved place, the house of friends in Maine,
their lawn of wildflowers, their grandfather clock and candid
portraits, their gabled attic rooms, and woodstove in the kitchen,
all accessories of the genuine summer years before, when I was
their son's girlfriend and tied an apron behind my neck, beneath
my braids, and took from their garden the harvest for a dinner
I would make alone and serve at their big table with the gladness
of the found, and loved. The eggplant shone like polished wood,
the tomatoes smelled like their furred collars, the dozen zucchini
lined up on the counter like placid troops with the onions, their
minions, and I even remember the garlic, each clove from its airmail
envelope brought to the cutting board, ready for my instruction.
And in this very slight story, a decade later, I came by myself,
having been dropped by the airport cab, and waited for the family
to arrive home from work. I walked into the lawn, waist-high
in the swaying, purple lupines, the subject of June's afternoon light
as I had never been addressed — a displaced young woman with
cropped hair, no place to which I wished to return, and no one
to gather me in his arms. That day the lupines received me,
and I was in love with them, because they were all I had left,
and in that same manner I have loved much of the world since then,
and who is to say there is more of a reason, or more to love?

Ex Machina

By Linda Gregerson

When love was a question, the message arrived
in the beak of a wire and plaster bird. The coloratura
was hardly to be believed. For flight,

it took three stagehands: two
on the pulleys and one on the flute. And you
thought fancy rained like grace.

Our fog machine lost in the Parcel Post, we improvised
with smoke. The heroine dies of tuberculosis after all.
Remorse and the raw night air: any plausible tenor

might cough. The passions, I take my clues
from an obvious source, may be less like climatic events
than we conventionalize, though I've heard

of tornadoes that break the second-best glassware
and leave everything else untouched.
There's a finer conviction than seamlessness

elicits: the Greeks knew a god
by the clanking behind his descent.
The heart, poor pump, protests till you'd think

it's rusted past redemption, but
there's tuning in these counterweights,
celebration's assembled voice.

The Lamb

By Linda Gregg

It was a picture I had after the war.
A bombed English church. I was too young
to know the word *English* or *war*,
but I knew the picture.
The ruined city still seemed noble.
The cathedral with its roof blown off
was not less godly. The church was the same
plus rain and sky. Birds flew in and out
of the holes God's fist made in the walls.
All our desire for love or children
is treated like rags by the enemy.
I knew so much and sang anyway.
Like a bird who will sing until
it is brought down. When they take
away the trees, the child picks up a stick
and says, this is a tree, this the house
and the family. As we might. Through a door

of what had been a house, into the field
of rubble, walks a single lamb, tilting
its head, curious, unafraid, hungry.

Chorus Sacerdotum

By Fulke Greville, Baron Brooke

from Mustapha

O wearisome condition of humanity!
Born under one law, to another bound;
Vainly begot and yet forbidden vanity;
Created sick, commanded to be sound.
What meaneth nature by these diverse laws?
Passion and reason, self-division cause.
Is it the mark or majesty of power
To make offenses that it may forgive?
Nature herself doth her own self deflower
To hate those errors she herself doth give.
For how should man think that he may not do,
If nature did not fail and punish, too?
Tyrant to others, to herself unjust,
Only commands things difficult and hard,
Forbids us all things which it knows is lust,
Makes easy pains, unpossible reward.
If nature did not take delight in blood,
She would have made more easy ways to good.
We that are bound by vows and by promotion,
With pomp of holy sacrifice and rites,
To teach belief in good and still devotion,
To preach of heaven's wonders and delights;
Yet when each of us in his own heart looks
He finds the God there, far unlike his books.

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

The Last Word

By Nikki Grimes

I am a door of metaphor
waiting to be opened.
You'll find no lock, no key.
All are free to enter, at will.

Simply step over the threshold.
Remember to dress for travel, though.
Visitors have been known
to get carried away.

Stomp

By Nikki Grimes

I come home,
feet about to bleed
from angry stomping.
“Boy!” says Mom.
“Quit making all that racket.”
But what does she expect
when, day after day,
haters sling words at me
like jagged stones
designed to split my skin?
I retreat to my room,
collapse on the bed,
count, “One. Two. Three...”
When I get to ten,
I snatch up journal and pen,
flip to a clean page,
and unload my hurt, my rage
’til I can breathe, again.
Letter by letter,
I rediscover
my power to decide
which words matter,
which words don’t,
and whose.
Calm, now, I remember:
I get to choose.

Charles Sumner

By Charlotte L. Forten Grimké

On seeing some pictures of the interior of his house, Washington, D.C.

Only the casket left, the jewel gone
Whose noble presence filled these stately rooms,
And made this spot a shrine where pilgrims came—
Stranger and friend—to bend in reverence

Before the great, pure soul that knew no guile;
To listen to the wise and gracious words
That fell from lips whose rare, exquisite smile
Gave tender beauty to the grand, grave face.

Upon these pictured walls we see thy peers,—
Poet, and saint, and sage, painter, and king,—
A glorious band;—they shine upon us still;
Still gleam in marble the enchanting forms
Whereupon thy artist eye delighted dwelt;
Thy favorite Psyche droops her matchless face,
Listening, methinks, for the beloved voice
Which nevermore on earth shall sound her praise.

All these remain,—the beautiful, the brave,
The gifted, silent ones; but thou art gone!
Fair is the world that smiles upon us now;
Blue are the skies of June, balmy the air
That soothes with touches soft the weary brow;
And perfect days glide into perfect nights,—
Moonlit and calm; but still our grateful hearts
Are sad, and faint with fear,— for thou art gone!

Oh friend beloved, with longing, tear-filled eyes
We look up, up to the unclouded blue,
And seek in vain some answering sign from thee.
Look down upon us, guide and cheer us still
From the serene height where thou dwellest now;
Dark is the way without the beacon light
Which long and steadfastly thy hand upheld.
Oh, nerve with courage new the stricken hearts
Whose dearest hopes seem lost in losing thee.

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

Words

By Barbara Guest

The simple contact with a wooden spoon and the word
recovered itself, began to spread as grass, forced
as it lay sprawling to consider the monument where
patience looked at grief, where warfare ceased
eyes curled outside themes to search the paper
now gleaming and potent, wise and resilient, word

entered its continent eager to find another as
capable as a thorn. The nearest possession would
house them both, they being then two might glide
into this house and presently create a rather larger
mansion filled with spoons and condiments, gracious
as a newly laid table where related objects might gather
to enjoy the interplay of gravity upon facetious hints,
the chocolate dish presuming an endowment, the ladle
of galactic rhythm primed as a relish dish, curved
knives, finger bowls, morsel carriages words might
choose and savor before swallowing so much was the
sumptuousness and substance of a rented house where words
placed dressing gowns as rosemary entered their scent
percipient as elder branches in the night where words
gathered, warped, then straightened, marking new wands.

Father

By Edgar Albert Guest

My father knows the proper way
The nation should be run;
He tells us children every day
Just what should now be done.
He knows the way to fix the trusts,
He has a simple plan;
But if the furnace needs repairs,
We have to hire a man.

My father, in a day or two
Could land big thieves in jail;
There's nothing that he cannot do,
He knows no word like "fail."
"Our confidence" he would restore,
Of that there is no doubt;
But if there is a chair to mend,
We have to send it out.

All public questions that arise,
He settles on the spot;
He waits not till the tumult dies,
But grabs it while it's hot.
In matters of finance he can
Tell Congress what to do;
But, O, he finds it hard to meet
His bills as they fall due.

It almost makes him sick to read
The things law-makers say;
Why, father's just the man they need,
He never goes astray.
All wars he'd very quickly end,
As fast as I can write it;
But when a neighbor starts a fuss,
'Tis mother has to fight it.

In conversation father can
Do many wondrous things;
He's built upon a wiser plan
Than presidents or kings.
He knows the ins and outs of each
And every deep transaction;
We look to him for theories,
But look to ma for action.

It Couldn't Be Done

By Edgar Albert Guest

Somebody said that it couldn't be done
    But he with a chuckle replied
That "maybe it couldn't," but he would be one
    Who wouldn't say so till he'd tried.
So he buckled right in with the trace of a grin
    On his face. If he worried he hid it.
He started to sing as he tackled the thing
    That couldn't be done, and he did it!

Somebody scoffed: "Oh, you'll never do that;
    At least no one ever has done it;"
But he took off his coat and he took off his hat
    And the first thing we knew he'd begun it.
With a lift of his chin and a bit of a grin,
    Without any doubting or quiddit,
He started to sing as he tackled the thing
    That couldn't be done, and he did it.

There are thousands to tell you it cannot be done,
    There are thousands to prophesy failure,
There are thousands to point out to you one by one,
    The dangers that wait to assail you.
But just buckle in with a bit of a grin,

Just take off your coat and go to it;
Just start in to sing as you tackle the thing
That "cannot be done," and you'll do it.

On Quitting

By Edgar Albert Guest

How much grit do you think you've got?
Can you quit a thing that you like a lot?
You may talk of pluck; it's an easy word,
And where'er you go it is often heard;
But can you tell to a jot or guess
Just how much courage you now possess?

You may stand to trouble and keep your grin,
But have you tackled self-discipline?
Have you ever issued commands to you
To quit the things that you like to do,
And then, when tempted and sorely swayed,
Those rigid orders have you obeyed?

Don't boast of your grit till you've tried it out,
Nor prate to men of your courage stout,
For it's easy enough to retain a grin
In the face of a fight there's a chance to win,
But the sort of grit that is good to own
Is the stuff you need when you're all alone.

How much grit do you think you've got?
Can you turn from joys that you like a lot?
Have you ever tested yourself to know
How far with yourself your will can go?
If you want to know if you have grit,
Just pick out a joy that you like, and quit.

It's bully sport and it's open fight;
It will keep you busy both day and night;
For the toughest kind of a game you'll find
Is to make your body obey your mind.
And you never will know what is meant by grit
Unless there's something you've tried to quit.

Lullaby in Fracktown

By Lilace Mellin Guignard

Child, when you're sad put on your blue shoes.
You know that Mama loves you lollipops
and Daddy still has a job to lose.

So put on a party hat. We'll play the kazoos
loud and louder from the mountaintop.
Child, when you're sad put on your blue shoes

and dance the polka with pink kangaroos,
dolphin choirs singing "flip-flop, flip-flop."
Hey, Daddy still has a job to lose —

don't be afraid. Close your eyes, snooze,
because today our suns have flared and dropped.
Tomorrow when you wake, put on your blue shoes.

Eat a good breakfast. Be good in school.
Good boys go to college goody gumdrops
so someday too you'll have a job to lose.

Waste trucks clatter by as the gray bird coos.
Flames pour forth when the faucet's unstopped.
Child, when you're sad put on your blue shoes.
For now, Daddy still has a job to lose.

The Man with Night Sweats

By Thom Gunn

I wake up cold, I who
Prospered through dreams of heat
Wake to their residue,
Sweat, and a clinging sheet.

My flesh was its own shield:
Where it was gashed, it healed.

I grew as I explored
The body I could trust
Even while I adored
The risk that made robust,

A world of wonders in

Each challenge to the skin.

I cannot but be sorry
The given shield was cracked,
My mind reduced to hurry,
My flesh reduced and wrecked.

I have to change the bed,
But catch myself instead

Stopped upright where I am
Hugging my body to me
As if to shield it from
The pains that will go through me,

As if hands were enough
To hold an avalanche off.

My Sad Captains

By Thom Gunn

One by one they appear in
the darkness: a few friends, and
a few with historical
names. How late they start to shine!
but before they fade they stand
perfectly embodied, all

the past lapping them like a
cloak of chaos. They were men
who, I thought, lived only to
renew the wasteful force they
spent with each hot convulsion.
They remind me, distant now.

True, they are not at rest yet,
but now that they are indeed
apart, winnowed from failures,
they withdraw to an orbit
and turn with disinterested
hard energy, like the stars.

Tamer and Hawk

By Thom Gunn

I thought I was so tough,
But gentled at your hands,
Cannot be quick enough
To fly for you and show
That when I go I go
At your commands.

Even in flight above
I am no longer free:
You seeled me with your love,
I am blind to other birds—
The habit of your words
Has hooded me.

As formerly, I wheel
I hover and I twist,
But only want the feel,
In my possessive thought,
Of catcher and of caught
Upon your wrist.

You but half civilize,
Taming me in this way.
Through having only eyes
For you I fear to lose,
I lose to keep, and choose
Tamer as prey.

God's Secretary

By R. S. Gwynn

Her e-mail inbox always overflows.
Her outbox doesn't get much use at all.
She puts on hold the umpteen-billionth call
As music oozes forth to placate those
Who wait, then disconnect. Outside, wind blows,
Scything pale leaves. She sees a sparrow fall
Fluttering to a claw-catch on a wall.
Will He be in today? God only knows.

She hasn't seen His face—He's so aloof.
She's long resigned He'll never know or love her

But still can wish there were some call, some proof
That He requires a greater service of her.
Fingers of rain now drum upon the roof,
Coming from somewhere, somewhere far above her.

Little Girl

By Tami Haaland

She's with Grandma in front
of Grandma's house, backed
by a willow tree, gladiola and roses.

Who did she ever want
to please? But Grandma
seems half-pleased and annoyed.

No doubt Mother frowns
behind the lens, wants
to straighten this sassy face.

Maybe laughs, too.
Little girl with her mouth wide,
tongue out, yelling

at the camera. See her little
white purse full of treasure,
her white sandals?

She has things to do,
you can tell. Places to explore
beyond the frame,

and these women picking flowers
and taking pictures.
Why won't they let her go?

Crepuscule with Muriel

By Marilyn Hacker

Instead of a cup of tea, instead of a milk-
silk whelk of a cup, of a cup of nearly six
o'clock teatime, cup of a stumbling block,
cup of an afternoon unredeemed by talk,
cup of a cut brown loaf, of a slice, a lack

of butter, blueberry jam that's almost black,
instead of tannin seeping into the cracks
of a pot, the void of an hour seeps out, infects
the slit of a cut I haven't the wit to fix
with a surgeon's needle threaded with fine-gauge silk
as a key would thread the cylinder of a lock.
But no key threads the cylinder of a lock.
Late afternoon light, transitory, licks
the place of the absent cup with its rough tongue, flicks
itself out beneath the wheel's revolving spoke.
Taut thought's gone, with a blink of attention, slack,
a vision of "death and distance in the mix"
(she lost her words and how did she get them back
when the corridor of a day was a lurching deck?
The dream-life logic encodes in nervous tics
she translated to a syntax which connects
intense and unfashionable politics
with morning coffee, Hudson sunsets, sex;
then the short-circuit of the final stroke,
the end toward which all lines looped out, then broke).
What a gaze out the window interjects:
on the southeast corner, a black Lab balks,
tugged as the light clicks green toward a late-day walk
by a plump brown girl in a purple anorak.
The Bronx-bound local comes rumbling up the tracks
out of the tunnel, over west Harlem blocks
whose windows gleam on the animal warmth of bricks
rouged by the fluvial light of six o'clock.

Ice Child

By John Haines

Cold for so long, unable to speak,
yet your mouth seems framed
on a cry, or a stifled question.

Who placed you here, and left you
to this lonely eternity of ash and ice,
and himself returned to the dust
fields, the church and the temple?

Was it God—the sun-god of the Incas,
the imperial god of the Spaniards?
Or only the priests of that god,
self-elected—voice of the volcano

that speaks once in a hundred years.

And I wonder, with your image before me,
what life might you have lived,
had you lived at all—whose companion,
whose love? To be perhaps no more
than a slave of that earthly master:

a jug of water on your shoulder,
year after stunted year, a bundle
of reeds and corn, kindling
for a fire on whose buried hearth?

There were furies to be fed, then
as now: blood to fatten the sun,
a heart for the lightning to strike.

And now the furies walk the streets,
a swarm in the milling crowd.
They stand to the podium, speak
of their coming ascension ...

Through all this drift and clamor
you have survived—in this cramped
and haunted effigy, another entry
on the historian's dated page.

Under the weight of this mountain—
once a god, now only restless stone,
we find your interrupted life,
placed here among the trilobites
and shells, so late unearthed.

The Sweater of Vladimir Ussachevsky

By John Haines

Facing the wind of the avenues
one spring evening in New York,
I wore under my thin jacket
a sweater given me by the wife
of a genial Manchurian.

The warmth in that sweater changed
the indifferent city block by block.
The buildings were mountains

that fled as I approached them.

The traffic became sheep and cattle
milling in muddy pastures.
I could feel around me the large
movements of men and horses.

It was spring in Siberia or Mongolia,
wherever I happened to be.
Rough but honest voices called to me
out of that solitude:
they told me we are all tired
of this coiling weight,
the oppression of a long winter;
that it was time to renew our life,
burn the expired contracts,
elect new governments.

The old Imperial sun has set,
and I must write a poem to the Emperor.
I shall speak it like the man
I should be, an inhabitant of the frontier,
clad in sweat-darkened wool,
my face stained by wind and smoke.

Surely the Emperor and his court
will want to know what a fine
and generous revolution begins tomorrow
in one of his remote provinces...

(1967)

Ox Cart Man

By Donald Hall

In October of the year,
he counts potatoes dug from the brown field,
counting the seed, counting
the cellar's portion out,
and bags the rest on the cart's floor.

He packs wool sheared in April, honey
in combs, linen, leather
tanned from deerhide,
and vinegar in a barrel

hooped by hand at the forge's fire.

He walks by his ox's head, ten days
to Portsmouth Market, and sells potatoes,
and the bag that carried potatoes,
flaxseed, birch brooms, maple sugar, goose
feathers, yarn.

When the cart is empty he sells the cart.
When the cart is sold he sells the ox,
harness and yoke, and walks
home, his pockets heavy
with the year's coin for salt and taxes,

and at home by fire's light in November cold
stitches new harness
for next year's ox in the barn,
and carves the yoke, and saws planks
building the cart again.

Wide Receiver

By Mark Halliday

In the huddle you said "Go long—get open"
and at the snap I took off along the right sideline
and then cut across left in a long arc
and I'm sure I was open at several points—
glancing back I saw you pump-fake more than once
but you must not have been satisfied with what you saw downfield
and then I got bumped off course and my hands touched the turf
but I regained my balance and dashed back to the right
I think or maybe first left and then right
and I definitely got open but the throw never came—

maybe you thought I couldn't hang on to a ball flung so far
or maybe you actually can't throw so far
but in any case I feel quite open now,
the defenders don't seem too interested in me
I sense only open air all around me
though the air is getting darker and it would appear
by now we're well into the fourth quarter
and I strongly doubt we can afford to settle for
dinky little first downs if the score is what I think it is

so come on, star boy, fling a Hail Mary

with a dream-coached combination of muscle and faith
and I will gauge the arc and I will not be stupidly frantic
and I will time my jump and—I'm just going to say
in the cool gloaming of this weirdly long game
it is not impossible that I will make the catch.

On An Unsociable Family

By Elizabeth Hands

O what a strange parcel of creatures are we,
Scarce ever to quarrel, or even agree;
We all are alone, though at home altogether,
Except to the fire constrained by the weather;
Then one says, ''Tis cold', which we all of us know,
And with unanimity answer, ''Tis so':
With shrugs and with shivers all look at the fire,
And shuffle ourselves and our chairs a bit nigher;
Then quickly, preceded by silence profound,
A yawn epidemical catches around:
Like social companions we never fall out,
Nor ever care what one another's about;
To comfort each other is never our plan,
For to please ourselves, truly, is more than we can.

August 12 in the Nebraska Sand Hills Watching the Perseids Meteor Shower

By Twyla Hansen

In the middle of rolling grasslands, away from lights,
a moonless night untethers its wild polka-dots,
the formations we can name competing for attention
in a twinkling and crowded sky-bowl.

Out from the corners, our eyes detect a maverick meteor,
a transient streak, and lying back toward midnight
on the heft of car hood, all conversation blunted,
we are at once unnerved and somehow restored.

Out here, a furrow of spring-fed river threads
through ranches in the tens of thousands of acres.
Like cattle, we are powerless, by instinct can see
why early people trembled and deliberated the heavens.

Off in the distance those cattle make themselves known,

a bird song moves singular across the horizon.
Not yet 2:00, and bits of comet dust, the Perseids,
startle and skim the atmosphere like skipping stones.

In the leaden dark, we are utterly alone. As I rub the ridges
on the back of your hand, our love for all things warm
and pulsing crescendos toward dawn: this timeless awe,
your breath floating with mine upward into the stars.

Channel Firing

By Thomas Hardy

That night your great guns, unawares,
Shook all our coffins as we lay,
And broke the chancel window-squares,
We thought it was the Judgment-day

And sat upright. While drearisome
Arose the howl of wakened hounds:
The mouse let fall the altar-crumb,
The worms drew back into the mounds,

The glebe cow drooled. Till God called, “No;
It’s gunnery practice out at sea
Just as before you went below;
The world is as it used to be:

“All nations striving strong to make
Red war yet redder. Mad as hatters
They do no more for Christés sake
Than you who are helpless in such matters.

“That this is not the judgment-hour
For some of them’s a blessed thing,
For if it were they’d have to scour
Hell’s floor for so much threatening....

“Ha, ha. It will be warmer when
I blow the trumpet (if indeed
I ever do; for you are men,
And rest eternal sorely need).”

So down we lay again. “I wonder,
Will the world ever saner be,”
Said one, “than when He sent us under

In our indifferent century!”

And many a skeleton shook his head.
“Instead of preaching forty year,”
My neighbour Parson Thirdly said,
“I wish I had stuck to pipes and beer.”

Again the guns disturbed the hour,
Roaring their readiness to avenge,
As far inland as Stourton Tower,
And Camelot, and starlit Stonehenge.

The Convergence of the Twain

By Thomas Hardy

(Lines on the loss of the "Titanic")

I
In a solitude of the sea
Deep from human vanity,
And the Pride of Life that planned her, stilly couches she.

II
Steel chambers, late the pyres
Of her salamandrine fires,
Cold currents thrid, and turn to rhythmic tidal lyres.

III
Over the mirrors meant
To glass the opulent
The sea-worm crawls — grotesque, slimed, dumb, indifferent.

IV
Jewels in joy designed
To ravish the sensuous mind
Lie lightless, all their sparkles bleared and black and blind.

V
Dim moon-eyed fishes near
Gaze at the gilded gear
And query: "What does this vaingloriousness down here?" ...

VI
Well: while was fashioning
This creature of cleaving wing,

The Immanent Will that stirs and urges everything

VII
Prepared a sinister mate
For her — so gaily great —
A Shape of Ice, for the time far and dissociate.

VIII
And as the smart ship grew
In stature, grace, and hue,
In shadowy silent distance grew the Iceberg too.

IX
Alien they seemed to be;
No mortal eye could see
The intimate welding of their later history,

X
Or sign that they were bent
By paths coincident
On being anon twin halves of one august event,

XI
Till the Spinner of the Years
Said "Now!" And each one hears,
And consummation comes, and jars two hemispheres.

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

The Darkling Thrush

By Thomas Hardy

I leant upon a coppice gate
When Frost was spectre-grey,
And Winter's dregs made desolate
The weakening eye of day.
The tangled bine-stems scored the sky
Like strings of broken lyres,
And all mankind that haunted nigh
Had sought their household fires.

The land's sharp features seemed to be
The Century's corpse outleant,
His crypt the cloudy canopy,

The wind his death-lament.
The ancient pulse of germ and birth
Was shrunken hard and dry,
And every spirit upon earth
Seemed fervourless as I.

At once a voice arose among
The bleak twigs overhead
In a full-hearted evensong
Of joy illimited;
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
Upon the growing gloom.

So little cause for carolings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware.

Hap

By Thomas Hardy

If but some vengeful god would call to me
From up the sky, and laugh: “Thou suffering thing,
Know that thy sorrow is my ecstasy,
That thy love's loss is my hate's profiting!”

Then would I bear it, clench myself, and die,
Steeled by the sense of ire unmerited;
Half-eased in that a Powerfuller than I
Had willed and meted me the tears I shed.

But not so. How arrives it joy lies slain,
And why unblooms the best hope ever sown?
—Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain,
And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan. . . .
These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown
Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain.

The Last Performance

By Thomas Hardy

“I am playing my oldest tunes,” declared she,
“All the old tunes I know,—
Those I learnt ever so long ago.”
—Why she should think just then she’d play them
Silence cloaks like snow.

When I returned from the town at nightfall
Notes continued to pour
As when I had left two hours before:
“It’s the very last time,” she said in closing;
“From now I play no more.”

A few morns onward found her fading,
And, as her life outflew,
I thought of her playing her tunes right through;
And I felt she had known of what was coming,
And wondered how she knew.

The Man He Killed

By Thomas Hardy

"Had he and I but met
By some old ancient inn,
We should have sat us down to wet
Right many a nipperkin!

"But ranged as infantry,
And staring face to face,
I shot at him as he at me,
And killed him in his place.

"I shot him dead because —
Because he was my foe,
Just so: my foe of course he was;
That's clear enough; although

"He thought he'd 'list, perhaps,
Off-hand like — just as I —
Was out of work — had sold his traps —
No other reason why.

"Yes; quaint and curious war is!

You shoot a fellow down
You'd treat if met where any bar is,
Or help to half-a-crown."

Don’t Bother the Earth Spirit

By Joy Harjo

Don’t bother the earth spirit who lives here. She is working on a story. It is the oldest story in the world and it is delicate, changing. If she sees you watching she will invite you in for coffee, give you warm bread, and you will be obligated to stay and listen. But this is no ordinary story. You will have to endure earthquakes, lightning, the deaths of all those you love, the most blinding beauty. It’s a story so compelling you may never want to leave; this is how she traps you. See that stone finger over there? That is the only one who ever escaped.

Eagle Poem

By Joy Harjo

To pray you open your whole self
To sky, to earth, to sun, to moon
To one whole voice that is you.
And know there is more
That you can’t see, can’t hear;
Can’t know except in moments
Steadily growing, and in languages
That aren’t always sound but other
Circles of motion.
Like eagle that Sunday morning
Over Salt River. Circled in blue sky
In wind, swept our hearts clean
With sacred wings.
We see you, see ourselves and know
That we must take the utmost care
And kindness in all things.
Breathe in, knowing we are made of
All this, and breathe, knowing
We are truly blessed because we
Were born, and die soon within a
True circle of motion,
Like eagle rounding out the morning
Inside us.
We pray that it will be done
In beauty.
In beauty.

Once the World Was Perfect

By Joy Harjo

Once the world was perfect, and we were happy in that world.
Then we took it for granted.
Discontent began a small rumble in the earthly mind.
Then Doubt pushed through with its spiked head.
And once Doubt ruptured the web,
All manner of demon thoughts
Jumped through—
We destroyed the world we had been given
For inspiration, for life—
Each stone of jealousy, each stone
Of fear, greed, envy, and hatred, put out the light.
No one was without a stone in his or her hand.
There we were,
Right back where we had started.
We were bumping into each other
In the dark.
And now we had no place to live, since we didn't know
How to live with each other.
Then one of the stumbling ones took pity on another
And shared a blanket.
A spark of kindness made a light.
The light made an opening in the darkness.
Everyone worked together to make a ladder.
A Wind Clan person climbed out first into the next world,
And then the other clans, the children of those clans, their children,
And their children, all the way through time—
To now, into this morning light to you.

Perhaps the World Ends Here

By Joy Harjo

The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, we must eat to live.

The gifts of earth are brought and prepared, set on the table. So it has been since creation, and it will go on.

We chase chickens or dogs away from it. Babies teethe at the corners. They scrape their knees under it.

It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be human. We make men at it, we make women.

At this table we gossip, recall enemies and the ghosts of lovers.

Our dreams drink coffee with us as they put their arms around our children. They laugh with us at our poor falling-down selves and as we put ourselves back together once again at the table.

This table has been a house in the rain, an umbrella in the sun.

Wars have begun and ended at this table. It is a place to hide in the shadow of terror. A place to celebrate the terrible victory.

We have given birth on this table, and have prepared our parents for burial here.

At this table we sing with joy, with sorrow. We pray of suffering and remorse. We give thanks.

Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing and crying, eating of the last sweet bite.

Let the Light Enter

By Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

The Dying Words of Goethe

"Light! more light! the shadows deepen,
And my life is ebbing low,
Throw the windows widely open:
Light! more light! before I go.

"Softly let the balmy sunshine
Play around my dying bed,
E'er the dimly lighted valley
I with lonely feet must tread.

"Light! more light! for Death is weaving
Shadows 'round my waning sight,
And I fain would gaze upon him
Through a stream of earthly light."

Not for greater gifts of genius;
Not for thoughts more grandly bright,
All the dying poet whispers
Is a prayer for light, more light.

Heeds he not the gathered laurels,

Fading slowly from his sight;
All the poet's aspirations
Centre in that prayer for light.

Gracious Saviour, when life's day-dreams
Melt and vanish from the sight,
May our dim and longing vision
Then be blessed with light, more light.

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

Learning to Read

By Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

Very soon the Yankee teachers
Came down and set up school;
But, oh! how the Rebs did hate it,—
It was agin' their rule.

Our masters always tried to hide
Book learning from our eyes;
Knowledge did'nt agree with slavery—
'Twould make us all too wise.

But some of us would try to steal
A little from the book.
And put the words together,
And learn by hook or crook.

I remember Uncle Caldwell,
Who took pot liquor fat
And greased the pages of his book,
And hid it in his hat.

And had his master ever seen
The leaves upon his head,
He'd have thought them greasy papers,
But nothing to be read.

And there was Mr. Turner's Ben,
Who heard the children spell,
And picked the words right up by heart,
And learned to read 'em well.

Well, the Northern folks kept sending
  The Yankee teachers down;
And they stood right up and helped us,
  Though Rebs did sneer and frown.

And I longed to read my Bible,
  For precious words it said;
But when I begun to learn it,
  Folks just shook their heads,

And said there is no use trying,
  Oh! Chloe, you're too late;
But as I was rising sixty,
  I had no time to wait.

So I got a pair of glasses,
  And straight to work I went,
And never stopped till I could read
  The hymns and Testament.

Then I got a little cabin
  A place to call my own—
And I felt independent
  As the queen upon her throne.

Song for the People

By Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

Let me make the songs for the people,
  Songs for the old and young;
Songs to stir like a battle-cry
  Wherever they are sung.

Not for the clashing of sabres,
  For carnage nor for strife;
But songs to thrill the hearts of men
  With more abundant life.

Let me make the songs for the weary,
  Amid life's fever and fret,
Till hearts shall relax their tension,
  And careworn brows forget.

Let me sing for little children,
  Before their footsteps stray,

Sweet anthems of love and duty,
  To float o'er life's highway.

I would sing for the poor and aged,
  When shadows dim their sight;
Of the bright and restful mansions,
  Where there shall be no night.

Our world, so worn and weary,
  Needs music, pure and strong,
To hush the jangle and discords
  Of sorrow, pain, and wrong.

Music to soothe all its sorrow,
  Till war and crime shall cease;
And the hearts of men grown tender
  Girdle the world with peace.

Grandfather

By Michael S. Harper

In 1915 my grandfather's
neighbors surrounded his house
near the dayline he ran
on the Hudson
in Catskill, NY
and thought they'd burn
his family out
in a movie they'd just seen
and be rid of his kind:
the death of a lone black
family is *the Birth*
of a Nation,
or so they thought.
His 5'4" waiter gait
quenched the white jacket smile
he'd brought back from watered
polish of my father
on the turning seats,
and he asked his neighbors
up on his thatched porch
for the first blossom of fire
that would bring him down.
They went away, his nation,
spittooning their torched necks

in the shadows of the riverboat
they'd seen, posse decomposing;
and I see him on Sutter
with white bag from your
restaurant, challenged by his first
grandson to a foot-race
he will win in white clothes.

I see him as he buys galoshes
for his railed yard near Mineo's
metal shop, where roses jump
as the el circles his house
toward Brooklyn, where his rain fell;
and I see cigar smoke in his eyes,
chocolate Madison Square Garden chews
he breaks on his set teeth,
stitched up after cancer,
the great white nation immovable
as his weight wilts
and he is on a porch
that won't hold my arms,
or the legs of the race run
forwards, or the film
played backwards on his grandson's eyes.

Here Where Coltrane Is

By Michael S. Harper

Soul and race
are private dominions,
memories and modal
songs, a tenor blossoming,
which would paint suffering
a clear color but is not in
this Victorian house
without oil in zero degree
weather and a forty-mile-an-hour wind;
it is all a well-knit family:
a love supreme.
Oak leaves pile up on walkway
and steps, catholic as apples
in a special mist of clear white
children who love my children.
I play "Alabama"
on a warped record player

skipping the scratches
on your faces over the fibrous
conical hairs of plastic
under the wooden floors.

Dreaming on a train from New York
to Philly, you hand out six
notes which become an anthem
to our memories of you:
oak, birch, maple,
apple, cocoa, rubber.
For this reason Martin is dead;
for this reason Malcolm is dead;
for this reason Coltrane is dead;
in the eyes of my first son are the browns
of these men and their music.

Makin' Jump Shots

By Michael S. Harper

He waltzes into the lane
'cross the free-throw line,
fakes a drive, pivots,
floats from the asphalt turf
in an arc of black light,
and sinks two into the chains.

One on one he fakes
down the main, passes
into the free lane
and hits the chains.

A sniff in the fallen air—
he stuffs it through the chains
riding high:
"traveling" someone calls—
and he laughs, stepping
to a silent beat, gliding
as he sinks two into the chains.

gravity furnace

By francine j. harris

She wants to set the house on fire,

gas in both hands, gas on the wall.

It'd be like the sea torched from its floor. She'd run like light

from basement windows. or maybe
suck all arms to room ablaze, so housed

in gut piping. the copper hollowed, reaching to a
heated black rot at bottom. Like ants; maybe she crawl in the dark.

low on the belly maybe she thug out late, lay low
and ink eight walls. lay low like cold, she might

strip bare, black glass. sometimes strut, sometimes
hide late. she runs from house to ember,

a sum of sink. She breathes through flame
a room of spoons. one

bar brick, one black-eyed room splatter, one torch
spent for each arm, from coal to alley, she heaves

hue of concrete into each limb. A house of blue-ring flames
to mimic; someone better run.

The Emerald Mosque on the Hill

By Raza Ali Hasan

In the lull, the afternoon sun warms
the linseed field. The flowers are quiet,

their bright subdued in the green
while the mind wanders

to the emerald mosque upon the hill,
built around a flowing spring,

the easy absolutions and ablutions
in that mosque where the spring water

has been let loose to meander
over marble courtyards and inner chambers,

across the geometric, green-tiled floor that
cools the heels of the faithful.

After the Gentle Poet Kobayashi Issa

By Robert Hass

New Year's morning—
everything is in blossom!
I feel about average.

A huge frog and I
staring at each other,
neither of us moves.

This moth saw brightness
in a woman's chamber—
burned to a crisp.

Asked how old he was
the boy in the new kimono
stretched out all five fingers.

Blossoms at night,
like people
moved by music

Napped half the day;
no one
punished me!

Fiftieth birthday:

From now on,
It's all clear profit,
every sky.

Don't worry, spiders,
I keep house
casually.

These sea slugs,
they just don't seem
Japanese.

Hell:

Bright autumn moon;
pond snails crying
in the saucepan.

Meditations at Lagunitas

By Robert Hass

All the new thinking is about loss.
In this it resembles all the old thinking.
The idea, for example, that each particular erases
the luminous clarity of a general idea. That the clown-
faced woodpecker probing the dead sculpted trunk
of that black birch is, by his presence,
some tragic falling off from a first world
of undivided light. Or the other notion that,
because there is in this world no one thing
to which the bramble of *blackberry* corresponds,
a word is elegy to what it signifies.
We talked about it late last night and in the voice
of my friend, there was a thin wire of grief, a tone
almost querulous. After a while I understood that,
talking this way, everything dissolves: *justice*,
pine, *hair*, *woman*, *you* and *I*. There was a woman
I made love to and I remembered how, holding
her small shoulders in my hands sometimes,
I felt a violent wonder at her presence
like a thirst for salt, for my childhood river
with its island willows, silly music from the pleasure boat,
muddy places where we caught the little orange-silver fish
called *pumpkinseed*. It hardly had to do with her.
Longing, we say, because desire is full
of endless distances. I must have been the same to her.
But I remember so much, the way her hands dismantled bread,
the thing her father said that hurt her, what
she dreamed. There are moments when the body is as numinous
as words, days that are the good flesh continuing.
Such tenderness, those afternoons and evenings,
saying *blackberry*, *blackberry*, *blackberry*.

The Ocean

By Nathaniel Hawthorne

The Ocean has its silent caves,
Deep, quiet, and alone;
Though there be fury on the waves,
Beneath them there is none.

The awful spirits of the deep
Hold their communion there;

And there are those for whom we weep,
The young, the bright, the fair.

Calmly the wearied seamen rest
Beneath their own blue sea.
The ocean solitudes are blest,
For there is purity.

The earth has guilt, the earth has care,
Unquiet are its graves;
But peaceful sleep is ever there,
Beneath the dark blue waves.

“Oh could I raise the darken’d veil”

By Nathaniel Hawthorne

Oh could I raise the darken’d veil,
Which hides my future life from me,
Could unborn ages slowly sail,
Before my view—and could I see
My every action painted there,
To cast one look I would not dare.
There poverty and grief might stand,
And dark Despair’s corroding hand,
Would make me seek the lonely tomb
To slumber in its endless gloom.
Then let me never cast a look,
Within Fate’s fix’d mysterious book.

Flying Lesson

By Dolores Hayden

Focus on the shapes. *Cirrus*, a curl,
stratus, a layer, *cumulus*, a heap.

Humilis, a small cloud,
cumulus humilis, a fine day to fly.

Incus, the anvil, stay grounded.
Nimbus, rain, be careful,

don’t take off near *nimbostratus*,
a shapeless layer

of rain, hail, ice, or snow.
Ice weighs on the blades of your propeller,

weighs on the entering edge of your wings.
Read a cloud,

decode it,
a dense, chilly mass

can shift, flood with light.
Watch for clouds closing under you,

the sky opens in a breath,
shuts in a heartbeat.

Frederick Douglass

By Robert Hayden

When it is finally ours, this freedom, this liberty, this beautiful
and terrible thing, needful to man as air,
usable as earth; when it belongs at last to all,
when it is truly instinct, brain matter, diastole, systole,
reflex action; when it is finally won; when it is more
than the gaudy mumbo jumbo of politicians:
this man, this Douglass, this former slave, this Negro
beaten to his knees, exiled, visioning a world
where none is lonely, none hunted, alien,
this man, superb in love and logic, this man
shall be remembered. Oh, not with statues' rhetoric,
not with legends and poems and wreaths of bronze alone,
but with the lives grown out of his life, the lives
fleshing his dream of the beautiful, needful thing.

Those Winter Sundays

By Robert Hayden

Sundays too my father got up early
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,
then with cracked hands that ached
from labor in the weekday weather made
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,

and slowly I would rise and dress,
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him,
who had driven out the cold
and polished my good shoes as well.
What did I know, what did I know
of love's austere and lonely offices?

American Sonnet for My Past and Future Assassin ["Inside me is a black-eyed animal"]

By Terrance Hayes

Inside me is a black-eyed animal
Bracing in a small stall. As if a bird
Could grow without breaking its shell.
As if the clatter of a thousand black
Birds whipping in a storm could be held
In a shell. Inside me is a huge black
Bull balled small enough to fit inside
The bead of a nipple ring. I mean to leave
A record of my raptures. I was raised
By a beautiful man. I loved his grasp of time.
My mother shaped my grasp of space.
Would you rather spend the rest of eternity
With your wild wings bewildering a cage or
With your four good feet stuck in a plot of dirt?

The Golden Shovel

By Terrance Hayes

after Gwendolyn Brooks

I. 1981

When I am so small Da's sock covers my arm, we
cruise at twilight until we find the place the real

men lean, bloodshot and translucent with cool.
His smile is a gold-plated incantation as we

drift by women on bar stools, with nothing left
in them but approachlessness. This is a school

I do not know yet. But the cue sticks mean we
are rubbed by light, smooth as wood, the lurk

of smoke thinned to song. We won't be out late.
Standing in the middle of the street last night we

watched the moonlit lawns and a neighbor strike
his son in the face. A shadow knocked straight

Da promised to leave me everything: the shovel we
used to bury the dog, the words he loved to sing

his rusted pistol, his squeaky Bible, his sin.
The boy's sneakers were light on the road. We

watched him run to us looking wounded and thin.
He'd been caught lying or drinking his father's gin.

He'd been defending his ma, trying to be a man. We
stood in the road, and my father talked about jazz,

how sometimes a tune is born of outrage. By June
the boy would be locked upstate. That night we

got down on our knees in my room. *If I should die
before I wake*. Da said to me, *it will be too soon*.

II. 1991

Into the tented city we go, we-
akened by the fire's ethereal

afterglow. Born lost and cool-
er than heartache. What we

know is what we know. The left
hand severed and school-

ed by cleverness. A plate of we-
ekdays cooking. The hour lurk-

ing in the afterglow. A late-
night chant. Into the city we

go. Close your eyes and strike

a blow. Light can be straight-

ened by its shadow. What we
break is what we hold. A sing-

ular blue note. An outcry sin-
ged exiting the throat. We

push until we thin, thin-
king we won’t creep back again.

While God licks his kin, we
sing until our blood is jazz,

we swing from June to June.
We sweat to keep from we-

eping. Groomed on a die-
t of hunger, we end too soon.

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

New Folk

By Terrance Hayes

I said Folk was dressed in Blues but hairier and hemped.
After "We acoustic banjo disciples!" Jebediah said, "When
and whereforth shall the bucolic blacks with good tempers
come to see us pluck as Elizabeth Cotton intended?"
We stole my Uncle Windchime's minivan, penned a simple
ballad about the drag of lovelessness and drove the end
of the chitlin' circuit to a joint skinny as a walk-in temple
where our new folk was not that new, but strengthened
by our twelve bar conviction. A month later, in pulled
a parade of well meaning alabaster post adolescents.
We noticed the sand-tanned and braless ones piled
in the ladder-backed front row with their boyfriends
first because beneath our twangor slept what I'll call
a hunger for the outlawable. One night J asked me when
sisters like Chapman would arrive. I shook my chin wool
then, and placed my hand over the guitar string's wind-
ow til it stilled. "When the moon's black," I said. "Be faithful."

The Good in the Evil World

By Rebecca Hazelton

Before the war leaned in and blew out
the candles, there were many long days
where lovers called themselves lovers
and a house was a dream but also
four walls, a roof. A father called
to his daughter to see the monarch butterflies,
pausing in their migration to fan the goldenrod,
a tiger in each coy disclosure.
A young man reached for a blackberry
and found draped on a branch a green snake
the color of matcha. A snake the color of matcha
sighed in the sun. People drove in cars.
There were jobs and someone had to work
every morning. A man quit his job
but it was no tragedy. He didn't like the work.
Another man slid in and found it comfortable
enough, and just as easily slid in beside
the man's wife and into the everyday rhythms
of his life and that was no tragedy either.
After rains, a ring of mushrooms would delicately
crack the earth. Spanish moss harbored red mites.
The sky wasn't interesting. No one looked up.

The Lyric In A Time of War

By Eloise Klein Healy

for Sappho

Let my music be found wanting
in comparison
to yours (as it must)

let me be found loving
(as you were)
extravagantly the beautiful

let me find you
and the song (forever)
between us

in these terrible times

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

Blackberry-Picking

By Seamus Heaney

for Philip Hobsbaum

Late August, given heavy rain and sun
For a full week, the blackberries would ripen.
At first, just one, a glossy purple clot
Among others, red, green, hard as a knot.
You ate that first one and its flesh was sweet
Like thickened wine: summer's blood was in it
Leaving stains upon the tongue and lust for
Picking. Then red ones inked up and that hunger
Sent us out with milk cans, pea tins, jam-pots
Where briars scratched and wet grass bleached our boots.
Round hayfields, cornfields and potato-drills
We trekked and picked until the cans were full,
Until the tinkling bottom had been covered
With green ones, and on top big dark blobs burned
Like a plate of eyes. Our hands were peppered
With thorn pricks, our palms sticky as Bluebeard's.

We hoarded the fresh berries in the byre.
But when the bath was filled we found a fur,
A rat-grey fungus, glutting on our cache.
The juice was stinking too. Once off the bush
The fruit fermented, the sweet flesh would turn sour.
I always felt like crying. It wasn't fair
That all the lovely canfuls smelt of rot.
Each year I hoped they'd keep, knew they would not.

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

Death of a Naturalist

By Seamus Heaney

All year the flax-dam festered in the heart
Of the townland; green and heavy headed
Flax had rotted there, weighted down by huge sods.
Daily it sweltered in the punishing sun.
Bubbles gargled delicately, bluebottles

Wove a strong gauze of sound around the smell.
There were dragonflies, spotted butterflies,
But best of all was the warm thick slobber
Of frogspawn that grew like clotted water
In the shade of the banks. Here, every spring
I would fill jampotfuls of the jellied
Specks to range on window sills at home,
On shelves at school, and wait and watch until
The fattening dots burst, into nimble
Swimming tadpoles. Miss Walls would tell us how
The daddy frog was called a bullfrog
And how he croaked and how the mammy frog
Laid hundreds of little eggs and this was
Frogspawn. You could tell the weather by frogs too
For they were yellow in the sun and brown
In rain.

Then one hot day when fields were rank
With cowdung in the grass the angry frogs
Invaded the flax-dam; I ducked through hedges
To a coarse croaking that I had not heard
Before. The air was thick with a bass chorus.
Right down the dam gross bellied frogs were cocked
On sods; their loose necks pulsed like sails. Some hopped:
The slap and plop were obscene threats. Some sat
Poised like mud grenades, their blunt heads farting.
I sickened, turned, and ran. The great slime kings
Were gathered there for vengeance and I knew
That if I dipped my hand the spawn would clutch it.

Digging

By Seamus Heaney

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds
Bends low, comes up twenty years away
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills
Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep
To scatter new potatoes that we picked,
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

By God, the old man could handle a spade.
Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day
Than any other man on Toner's bog.
Once I carried him milk in a bottle
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up
To drink it, then fell to right away
Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
Over his shoulder, going down and down
For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awaken in my head.
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it.

The Grauballe Man

By Seamus Heaney

As if he had been poured
in tar, he lies
on a pillow of turf
and seems to weep

the black river of himself.
The grain of his wrists
is like bog oak,
the ball of his heel

like a basalt egg.
His instep has shrunk
cold as a swan's foot
or a wet swamp root.

His hips are the ridge
and purse of a mussel,
his spine an eel arrested
under a glisten of mud.

The head lifts,
the chin is a visor
raised above the vent
of his slashed throat

that has tanned and toughened.
The cured wound
opens inwards to a dark
elderberry place.

Who will say 'corpse'
to his vivid cast?
Who will say 'body'
to his opaque repose?

And his rusted hair,
a mat unlikely
as a foetus's.
I first saw his twisted face

in a photograph,
a head and shoulder
out of the peat,
bruised like a forceps baby,

but now he lies
perfected in my memory,
down to the red horn
of his nails,

hung in the scales
with beauty and atrocity:
with the Dying Gaul
too strictly compassed

on his shield,
with the actual weight
of each hooded victim,
slashed and dumped.

Thine Own

By Josephine Delphine Henderson Heard

To live and not be Thine Own,
Like Springtime is when birds are flown;
Or liberty in prison bars,
Or evening skies without the stars;
Like diamonds that are lusterless,
Or rest when there's no weariness;
Like lovely flower that have no scent,
Or music when the sound is spent.

The Old Liberators

By Robert Hedin

Of all the people in the mornings at the mall,
it's the old liberators I like best,
those veterans of the Bulge, Anzio, or Monte Cassino
I see lost in Automotive or back in Home Repair,
bored among the paints and power tools.
Or the really old ones, the ones who are going fast,
who keep dozing off in the little orchards
of shade under the distant skylights.
All around, from one bright rack to another,
their wives stride big as generals,
their handbags bulging like ripe fruit.
They are almost all gone now,
and with them they are taking the flak
and fire storms, the names of the old bombing runs.
Each day a little more of their memory goes out,
darkens the way a house darkens,
its rooms quietly filling with evening,
until nothing but the wind lifts the lace curtains,
the wind bearing through the empty rooms
the rich far off scent of gardens
where just now, this morning,
light is falling on the wild philodendrons.

Invictus

By William Ernest Henley

Out of the night that covers me,
    Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be

For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.

The Collar

By George Herbert

I struck the board, and cried, "No more;
I will abroad!
What? shall I ever sigh and pine?
My lines and life are free, free as the road,
Loose as the wind, as large as store.
Shall I be still in suit?
Have I no harvest but a thorn
To let me blood, and not restore
What I have lost with cordial fruit?
Sure there was wine
Before my sighs did dry it; there was corn
Before my tears did drown it.
Is the year only lost to me?
Have I no bays to crown it,
No flowers, no garlands gay? All blasted?
All wasted?
Not so, my heart; but there is fruit,
And thou hast hands.
Recover all thy sigh-blown age
On double pleasures: leave thy cold dispute
Of what is fit and not. Forsake thy cage,
Thy rope of sands,
Which petty thoughts have made, and made to thee
Good cable, to enforce and draw,
And be thy law,

While thou didst wink and wouldst not see.
Away! take heed;
I will abroad.
Call in thy death's-head there; tie up thy fears;
He that forbears
To suit and serve his need
Deserves his load."
But as I raved and grew more fierce and wild
At every word,
Methought I heard one calling, *Child!*
And I replied *My Lord.*

Love (III)

By George Herbert

Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
If I lacked any thing.

A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:
Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
My dear, then I will serve.
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
So I did sit and eat.

The Pulley

By George Herbert

When God at first made man,
Having a glass of blessings standing by,
“Let us,” said he, “pour on him all we can.
Let the world’s riches, which dispersèd lie,
Contract into a span.”

So strength first made a way;
Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honour, pleasure.
When almost all was out, God made a stay,
Perceiving that, alone of all his treasure,
Rest in the bottom lay.

"For if I should," said he,
"Bestow this jewel also on my creature,
He would adore my gifts instead of me,
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature;
So both should losers be.

"Yet let him keep the rest,
But keep them with repining restlessness;
Let him be rich and weary, that at least,
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
May toss him to my breast."

Let Me Tell You What a Poem Brings

By Juan Felipe Herrera

for Charles Fishman

Before you go further,
let me tell you what a poem brings,
first, you must know the secret, there is no poem
to speak of, it is a way to attain a life without boundaries,
yes, it is that easy, a poem, imagine me telling you this,
instead of going day by day against the razors, well,
the judgments, all the tick-tock bronze, a leather jacket
sizing you up, the fashion mall, for example, from
the outside you think you are being entertained,
when you enter, things change, you get caught by surprise,
your mouth goes sour, you get thirsty, your legs grow cold
standing still in the middle of a storm, a poem, of course,
is always open for business too, except, as you can see,
it isn't exactly business that pulls your spirit into
the alarming waters, there you can bathe, you can play,
you can even join in on the gossip—the mist, that is,
the mist becomes central to your existence.

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

This Is My Last Report

By Juan Felipe Herrera

This is my last report:
I wanted to speak of existence, the ants most of all,
dressed up in their naughty flame-trousers, the exact jaws,
their unknowable kindnesses, their abyss of hungers,
and science, their mercilessness, their prophetic military
devotions, their geometry of scent, their cocoons
for the Nomenclature,

I wanted to speak of the Glue Sniffers
and Glue Smoothers who despise all forms
unbound, loose in their amber nectars, I wanted
to point to their noses, hoses and cables and networks,
their tools, if I can use that word now—and scales and
scanners and Glue Rectories.

I wanted you to meet my broom mother
who carved a hole into her womb
so that I could live—

At every sunset she stands
under the shadow of the watchtowers
elongating and denying her breath.

I wanted to look under the rubble fields
for once, for you (if you approved), flee
into the bullet-riddled openness and fall flat,
arched, askew, under the rubble sheets
and let the rubble fill me

with its sharp plates and ripped dust—
alphabets incomplete and humid. You,
listen,

a little closer
to the chalk dust—this child swinging her left arm,
a ribbon, agitated by unnamed forces, devoured.

The Impossible Replication of Desire

By Lee Herrick

How much delight before we collapse
How much earth in the lungs

How much wine

When we want more
When the weeds sprawl
It is not what you think

Think how fast some landscapes change
the lover, the gardener's grand idea,
the failing Maple

the boat about to capsize
the correction
the hand's reflection

the impossible replication of weight
versus time
how it will never mean what you want

To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time

By Robert Herrick

Gather ye rose-buds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles today
Tomorrow will be dying.

The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,
The higher he’s a-getting,
The sooner will his race be run,
And nearer he’s to setting.

That age is best which is the first,
When youth and blood are warmer;
But being spent, the worse, and worst
Times still succeed the former.

Then be not coy, but use your time,
And while ye may, go marry;
For having lost but once your prime,
You may forever tarry.

After working sixty hours again for what reason

By Bob Hicok

The best job I had was moving a stone
from one side of the road to the other.
This required a permit which required
a bribe. The bribe took all my salary.
Yet because I hadn't finished the job
I had no salary, and to pay the bribe
I took a job moving the stone
the other way. Because the official
wanted his bribe, he gave me a permit
for the second job. When I pointed out
that the work would be best completed
if I did nothing, he complimented
my brain and wrote a letter
to my employer suggesting promotion
on stationery bearing the wings
of a raptor spread in flight
over a mountain smaller than the bird.
My boss, fearing my intelligence,
paid me to sleep on the sofa
and take lunch with the official
who required a bribe to keep anything
from being done. When I told my parents,
they wrote my brother to come home
from university to be slapped
on the back of the head. Dutifully,
he arrived and bowed to receive
his instruction, at which point
sense entered his body and he asked
what I could do by way of a job.
I pointed out there were stones
everywhere trying not to move,
all it took was a little gumption
to be the man who didn't move them.
It was harder to explain the intricacies
of not obtaining a permit to not
do this. Just yesterday he got up
at dawn and shaved, as if the lack
of hair on his face has anything
to do with the appearance of food
on an empty table.

Learning to swim

By Bob Hicok

At forty-eight, to be given water,

which is most of the world, given life
in water, which is most of me, given ease,

which is most of what I lack, here, where walls
don't part to my hands, is to be born
as of three weeks ago. Taking nothing

from you, mother, or you, sky, or you,
mountain, that you wouldn't take
if offered by the sea, any sea, or river,

any river, or the pool, beside which
a woman sits who would save me
if I needed saving, in a red suit, as if flame

is the color of emergency, as I do,
need saving, from solid things,
most of all, their dissolve.

Dawn

By Ella Higginson

The soft-toned clock upon the stair chimed three—
  Too sweet for sleep, too early yet to rise.
  In restful peace I lay with half-closed eyes,
Watching the tender hours go dreamily;
The tide was flowing in; I heard the sea
  Shivering along the sands; while yet the skies
  Were dim, uncertain, as the light that lies
Beneath the fretwork of some wild-rose tree
Within the thicket gray. The chanticleer
  Sent drowsy calls across the slumbrous air;
  In solemn silence sweet it was to hear
My own heart beat . . . Then broad and deep and fair—
  Trembling in its new birth from heaven's womb—
  One crimson shaft of dawn sank thro' my room.

Girl Sleuth

By Brenda Hillman

A brenda is missing—where is she?
Summon the seeds & weeds, the desert whooshes. Phone the finch
with the crowded beak; a little pretenda
is learning to read
in the afternoon near the cactus caves. Near oleander & pulpy
caves with the click-click of the wren & the *shkrrrr* of the thrasher,
a skinny pretenda is learning
to read till the missing brenda
is found. Drip of syllables like olives near the saguaro.
Nancy Drew will find the secret in raincoats & wednesdays
& sticks. Nancy whose spine is yellow
or blue will find the brenda in 1962,
Nancy who has no mother,
who takes suggestions from her father & ignores them.

Gleam goes the wren ignoring the thorn. They cannot tell the difference.
Click of the smart dog's nails on linoleum.
Nancy bends over the clues,
of brenda's locket & dress. Word by word
between syllables a clue. Where has the summer gone, the autumn—
are they missing too? Maybe Nancy
will parse the secret & read the book report on Nancy Drew:
"neat pretty sly cute." Syllable by syllable
& still no brenda! Nancy
puts her hand to her forehead; is the missing
girl in the iron bird? is the clue to the girl in the locket?

Saguaro

By Brenda Hillman

Often visitors there, saddened
by lack of trees, go out
to a promontory.

Then, backed by the banded
sunset, the trail
of the Conquistadores,

the father puts on the camera,
the leather albatross,
and has the children

imitate saguaros. One
at a time they stand there smiling,
fingers up like the tines of a fork

while the stately saguaro
goes on being entered
by wrens, diseases, and sunlight.

The mother sits on a rock,
arms folded
across her breasts. To her

the cactus looks scared,
its needles
like hair in cartoons.

With its arms in preacher
or waltz position,
it gives the impression

of great effort
in every direction,
like the mother.

Thousands of these gray-green
cacti cross the valley:
nature repeating itself,

children repeating nature,
father repeating children
and mother watching.

Later, the children think
the cactus was moral,
had something to teach them,

some survival technique
or just regular beauty.
But what else could it do?

The only protection
against death
was to love solitude.

Echo

By Daryl Hine

Echo that loved hid within a wood
Would to herself rehearse her weary woe:
O, she cried, and all the rest unsaid
Identical came back in sorry echo.

Echo for the fix that she was in
Invisible, distraught by mocking passion,
Passionate, ignored, as good as dumb,
Employed that O unchanged in repetition.

Shun love if you suspect that he shuns you,
Use with him no reproaches whatsoever.
Ever you knew, supposing him to know
No melody from which you might recover-

Cover your ears, dear Echo, do not hear.
Here is no supplication but your own,
Only your sighs return upon the air
Ere their music from the mouth be gone.

Poor Angels

By Edward Hirsch

At this hour the soul floats weightlessly
through the city streets, speechless and invisible,
astonished by the smoky blend of grays and golds
seeping out of the air, the dark half-tones

of dusk suddenly filling the urban sky
while the body sits listlessly by the window
sullen and heavy, too exhausted to move,
too weary to stand up or to lie down.

At this hour the soul is like a yellow wing
slipping through the treetops, a little ecstatic
cloud hovering over the sidewalks, calling out
to the approaching night, “Amaze me, amaze me,”

while the body sits glumly by the window
listening to the clear summons of the dead
transparent as glass, clairvoyant as crystal.
Some nights it is almost ready to join them.

Oh, this is a strange, unlikely tethering,
a furious grafting of the quick and the slow:
when the soul flies up, the body sinks down
and all night—locked in the same cramped room—

they go on quarreling, stubbornly threatening
to leave each other, wordlessly filling the air
with the sound of a low internal burning.
How long can this bewildering marriage last?

At midnight the soul dreams of a small fire
of stars flaming on the other side of the sky,
but the body stares into an empty night sheen,
a hollow-eyed darkness. Poor luckless angels,

feverish old loves: don't separate yet.
Let what rises live with what descends.

Memory As a Hearing Aid

By Tony Hoagland

Somewhere, someone is asking a question,
and I stand squinting at the classroom
with one hand cupped behind my ear,
trying to figure out where that voice is coming from.

I might be already an old man,
attempting to recall the night
his hearing got misplaced,
front-row-center at a battle of the bands,

where a lot of leather-clad, second-rate musicians,
amped up to dinosaur proportions,
test drove their equipment through our ears.
Each time the drummer threw a tantrum,

the guitarist whirled and sprayed us with machine-gun riffs,
as if they wished that they could knock us
quite literally dead.
We called that fun in 1970,

when we weren't sure our lives were worth surviving.
I'm here to tell you that they were,
and many of us did, despite ourselves,

though the road from there to here

is paved with dead brain cells,
parents shocked to silence,
and squad cars painting the whole neighborhood
the quaking tint and texture of red jelly.

Friends, we should have postmarks on our foreheads
to show where we have been;
we should have pointed ears, or polka-dotted skin
to show what we were thinking

when we hot-rodded over God's front lawn,
and Death kept blinking.
But here I stand, an average-looking man
staring at a room

where someone blond in braids
with a beautiful belief in answers
is still asking questions.

Through the silence in my dead ear,
I can almost hear the future whisper
to the past: it says that this is not a test
and everybody passes.

Requests for Toy Piano

By Tony Hoagland

Play the one about the family of the ducks
where the ducks go down to the river
and one of them thinks the water will be cold
but then they jump in anyway
and like it and splash around.

No, I must play the one
about the nervous man from Palestine in row 14
with a brown bag in his lap
in which a gun is hidden in a sandwich.

Play the one about the handsome man and woman
standing on the steps of her apartment
and how the darkness and her perfume and the beating of their hearts
conjoin to make them feel
like leaping from the edge of chance—

No, I should play the one about
the hard rectangle of the credit card
hidden in the man's back pocket
and how the woman spent an hour
plucking out her brows, and how her perfume
was made from the destruction of a hundred flowers.

Then play the one about the flower industry
in which the migrant workers curse their own infected hands
from tossing sheaves of roses and carnations
into the back of the refrigerated trucks.

No, I must play the one about the single yellow daffodil
standing on my kitchen table
whose cut stem draws the water upwards
so the plant is flushed with the conviction

that the water has been sent
to find and raise it up
from somewhere so deep inside the earth
not even flowers can remember.

To Be Held

By Linda Hogan

To be held
by the light
was what I wanted,
to be a tree drinking the rain,
no longer parched in this hot land.
To be roots in a tunnel growing
but also to be sheltering the inborn leaves
and the green slide of mineral
down the immense distances
into infinite comfort
and the land here, only clay,
still contains and consumes
the thirsty need
the way a tree always shelters the unborn life
waiting for the healing
after the storm
which has been our life.

In Praise of My Bed

By Meredith Holmes

At last I can be with you!
The grinding hours
since I left your side!
The labor of being fully human,
working my opposable thumb,
talking, and walking upright.
Now I have unclasped
unzipped, stepped out of.
Husked, soft, a be-er only,
I do nothing, but point
my bare feet into your
clean smoothness
feel your quiet strength
the whole length of my body.
I close my eyes, hear myself
moan, so grateful to be held this way.

They Come

By Cathy Park Hong

Stamp the earth rind down,
shuck our boots & nap on
rubber cockscomb pad.

Rise up & ride in,
poles poked through with hide of kid
flap from blither wind.

Ride into a town of tires stacked,
a tarred prehistoric castle.

A town of shacks painted kiwi green
latches guano rimmed.
Road's a batter of blood & dust.

One serf scurries off cowed & cloaked.
Linseed-eyed & broad of face.
Hold, I say.

She says oh gods once nested on our tire hills
but now that tire factory flakes to tinder too.
Are you here from the world above?

Now come. Heal my kin.
Are you here from the world above?

We douse ourselves with flame retardant
& douse the town to flame.
Are you here from the world above?

We hear her death in flames
We hear other deaths in flames
Along each town we pass

We rave & rove & gore
the last oil rig hidalgo in his tin gilt throne,
His ale we drink, his heart we jar.

We are from the world above,
We sing & jig but like Sisyphus,
as we eye from afar,

as each child crawls out their gutted hole,
& rebuild each dead town —
We can never rest.

The Legend

By Garrett Hongo

In Chicago, it is snowing softly
and a man has just done his wash for the week.
He steps into the twilight of early evening,
carrying a wrinkled shopping bag
full of neatly folded clothes,
and, for a moment, enjoys
the feel of warm laundry and crinkled paper,
flannellike against his gloveless hands.
There's a Rembrandt glow on his face,
a triangle of orange in the hollow of his cheek
as a last flash of sunset
blazes the storefronts and lit windows of the street.

He is Asian, Thai or Vietnamese,
and very skinny, dressed as one of the poor
in rumpled suit pants and a plaid mackinaw,
dingy and too large.
He negotiates the slick of ice

on the sidewalk by his car,
opens the Fairlane's back door,
leans to place the laundry in,
and turns, for an instant,
toward the flurry of footsteps
and cries of pedestrians
as a boy—that's all he was—
backs from the corner package store
shooting a pistol, firing it,
once, at the dumbfounded man
who falls forward,
grabbing at his chest.

A few sounds escape from his mouth,
a babbling no one understands
as people surround him
bewildered at his speech.
The noises he makes are nothing to them.
The boy has gone, lost
in the light array of foot traffic
dappling the snow with fresh prints.
Tonight, I read about Descartes'
grand courage to doubt everything
except his own miraculous existence
and I feel so distinct
from the wounded man lying on the concrete
I am ashamed.

Let the night sky cover him as he dies.
Let the weaver girl cross the bridge of heaven
and take up his cold hands.

IN MEMORY OF JAY KASHIWAMURA

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

I Remember, I Remember

By Thomas Hood

I remember, I remember,
The house where I was born,
The little window where the sun
Came peeping in at morn;
He never came a wink too soon,

Nor brought too long a day,
But now, I often wish the night
Had borne my breath away!

I remember, I remember,
The roses, red and white,
The vi'lets, and the lily-cups,
Those flowers made of light!
The lilacs where the robin built,
And where my brother set
The laburnum on his birthday,—
The tree is living yet!

I remember, I remember,
Where I was used to swing,
And thought the air must rush as fresh
To swallows on the wing;
My spirit flew in feathers then,
That is so heavy now,
And summer pools could hardly cool
The fever on my brow!

I remember, I remember,
The fir trees dark and high;
I used to think their slender tops
Were close against the sky:
It was a childish ignorance,
But now 'tis little joy
To know I'm farther off from heav'n
Than when I was a boy.

Silence

By Thomas Hood

There is a silence where hath been no sound,
  There is a silence where no sound may be,
  In the cold grave—under the deep deep sea,
Or in the wide desert where no life is found,
Which hath been mute, and still must sleep profound;
  No voice is hush’d—no life treads silently,
  But clouds and cloudy shadows wander free,
That never spoke, over the idle ground:
But in green ruins, in the desolate walls
  Of antique palaces, where Man hath been,
Though the dun fox, or wild hyena, calls,

And owls, that flit continually between,
Shriek to the echo, and the low winds moan,
There the true Silence is, self-conscious and alone.

As Kingishers Catch Fire

By Gerard Manley Hopkins

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves — goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,
Crying *Whát I dó is me: for that I came.*

I say móre: the just man justices;
Keeps grace: thát keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is —
Chríst — for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.

God’s Grandeur

By Gerard Manley Hopkins

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

Spring

By Gerard Manley Hopkins

Nothing is so beautiful as Spring –
  When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush;
  Thrush's eggs look little low heavens, and thrush
Through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring
The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing;
  The glassy peartree leaves and blooms, they brush
  The descending blue; that blue is all in a rush
With richness; the racing lambs too have fair their fling.

What is all this juice and all this joy?
  A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning
In Eden garden. – Have, get, before it cloy,
  Before it cloud, Christ, lord, and sour with sinning,
Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy,
  Most, O maid's child, thy choice and worthy the winning.

Spring and Fall

By Gerard Manley Hopkins

to a young child

Márgarét, áre you gríeving
Over Goldengrove unleaving?
Leáves like the things of man, you
With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?
Ah! ás the heart grows older
It will come to such sights colder
By and by, nor spare a sigh
Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;
And yet you wíll weep and know why.
Now no matter, child, the name:
Sórrow's springs áre the same.
Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed
What heart heard of, ghost guessed:
It ís the blight man was born for,
It is Margaret you mourn for.

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

The Windhover

By Gerard Manley Hopkins

To Christ our Lord

I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird, – the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

No wonder of it: shéer plód makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

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

Ode I. 11

By Horace
Translated by Burton Raffel

Leucon, no one's allowed to know his fate,
Not you, not me: don't ask, don't hunt for answers
In tea leaves or palms. Be patient with whatever comes.
This could be our last winter, it could be many
More, pounding the Tuscan Sea on these rocks:
Do what you must, be wise, cut your vines
And forget about hope. Time goes running, even
As we talk. Take the present, the future's no one's affair.

Early Affection

By George Moses Horton

I lov'd thee from the earliest dawn,
When first I saw thy beauty's ray,
And will, until life's eve comes on,

And beauty's blossom fades away;
And when all things go well with thee,
With smiles and tears remember me.

I'll love thee when thy morn is past,
And wheedling gallantry is o'er,
When youth is lost in age's blast,
And beauty can ascend no more,
And when life's journey ends with thee,
O, then look back and think of me.

I'll love thee with a smile or frown,
'Mid sorrow's gloom or pleasure's light,
And when the chain of life runs down,
Pursue thy last eternal flight,
When thou hast spread thy wing to flee,
Still, still, a moment wait for me.

I'll love thee for those sparkling eyes,
To which my fondness was betray'd,
Bearing the tincture of the skies,
To glow when other beauties fade,
And when they sink too low to see,
Reflect an azure beam on me.

George Moses Horton, Myself

By George Moses Horton

I feel myself in need
Of the inspiring strains of ancient lore,
My heart to lift, my empty mind to feed,
And all the world explore.

I know that I am old
And never can recover what is past,
But for the future may some light unfold
And soar from ages blast.

I feel resolved to try,
My wish to prove, my calling to pursue,
Or mount up from the earth into the sky,
To show what Heaven can do.

My genius from a boy,
Has fluttered like a bird within my heart;

But could not thus confined her powers employ,
  Impatient to depart.

She like a restless bird,
  Would spread her wing, her power to be unfurl'd,
And let her songs be loudly heard,
  And dart from world to world.

Like Brother We Meet

By George Moses Horton

Dedicated to the Federal and Late Confederate Soldiers

Like heart-loving brothers we meet,
  And still the loud thunders of strife,
The blaze of fraternity kindles most sweet,
  There's nothing more pleasing in life.

The black cloud of faction retreats,
  The poor is no longer depressed,
See those once discarded resuming their seats,
  The lost strangers soon will find rest.

The soldier no longer shall roam,
  But soon shall land safely ashore,
Each soon will arrive at his own native home,
  And struggle in warfare no more.

The union of brothers is sweet,
  Whose wives and children do come,
Their sons and fair daughters with pleasure they greet,
  When long absent fathers come home.

They never shall languish again,
  Nor discord their union shall break,
When brothers no longer lament and complain,
  Hence never each other forsake.

Hang closely together like friends,
  By peace killing foes never driven,
The storm of commotion eternally ends,
  And earth will soon turn into Heaven.

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

On Liberty and Slavery

By George Moses Horton

Alas! and am I born for this,
To wear this slavish chain?
Deprived of all created bliss,
Through hardship, toil and pain!

How long have I in bondage lain,
And languished to be free!
Alas! and must I still complain—
Deprived of liberty.

Oh, Heaven! and is there no relief
This side the silent grave—
To soothe the pain—to quell the grief
And anguish of a slave?

Come Liberty, thou cheerful sound,
Roll through my ravished ears!
Come, let my grief in joys be drowned,
And drive away my fears.

Say unto foul oppression, Cease:
Ye tyrants rage no more,
And let the joyful trump of peace,
Now bid the vassal soar.

Soar on the pinions of that dove
Which long has cooed for thee,
And breathed her notes from Afric's grove,
The sound of Liberty.

Oh, Liberty! thou golden prize,
So often sought by blood—
We crave thy sacred sun to rise,
The gift of nature's God!

Bid Slavery hide her haggard face,
And barbarism fly:
I scorn to see the sad disgrace
In which enslaved I lie.

Dear Liberty! upon thy breast,
I languish to respire;
And like the Swan unto her nest,

I'd like to thy smiles retire.

Oh, blest asylum—heavenly balm!
Unto thy boughs I flee—
And in thy shades the storm shall calm,
With songs of Liberty!

On Summer

By George Moses Horton

Esteville begins to burn;
  The auburn fields of harvest rise;
The torrid flames again return,
  And thunders roll along the skies.

Perspiring Cancer lifts his head,
  And roars terrific from on high;
Whose voice the timid creatures dread;
  From which they strive with awe to fly.

The night-hawk ventures from his cell,
  And starts his note in evening air;
He feels the heat his bosom swell,
  Which drives away the gloom of fear.

Thou noisy insect, start thy drum;
  Rise lamp-like bugs to light the train;
And bid sweet Philomela come,
  And sound in front the nightly strain.

The bee begins her ceaseless hum,
  And doth with sweet exertions rise;
And with delight she stores her comb,
  And well her rising stock supplies.

Let sportive children well beware,
  While sprightly frisking o'er the green;
And carefully avoid the snare,
  Which lurks beneath the smiling scene.

The mistress bird assumes her nest,
  And broods in silence on the tree,
Her note to cease, her wings at rest,
  She patient waits her young to see.

Is My Team Ploughing

By A. E. Housman

"Is my team ploughing,
  That I was used to drive
And hear the harness jingle
  When I was man alive?"

Ay, the horses trample,
  The harness jingles now;
No change though you lie under
  The land you used to plough.

"Is football playing
  Along the river shore,
With lads to chase the leather,
  Now I stand up no more?"

Ay the ball is flying,
  The lads play heart and soul;
The goal stands up, the keeper
  Stands up to keep the goal.

"Is my girl happy,
  That I thought hard to leave,
And has she tired of weeping
  As she lies down at eve?"

Ay, she lies down lightly,
  She lies not down to weep:
Your girl is well contented.
  Be still, my lad, and sleep.

"Is my friend hearty,
  Now I am thin and pine,
And has he found to sleep in
  A better bed than mine?"

Yes, lad, I lie easy,
  I lie as lads would choose;
I cheer a dead man's sweetheart,
  Never ask me whose.

To an Athelete Dying Young

By A. E. Housman

The time you won your town the race
We chaired you through the market-place;
Man and boy stood cheering by,
And home we brought you shoulder-high.

Today, the road all runners come,
Shoulder-high we bring you home,
And set you at your threshold down,
Townsman of a stiller town.

Smart lad, to slip betimes away
From fields where glory does not stay,
And early though the laurel grows
It withers quicker than the rose.

Eyes the shady night has shut
Cannot see the record cut,
And silence sounds no worse than cheers
After earth has stopped the ears.

Now you will not swell the rout
Of lads that wore their honours out,
Runners whom renown outran
And the name died before the man.

So set, before its echoes fade,
The fleet foot on the sill of shade,
And hold to the low lintel up
The still-defended challenge-cup.

And round that early-laurelled head
Will flock to gaze the strengthless dead,
And find unwithered on its curls
The garland briefer than a girl's.

A Shropshire Lad 2: Loveliest of trees, the cherry now

By A. E. Housman

Loveliest of trees, the cherry now
Is hung with bloom along the bough,
And stands about the woodland ride
Wearing white for Eastertide.

Now, of my threescore years and ten,
Twenty will not come again,
And take from seventy springs a score,
It only leaves me fifty more.

And since to look at things in bloom
Fifty springs are little room,
About the woodlands I will go
To see the cherry hung with snow.

Battle-Hymn of the Republic

By Julia Ward Howe

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord:
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fatal lightning of his terrible swift sword:
    His truth is marching on.

I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps;
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps;
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps.
    His Day is marching on.

I have read a fiery gospel, writ in burnished rows of steel:
"As ye deal with my contemners, so with you my grace shall deal;
Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his heel,
    Since God is marching on."

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before his judgment-seat:
Oh! be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet!
    Our God is marching on.

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me:
As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
    While God is marching on.

In

By Andrew Hudgins

When we first heard from blocks away
the fog truck's blustery roar,

we dropped our toys, leapt from our meals,
and scrambled out the door

into an evening briefly fuzzy.
We yearned to be transformed—
translated past confining flesh
to disembodied spirit. We swarmed

in thick smoke, taking human form
before we blurred again,
turned vague and then invisible,
in temporary heaven.

Freed of bodies by the fog,
we laughed, we sang, we shouted.
We were our voices, nothing else.
Voice was all we wanted.

The white clouds tumbled down our streets
pursued by spellbound children
who chased the most distorting clouds,
ecstatic in the poison.

End of Days Advice from an Ex-zombie

By Michael Derrick Hudson

To think I used to be so good at going to pieces
gobbling my way through the cops

and spooking what's left of the girls. How'd I

get so far, sloughing off one knuckle at a time,
jerking my mossy pelt along

ruined streets? Those insistent, dreadful thuds

when we stacked our futile selves
against locked doors. Our mumbles and groans!

Such hungry nights! Staggering through the grit

of looted malls, plastered with tattered
flags of useless currency, I'd slobbered all over

the busted glass and merchandise of America…

But first you'll have to figure out those qualities
separating what's being alive from

who's already dead. Most of you will flunk that.

Next learn how to want one thing over and over,
night after night. Most of you

are good at that. Don't get tired. Don't cough

into your leftovers. Don't think. Always stand
by your hobgoblin buddies. Clutch

at whatever's there. Learn to sniff out sundowns.

I look at the world

By Langston Hughes

I look at the world
From awakening eyes in a black face—
And this is what I see:
This fenced-off narrow space
Assigned to me.

I look then at the silly walls
Through dark eyes in a dark face—
And this is what I know:
That all these walls oppression builds
Will have to go!

I look at my own body
With eyes no longer blind—
And I see that my own hands can make
The world that's in my mind.
Then let us hurry, comrades,
The road to find.

I, Too

By Langston Hughes

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.

They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

The Negro Speaks of Rivers

By Langstson Hughes

I've known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

The River Now

By Richard Hugo

Hardly a ghost left to talk with. The slavs moved on

or changed their names to something green. Greeks gave up
old dishes and slid into repose. Runs of salmon thin
and thin until a ripple in October might mean carp.
Huge mills bang and smoke. Day hangs thick with commerce
and my favorite home, always overgrown with roses,
collapsed like moral advice. Tugs still pound against
the outtide pour but real, running on some definite fuel.
I can't dream anything, not some lovely woman
murdered in a shack, not saw mills going broke,
not even wild wine and a landslide though I knew both well.
The blood still begs direction home. This river points
the way north to the blood, the blue stars certain
in their swing, their fix. I pass the backwash where
the cattails still lean north, familiar grebes pop up,
the windchill is the same. And it comes back with the odor
of the river, some way I know the lonely sources
of despair break down from too much love. No matter
how this water fragments in the reeds, it rejoins
the river and the bright bay north receives it all,
new salmon on their way to open ocean,
the easy tub returned.

Recess

By Maria Hummel

This is the sound of the bell. It rings,
full of brass and the end it brings:
once for the children, once for the child
who sits alone. His eyes hurt and mild,
he waits, holding his things.

Time should hold no meaning
for him yet. You don't learn
how to play; you forget. But he knows a while
well, and longs for the clang of the bell.

A bell is a room of nothing.
No, a dome with a hidden swing —
a will, a sway, a tone, a peal,
the beginning of song. The wild
crowd nears, passes, laughing.
Here is the sound of the bell.

Rondeau

By Leigh Hunt

Jenny kiss'd me when we met,
Jumping from the chair she sat in;
Time, you thief, who love to get
Sweets into your list, put that in!
Say I'm weary, say I'm sad,
Say that health and wealth have miss'd me,
Say I'm growing old, but add,
Jenny kiss'd me.

I Close My Eyes

By David Ignatow

I close my eyes like a good little boy at night in bed,
as I was told to do by my mother when she lived,
and before bed I brush my teeth and slip on my pajamas,
as I was told, and look forward to tomorrow.

I do all things required of me to make me a citizen of sterling worth.
I keep a job and come home each evening for dinner. I arrive at the
same time on the same train to give my family a sense of order.

I obey traffic signals. I am cordial to strangers, I answer my
mail promptly. I keep a balanced checking account. Why can't I
live forever?

Self-Employed

By David Ignatow

For Harvey Shapiro

I stand and listen, head bowed,
to my inner complaint.
Persons passing by think
I am searching for a lost coin.
You're fired, I yell inside
after an especially bad episode.
I'm letting you go without notice
or terminal pay. You just lost
another chance to make good.
But then I watch myself standing at the exit,
depressed and about to leave,

and wave myself back in wearily,
for who else could I get in my place
to do the job in dark, airless conditions?

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

The Grand Silos of Sacramento

By Lawson Fusao Inada

From a distance, at night, they seem to be

industries—all lit up but not on the map;

or, in this scientific age, they could be

installations for launching rocket ships—

so solid, and with such security, are they. . .

Ah, but up close, by the light of day,

we see, not “pads” but actual paddies—

for these are simply silos in ricefields,

structures to hold the harvested grain.

Still, they're the tallest things around,

and, by night or day, you'd have to say

they're ample for what they do: storage.

And, if you amble around from your car,

you can lean up against one in the sun,

feeling warmth on your cheek as you spread

out your arms, holding on to the whole world

around you, to the shores of other lands

where the laborers launched their lives

to arrive and plant and harvest this grain

of history—as you hold and look, look

up, up, up, and whisper: "*Grandfather*!"

anthem for my belly after eating too much

By Kara Jackson

i look in the mirror, and all the chips i've eaten
this month have accumulated
like schoolwork at the bottom of my tummy,
my belly—a country i'm trying to love.
my mouth is a lover devoted to you, my belly, my belly
the birds will string a song together
with wind for you and your army
of solids, militia of grease.
americans love excess, but we also love jeans,
and refuse to make excess comfortable in them.
i step into a fashionable prison,
my middle managed and fastened into
suffering. my gracious gut,
dutiful dome, i will wear a house for you
that you can live in, promise walls
that embrace your growing flesh,
and watch you reach toward everything possible.

the world is about to end and my grandparents are in love

By Kara Jackson

still, living like they orbit one another,
my grandfather, the planet, & grandma, his moon assigned
by some gravitational pull. they have loved long enough
for a working man to retire. grandma says she's not tired,

she wears her husband like a coat that survives every season,
talks about him the way my parents talk about vinyl—
the subject salvaged by the tent of their tongues.
grandma returns to her love like a hymn, marks it with a color.

when the world ends will it suck the earth of all its love?
will i go taking somebody's hand,
my skin becoming their skin?

the digital age is taking away our winters,

and i'm afraid the sun is my soulmate,
that waste waits for a wet kiss,
carbon calls me pretty, and i think
death is a good first date.

i hope when the world ends it leaves them be,
spares grandpa and his game,
grandma spinning corn into weight,

the two of them reeling into western
theme songs, the TV louder
than whatever's coming.

The Animals

By Josephine Jacobsen

At night, alone, the animals came and shone.
The darkness whirled but silent shone the animals:
The lion the man the calf the eagle saying
Sanctus which was and is and is to come.

The sleeper watched the people at the waterless wilderness' edge;
The wilderness was made of granite, of thorn, of death,
It was the goat which lightened the people praying.
The goat went out with sin on its sunken head.

On the sleeper's midnight and the smaller after hours
From above below elsewhere there shone the animals
Through the circular dark; the cock appeared in light
Crying three times, for tears for tears for tears.

High in the frozen tree the sparrow sat. At three o'clock
The luminous thunder of its fall fractured the earth.
The somber serpent looped its coils to write
In scales the slow snake-music of the red ripe globe.

To the sleeper, alone, the animals came and shone,
The darkness whirled but silent shone the animals.
Just before dawn the dove flew out of the dark
Flying with green in her beak; the dove also had come.

Moon

By Kathleen Jamie

Last night, when the moon
slipped into my attic room
as an oblong of light,
I sensed she'd come to commiserate.

It was August. She traveled
with a small valise
of darkness, and the first few stars
returning to the northern sky,

and my room, it seemed,
had missed her. She pretended
an interest in the bookcase
while other objects

stirred, as in a rock pool,
with unexpected life:
strings of beads in their green bowl gleamed,
the paper-crowded desk;

the books, too, appeared inclined
to open and confess.
Being sure the moon
harbored some intention,

I waited; watched for an age
her cool gaze shift
first toward a flower sketch
pinned on the far wall

then glide down to recline
along the pinewood floor,
before I'd had enough. *Moon,*
I said, *We're both scarred now.*

Are they quite beyond you,
the simple words of love? Say them.
You are not my mother;
with my mother, I waited unto death.

Dressing My Daughters

By Mark Jarman

One girl a full head taller
Than the other—into their Sunday dresses.
First, the slip, hardly a piece of fabric,
Softly stitched and printed with a bud.
I'm not their mother, and tangle, then untangle
The whole cloth—on backwards, have to grab it
Round their necks. But they know how to pull
Arms in, a reflex of being dressed,
And also, a child's faith. The mass of stuff
That makes the Sunday frocks collapses
In my hands and finds its shape, only because
They understand the drape of it—
These skinny keys to intricate locks.
The buttons are a problem
For a surgeon. How would she connect
These bony valves and stubborn eyelets?
The filmy dress revolves in my blind fingers.
The slots work one by one.
And when they're put together,
Not like puppets or those doll-saints
That bring tears to true believers,
But living children, somebody's real daughters,
They do become more real.
They say, "Stop it!" and "Give it back!"
And "I don't want to!" They'll kiss
A doll's hard features, whispering,
"I'm sorry." I know just why my mother
Used to worry. Your clothes don't keep
You close—it's nakedness.
Clad in my boots and holster,
I would roam with my six-gun buddies.
We dealt fake death to one another,
Fell and rolled in filth and rose,
Grimy with wounds, then headed home.
But Sunday ... what was that tired explanation
Given for wearing clothes that
Scratched and shone and weighed like a slow hour?
That we should shine—in gratitude.
So, I give that explanation, undressing them,
And wait for the result.
After a day like Sunday, such a long one,
When they lie down, half-dead,
To be undone, they won't help me.

They cry, “It’s not my fault.”

Unholy Sonnet 1

By Mark Jarman

Dear God, Our Heavenly Father, Gracious Lord,
Mother Love and Maker, Light Divine,
Atomic Fingertip, Cosmic Design,
First Letter of the Alphabet, Last Word,
Mutual Satisfaction, Cash Award,
Auditor Who Approves Our Bottom Line,
Examiner Who Says That We Are Fine,
Oasis That All Sands Are Running Toward.

I can say almost anything about you,
O Big Idea, and with each epithet,
Create new reasons to believe or doubt you,
Black Hole, White Hole, Presidential Jet.
But what’s the anything I must leave out? You
Solve nothing but the problems that I set.

This Most Perfect Hill

By Lisa Jarnot

On this most perfect hill
with these most perfect dogs
are these most perfect people
and this most perfect fog

In this most perfect fog
that is the middle of the sea
inside the perfect middle of
the things inside that swing

In this most perfect rhyme
that takes up what it sees,
with perfect shelter from the
rain as perfect as can be,

In this most perfect day
at the apex of the sun
runs this most perfect
frog song that is roiling
from the mud

In these most perfect habits
of the waving of the trees,
through this imperfect language
rides a perfect brilliancy.

The Woman at the Washington Zoo

By Randall Jarrell

The saris go by me from the embassies.

Cloth from the moon. Cloth from another planet.
They look back at the leopard like the leopard.

And I....
this print of mine, that has kept its color
Alive through so many cleanings; this dull null
Navy I wear to work, and wear from work, and so
To my bed, so to my grave, with no
Complaints, no comment: neither from my chief,
The Deputy Chief Assistant, nor his chief—
Only I complain.... this serviceable
Body that no sunlight dyes, no hand suffuses
But, dome-shadowed, withering among columns,
Wavy beneath fountains—small, far-off, shining
In the eyes of animals, these beings trapped
As I am trapped but not, themselves, the trap,
Aging, but without knowledge of their age,
Kept safe here, knowing not of death, for death—
Oh, bars of my own body, open, open!

The world goes by my cage and never sees me.
And there come not to me, as come to these,
The wild beasts, sparrows pecking the llamas' grain,
Pigeons settling on the bears' bread, buzzards
Tearing the meat the flies have clouded....
Vulture,
When you come for the white rat that the foxes left,
Take off the red helmet of your head, the black
Wings that have shadowed me, and step to me as man:
The wild brother at whose feet the white wolves fawn,
To whose hand of power the great lioness
Stalks, purring....
You know what I was,
You see what I am: change me, change me!

The Bloody Sire

By Robinson Jeffers

It is not bad. Let them play.
Let the guns bark and the bombing-plane
Speak his prodigious blasphemies.
It is not bad, it is high time,
Stark violence is still the sire of all the world's values.

What but the wolf's tooth whittled so fine
The fleet limbs of the antelope?
What but fear winged the birds, and hunger
Jewelled with such eyes the great goshawk's head?
Violence has been the sire of all the world's values.

Who would remember Helen's face
Lacking the terrible halo of spears?
Who formed Christ but Herod and Caesar,
The cruel and bloody victories of Caesar?
Violence, the bloody sire of all the world's values.

Never weep, let them play,
Old violence is not too old to beget new values.

Football

By Louis Jenkins

I take the snap from the center, fake to the right, fade back...
I've got protection. I've got a receiver open downfield...
What the hell is this? This isn't a football, it's a shoe, a man's
brown leather oxford. A cousin to a football maybe, the same
skin, but not the same, a thing made for the earth, not the air.
I realize that this is a world where anything is possible and I
understand, also, that one often has to make do with what one
has. I have eaten pancakes, for instance, with that clear corn
syrup on them because there was no maple syrup and they
weren't very good. Well, anyway, this is different. (My man
downfield is waving his arms.) One has certain responsibilities,
one has to make choices. This isn't right and I'm not going
to throw it.

Blind Boone's Vision

By Tyehimba Jess

When I got old enough
I asked my mother,
to her surprise,
to tell me what she did
with my eyes. She balked
and stalled, sounding
unsure for the first time
I could remember.
It was the tender way
she held my face
and kissed where tears
should have rolled
that told me I'd asked
of her the almost impossible—
to recount my blinding
tale, to tell what became
of the rest of me.
She took me by the hand
and led me to a small
sapling that stood not
much taller than me.
I could smell the green
marrow of its promise
reaching free of the soil
like a song from Earth's
royal, dirty mouth.
Then Mother told me
how she, newly freed,
had prayed like a slave
through the night when
the surgeon took my eyes
to save my fevered life,
then got off her knees
come morning to take
the severed parts of me
for burial—right there
beneath that small tree.
They fed the roots,
climbed through its leaves
to soak in sunlight . . .
and so, she told me,
I *can* see.

When the wind rustles
up and cools me down,
when the earth shakes
with footsteps and when
the sound of birdcalls
stirs forests like the black
and white bustling
’neath my fingertips
I am of the light and shade
of my tree. Now,
ask me how tall
that tree of mine
has grown to be
after all this time—
it touches a place
between heaven and here.
And I shudder when I hear
the earth’s wind
in my bones
through the bones
of that boxed-up
swarm of wood,
bird and bee:
I let it loose . . .
and beyond
me.

A Country Boy in Winter

By Sarah Orne Jewett

The wind may blow the snow about,
For all I care, says Jack,
And I don’t mind how cold it grows,
For then the ice won’t crack.
Old folks may shiver all day long,
But I shall never freeze;
What cares a jolly boy like me
For winter days like these?

Far down the long snow-covered hills
It is such fun to coast,
So clear the road! the fastest sled
There is in school I boast.
The paint is pretty well worn off,
But then I take the lead;

A dandy sled's a loiterer,
And I go in for speed.

When I go home at supper-time,
Ki! but my cheeks are red!
They burn and sting like anything;
I'm cross until I'm fed.
You ought to see the biscuit go,
I am so hungry then;
And old Aunt Polly says that boys
Eat twice as much as men.

There's always something I can do
To pass the time away;
The dark comes quick in winter-time—
A short and stormy day
And when I give my mind to it,
It's just as father says,
I almost do a man's work now,
And help him many ways.

I shall be glad when I grow up
And get all through with school,
I'll show them by-and-by that I
Was not meant for a fool.
I'll take the crops off this old farm,
I'll do the best I can.
A jolly boy like me won't be
A dolt when he's a man.

I like to hear the old horse neigh
Just as I come in sight,
The oxen poke me with their horns
To get their hay at night.
Somehow the creatures seem like friends,
And like to see me come.
Some fellows talk about New York,
But I shall stay at home.

Ways of Talking

By Ha Jin

We used to like talking about grief
Our journals and letters were packed
with losses, complaints, and sorrows.

Even if there was no grief
we wouldn’t stop lamenting
as though longing for the charm
of a distressed face.

Then we couldn’t help expressing grief
So many things descended without warning:
labor wasted, loves lost, houses gone,
marriages broken, friends estranged,
ambitions worn away by immediate needs.
Words lined up in our throats
for a good whining.
Grief seemed like an endless river—
the only immortal flow of life.

After losing a land and then giving up a tongue,
we stopped talking of grief
Smiles began to brighten our faces.
We laugh a lot, at our own mess.
Things become beautiful,
even hailstones in the strawberry fields.

Marshlands

By Emily Pauline Johnson

A thin wet sky, that yellows at the rim,
And meets with sun-lost lip the marsh’s brim.

The pools low lying, dank with moss and mould,
Glint through their mildews like large cups of gold.

Among the wild rice in the still lagoon,
In monotone the lizard shrills his tune.

The wild goose, homing, seeks a sheltering,
Where rushes grow, and oozing lichens cling.

Late cranes with heavy wing, and lazy flight,
Sail up the silence with the nearing night.

And like a spirit, swathed in some soft veil,
Steals twilight and its shadows o’er the swale.

Hushed lie the sedges, and the vapours creep,
Thick, grey and humid, while the marshes sleep.

Common Dust

By Georgia Douglas Johnson

And who shall separate the dust
What later we shall be:
Whose keen discerning eye will scan
And solve the mystery?

The high, the low, the rich, the poor,
The black, the white, the red,
And all the chromatique between,
Of whom shall it be said:

Here lies the dust of Africa;
Here are the sons of Rome;
Here lies the one unlabelled,
The world at large his home!

Can one then separate the dust?
Will mankind lie apart,
When life has settled back again
The same as from the start?

Art vs. Trade

By James Weldon Johnson

Trade, Trade versus Art,
Brain, Brain versus Heart;
Oh, the earthiness of these hard-hearted times,
When clinking dollars, and jingling dimes,
Drown all the finer music of the soul.

Life as an Octopus with but this creed,
That all the world was made to serve his greed;
Trade has spread out his mighty myriad claw,
And drawn into his foul polluted maw,
The brightest and the best,
Well nigh,
Has he drained dry,
The sacred fount of Truth;
And if, forsooth,
He has left yet some struggling streams from it to go,
He has contaminated so their flow,
That Truth, scarce is it true.

Poor Art with struggling gasp,
Lies strangled, dying in his mighty grasp;
He locks his grimy fingers ’bout her snowy throat so tender.
Is there no power to rescue her, protect, defend her?
Shall Art be left to perish?
Shall all the images her shrines cherish
Be left to this iconoclast, to vulgar Trade?

Oh, that mankind had less of Brain and more of Heart,
Oh, that the world had less of Trade and more of Art;
Then would there be less grinding down the poor,
Then would men learn to love each other more;
For Trade stalks like a giant through the land,
Bearing aloft the rich in his high hand,
While down beneath his mighty ponderous tread,
He crushes those who cry for daily bread.

Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing

By James Weldon Johnson

Lift ev’ry voice and sing,
Till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the list’ning skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chast’ning rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
Till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,

Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who has by Thy might,
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand.
True to our God,
True to our native land.

Dragons

By Devin Johnston

We gathered in a field southwest of town,
several hundred hauling coolers
and folding chairs along a gravel road
dry in August, two ruts of soft dust
that soaked into our clothes
and rose in plumes behind us.

By noon we could discern their massive coils
emerging from a bale of cloud,
scales scattering crescent dapples
through walnut fronds,
the light polarized, each leaf tip in focus.

As their bodies blotted out the sun,
the forest faded to silverpoint.
A current of cool air
extended from the bottomlands
an intimation of October,
and the bowl of sky deepened
its celestial archaeology.

Their tails, like banners of a vast army,
swept past Orion and his retinue
to sighs and scattered applause,
the faint wail of a child crying.
In half an hour they had passed on
in search of deep waters.

Before our company dispersed,
dust whirling in the wind,
we planned to meet again in seven years

for the next known migration.
Sunlight flashed on windshields

and caught along the riverbank
a cloudy, keeled scale
about the size of a dinner plate,
cool as *blanc de Chine*
in the heat of the afternoon.

A Celebration of Charis: I. His Excuse for Loving

By Ben Jonson

Let it not your wonder move,
Less your laughter, that I love.
Though I now write fifty years,
I have had, and have, my peers;
Poets, though divine, are men,
Some have lov'd as old again.
And it is not always face,
Clothes, or fortune, gives the grace;
Or the feature, or the youth.
But the language and the truth,
With the ardour and the passion,
Gives the lover weight and fashion.
If you then will read the story,
First prepare you to be sorry
That you never knew till now
Either whom to love or how;
But be glad, as soon with me,
When you know that this is she
Of whose beauty it was sung;
She shall make the old man young,
Keep the middle age at stay,
And let nothing high decay,
Till she be the reason why
All the world for love may die.

A Fit of Rhyme against Rhyme

By Ben Jonson

Rhyme, the rack of finest wits,
That expresseth but by fits
True conceit,
Spoiling senses of their treasure,

Cozening judgment with a measure,
But false weight;
Wresting words from their true calling,
Propping verse for fear of falling
To the ground;
Jointing syllabes, drowning letters,
Fast'ning vowels as with fetters
They were bound!
Soon as lazy thou wert known,
All good poetry hence was flown,
And art banish'd.
For a thousand years together
All Parnassus' green did wither,
And wit vanish'd.
Pegasus did fly away,
At the wells no Muse did stay,
But bewail'd
So to see the fountain dry,
And Apollo's music die,
All light failed!
Starveling rhymes did fill the stage;
Not a poet in an age
Worth crowning;
Not a work deserving bays,
Not a line deserving praise,
Pallas frowning;
Greek was free from rhyme's infection,
Happy Greek by this protection
Was not spoiled.
Whilst the Latin, queen of tongues,
Is not yet free from rhyme's wrongs,
But rests foiled.
Scarce the hill again doth flourish,
Scarce the world a wit doth nourish
To restore
Phoebus to his crown again,
And the Muses to their brain,
As before.
Vulgar languages that want
Words and sweetness, and be scant
Of true measure,
Tyrant rhyme hath so abused,
That they long since have refused
Other cæsure.
He that first invented thee,
May his joints tormented be,

Cramp'd forever.
Still may syllabes jar with time,
Still may reason war with rhyme,
Resting never.
May his sense when it would meet
The cold tumor in his feet,
Grow unsounder;
And his title be long fool,
That in rearing such a school
Was the founder.

Song: to Celia [“Come, my Celia, let us prove”]

By Ben Jonson

Come, my Celia, let us prove,
While we can, the sports of love;
Time will not be ours forever;
He at length our good will sever.
Spend not then his gifts in vain.
Suns that set may rise again;
But if once we lose this light,
’Tis with us perpetual night.
Why should we defer our joys?
Fame and rumor are but toys.
Cannot we delude the eyes
Of a few poor household spies,
Or his easier ears beguile,
So removèd by our wile?
’Tis no sin love’s fruit to steal;
But the sweet thefts to reveal,
To be taken, to be seen,
These have crimes accounted been.

Song: to Celia [“Drink to me only with thine eyes”]

By Ben Jonson

Drink to me only with thine eyes,
    And I will pledge with mine;
Or leave a kiss but in the cup,
    And I’ll not look for wine.
The thirst that from the soul doth rise
    Doth ask a drink divine;
But might I of Jove’s nectar sup,
    I would not change for thine.

I sent thee late a rosy wreath,
Not so much honouring thee
As giving it a hope, that there
It could not withered be.
But thou thereon didst only breathe,
And sent'st it back to me;
Since when it grows, and smells, I swear,
Not of itself, but thee.

In Memoriam: Martin Luther King, Jr.

By June Jordan

I

honey people murder mercy U.S.A.
the milkland turn to monsters teach
to kill to violate pull down destroy
the weakly freedom growing fruit
from being born

America

tomorrow yesterday rip rape
exacerbate despoil disfigure
crazy running threat the
deadly thrall
appall belief dispel
the wildlife burn the breast
the onward tongue
the outward hand
deform the normal rainy
riot sunshine shelter wreck
of darkness derogate
delimit blank
explode deprive
assassinate and batten up
like bullets fatten up
the raving greed
reactivate a springtime
terrorizing

death by men by more
than you or I can

STOP

II

They sleep who know a regulated place
or pulse or tide or changing sky
according to some universal
stage direction obvious
like shorewashed shells

we share an afternoon of mourning
in between no next predictable
except for wild reversal hearse rehearsal
bleach the blacklong lunging
ritual of fright insanity and more
deplorable abortion
more and
more

Poem for Haruko

By June Jordan

I never thought I'd keep a record of my pain
or happiness
like candles lighting the entire soft lace
of the air
around the full length of your hair/a shower
organized by God
in brown and auburn
undulations luminous like particles
of flame

But now I do
retrieve an afternoon of apricots
and water interspersed with cigarettes
and sand and rocks
we walked across:
                How easily you held
my hand
beside the low tide
of the world

Now I do
relive an evening of retreat

a bridge I left behind
where all the solid heat
of lust and tender trembling
lay as cruel and as kind
as passion spins its infinite
tergiversations in between the bitter
and the sweet

Alone and longing for you
now I do

Mimesis

By Fady Joudah

My daughter
wouldn't hurt a spider
That had nested
Between her bicycle handles
For two weeks
She waited
Until it left of its own accord

If you tear down the web I said
It will simply know
This isn't a place to call home
And you'd get to go biking

She said that's how others
Become refugees isn't it?

Brother, I've seen some

By Kabir
Translated by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra

Brother, I've seen some
Astonishing sights:
A lion keeping watch
Over pasturing cows;
A mother delivered
After her son was;
A guru prostrated
Before his disciple;
Fish spawning
On treetops;

A cat carrying away
    A dog;
A gunny-sack
    Driving a bullock-cart;
A buffalo going out to graze,
    Sitting on a horse;
A tree with its branches in the earth,
    Its roots in the sky;
A tree with flowering roots.

This verse, says Kabir,
    Is your key to the universe.
If you can figure it out.

I won’t come

By Kabir
Translated by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra

I won’t come
I won’t go
I won’t live
I won’t die

I’ll keep uttering
The name
And lose myself
In it

I’m bowl
And I’m platter
I’m man
And I’m woman

I’m grapefruit
And I’m sweet lime
I’m Hindu
And I’m Muslim

I’m fish
And I’m net
I’m fisherman
And I’m time

I’m nothing
Says Kabir

I'm not among the living
Or the dead

Another One of the World's Liars

By Mohja Kahf

I am just another one of the world's liars
believe me
I have a few charms
worn-out peddler's trinkets
with grand names like beauty
friendship, truth, passion
—and this one's a real item, sometimes
I even buy it myself: love
Check my record; odds
are not in your favor
that I won't sell out
my goods, bolt by night
deny you three times
before the cock has crowed
Consider this fair warning:
never fall for my spiel
If you do
and end up with a huge bill
for damage done
never forgive me

Author's Prayer

By Ilya Kaminsky

If I speak for the dead, I must leave
this animal of my body,

I must write the same poem over and over,
for an empty page is the white flag of their surrender.

If I speak for them, I must walk on the edge
of myself, I must live as a blind man

who runs through rooms without
touching the furniture.

Yes, I live. I can cross the streets asking "What year is it?"
I can dance in my sleep and laugh

in front of the mirror.
Even sleep is a prayer, Lord,

I will praise your madness, and
in a language not mine, speak

of music that wakes us, music
in which we move. For whatever I say

is a kind of petition, and the darkest
days must I praise.

We Lived Happily During the War

By Ilya Kaminsky

And when they bombed other people's houses, we

protested
but not enough, we opposed them but not

enough. I was
in my bed, around my bed America

was falling: invisible house by invisible house by invisible house.

I took a chair outside and watched the sun.

In the sixth month
of a disastrous reign in the house of money

in the street of money in the city of money in the country of money,
our great country of money, we (forgive us)

lived happily during the war.

All This and More

By Mary Karr

The Devil's tour of hell did not include
a factory line where molten lead
spilled into mouths held wide,

no electric drill spiraling screws

into hands and feet, nor giant pliers
to lower you into simmering vats.

Instead, a circle of light
opened on your stuffed armchair,
whose chintz orchids did not boil and change,

and the Devil adjusted
your new spiked antennae
almost delicately, with claws curled

and lacquered black, before he spread
his leather wings to leap
into the acid-green sky.

So your head became a tv hull,
a gargoyle mirror. Your doppelganger
sloppy at the mouth

and swollen at the joints
enacted your days in sinuous
slow motion, your lines delivered

with a mocking sneer. Sometimes
the frame froze, reversed, began
again: the red eyes of a friend

you cursed, your girl child cowered
behind the drapes, parents alive again
and puzzled by this new form. That's why

you clawed your way back to this life.

"Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art"

By John Keats

Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art—
    Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
    Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,
The moving waters at their priestlike task
    Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
    Of snow upon the mountains and the moors—
No—yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,

Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever—or else swoon to death.

La Belle Dame sans Merci: A Ballad

By John Keats

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge has withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
So haggard and so woe-begone?
The squirrel's granary is full,
And the harvest's done.

I see a lily on thy brow,
With anguish moist and fever-dew,
And on thy cheeks a fading rose
Fast withereth too.

I met a lady in the meads,
Full beautiful—a faery's child,
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.

I made a garland for her head,
And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;
She looked at me as she did love,
And made sweet moan

I set her on my pacing steed,
And nothing else saw all day long,
For sidelong would she bend, and sing
A faery's song.

She found me roots of relish sweet,
And honey wild, and manna-dew,
And sure in language strange she said—
'I love thee true'.

She took me to her Elfin grot,

And there she wept and sighed full sore,
And there I shut her wild wild eyes
With kisses four.

And there she lullèd me asleep,
And there I dreamed—Ah! woe betide!—
The latest dream I ever dreamt
On the cold hill side.

I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
They cried—'La Belle Dame sans Merci
Thee hath in thrall!'

I saw their starved lips in the gloam,
With horrid warning gapèd wide,
And I awoke and found me here,
On the cold hill's side.

And this is why I sojourn here,
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.

Note to Poetry Out Loud participants and judges: *in this poem's third-to-last stanza, recitations that include "Hath thee in thrall!" or "Thee hath in thrall!" are both acceptable.*

To Autumn

By John Keats

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,

Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook;
Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

Where are the songs of spring? Ay, Where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
Among the river sallows, borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

When I have Fears That I May Cease to Be

By John Keats

When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain,
Before high-pilèd books, in charactery,
Hold like rich garners the full ripened grain;
When I behold, upon the night's starred face,
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
Their shadows with the magic hand of chance;
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
Of unreflecting love—then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.

Oranges

By Roisin Kelly

I'll choose for myself next time
who I'll reach out and take

as mine, in the way
I might stand at a fruit stall

having decided
to ignore the apples
the mangoes and the kiwis
but hold my hands above

a pile of oranges
as if to warm my skin
before a fire.
Not only have I chosen

oranges, but I'll also choose
which orange — I'll test
a few for firmness
scrape some rind off

with my fingernail
so that a citrus scent
will linger there all day.
I won't be happy

with the first one I pick
but will try different ones
until I know you. How
will I know you?

You'll feel warm
between my palms
and I'll cup you like
a handful of holy water.

A vision will come to me
of your exotic land: the sun
you swelled under
the tree you grew from.

A drift of white blossoms
from the orange tree
will settle in my hair
and I'll know.

This is how I will choose
you: by feeling you
smelling you, by slipping

you into my coat.

Maybe then I'll climb
the hill, look down
on the town we live in
with sunlight on my face

and a miniature sun
burning a hole in my pocket.
Thirsty, I'll suck the juice
from it. From you.

When I walk away
I'll leave behind a trail
of lamp-bright rind.

Sonnet

By Frances Anne Kemble

Cover me with your everlasting arms,
  Ye guardian giants of this solitude!
  From the ill-sight of men, and from the rude,
Tumultuous din of yon wild world's alarms!
Oh, knit your mighty limbs around, above,
  And close me in for ever! let me dwell
  With the wood spirits, in the darkest cell
That ever with your verdant locks ye wove.
  The air is full of countless voices, joined
In one eternal hymn; the whispering wind,
The shuddering leaves, the hidden water springs,
The work-song of the bees, whose honeyed wings
Hang in the golden tresses of the lime,
Or buried lie in purple beds of thyme.

For Allen Ginsberg

By X. J. Kennedy

Ginsberg, Ginsberg, burning bright,
Taunter of the ultra right,
What blink of the Buddha's eye
Chose the day for you to die?

Queer pied piper, howling wild,
Mantra-minded flower child,

Queen of Maytime, misrule's lord
Bawling, *Drop out! All aboard!*

Finger-cymbaled, chanting *Om*,
Foe of fascist, bane of bomb,
Proper poets' thorn-in-side,
Turner of a whole time's tide,

Who can fill your sloppy shoes?
What a catch for Death. We lose
Glee and sweetness, freaky light,
Ginsberg, Ginsberg, burning bright.

Nude Descending a Staircase

By X. J. Kennedy

Toe after toe, a snowing flesh,
a gold of lemon, root and rind,
she sifts in sunlight down the stairs
with nothing on. Nor on her mind.

We spy beneath the banister
a constant thresh of thigh on thigh;
her lips imprint the swinging air
that parts to let her parts go by.

One-woman waterfall, she wears
her slow descent like a long cape
and pausing on the final stair,
collects her motions into shape.

Old Men Pitching Horseshoes

By X. J. Kennedy

Back in a yard where ringers groove a ditch,
These four in shirtsleeves congregate to pitch
Dirt-burnished iron. With appraising eye,
One sizes up a peg, hoists and lets fly—
A clang resounds as though a smith had struck
Fire from a forge. His first blow, out of luck,
Rattles in circles. Hitching up his face,
He swings, and weight once more inhabits space,
Tumbles as gently as a new-laid egg.
Extended iron arms surround their peg

Like one come home to greet a long-lost brother.
Shouts from one outpost. Mutters from the other.

Now changing sides, each withered pitcher moves
As his considered dignity behooves
Down the worn path of earth where August flies
And sheaves of air in warm distortions rise,
To stand ground, fling, kick dust with all the force
Of shoes still hammered to a living horse.

Happiness

By Jane Kenyon

There's just no accounting for happiness,
or the way it turns up like a prodigal
who comes back to the dust at your feet
having squandered a fortune far away.

And how can you not forgive?
You make a feast in honor of what
was lost, and take from its place the finest
garment, which you saved for an occasion
you could not imagine, and you weep night and day
to know that you were not abandoned,
that happiness saved its most extreme form
for you alone.

No, happiness is the uncle you never
knew about, who flies a single-engine plane
onto the grassy landing strip, hitchhikes
into town, and inquires at every door
until he finds you asleep midafternoon
as you so often are during the unmerciful
hours of your despair.

It comes to the monk in his cell.
It comes to the woman sweeping the street
with a birch broom, to the child
whose mother has passed out from drink.
It comes to the lover, to the dog chewing
a sock, to the pusher, to the basketmaker,
and to the clerk stacking cans of carrots
in the night.
It even comes to the boulder
in the perpetual shade of pine barrens,

to rain falling on the open sea,
to the wineglass, weary of holding wine.

Let Evening Come

By Jane Kenyon

Let the light of late afternoon
shine through chinks in the barn, moving
up the bales as the sun moves down.

Let the cricket take up chafing
as a woman takes up her needles
and her yarn. Let evening come.

Let dew collect on the hoe abandoned
in long grass. Let the stars appear
and the moon disclose her silver horn.

Let the fox go back to its sandy den.
Let the wind die down. Let the shed
go black inside. Let evening come.

To the bottle in the ditch, to the scoop
in the oats, to air in the lung
let evening come.

Let it come, as it will, and don't
be afraid. God does not leave us
comfortless, so let evening come.

Not Here

By Jane Kenyon

Searching for pillowcases trimmed
with lace that my mother-in-law
once made, I open the chest of drawers
upstairs to find that mice
have chewed the blue and white linen
dishtowels to make their nest,
and bedded themselves
among embroidered dresser scarves
and fingertip towels.

Tufts of fibers, droppings like black

caraway seeds, and the stains of birth
and afterbirth give off the strong
unforgettable attar of mouse
that permeates an old farmhouse
on humid summer days.

A couple of hickory nuts
roll around as I lift out
the linens, while a hail of black
sunflower shells
falls on the pillowcases,
yellow with age, but intact.
I'll bleach them and hang them in the sun
to dry. There's almost no one left
who knows how to crochet lace....

The bright-eyed squatters are not here.
They've scuttled out to the fields
for summer, as they scuttled in
for winter—along the wall, from chair
to skirted chair, making themselves
flat and scarce while the cat
dozed with her paws in the air,
and we read the mail
or evening paper, unaware.

Pastoral Dialogue

By Anne Killigrew

Remember when you love, from that same hour
Your peace you put into your lover's power;
From that same hour from him you laws receive,
And as he shall ordain, you joy, or grieve,
Hope, fear, laugh, weep; Reason aloof does stand,
Disabled both to act, and to command.
Oh cruel fetters! rather wish to feel
On your soft limbs, the galling weight of steel;
Rather to bloody wounds oppose your breast.
No ill, by which the body can be pressed
You will so sensible a torment find
As shackles on your captived mind.
The mind from heaven its high descent did draw,
And brooks uneasily any other law
Than what from Reason dictated shall be.
Reason, a kind of innate deity,

Which only can adapt to ev'ry soul
A yoke so fit and light, that the control
All liberty excels; so sweet a sway,
The same 'tis to be happy, and obey;
Commands so wise, and with rewards so dressed,
That the according soul replies "I'm blessed."

Slant

By Suji Kwock Kim

If the angle of an eye is all,
the slant of hope, the slant of dreaming, according to each life,
what is the light of this city,
light of Lady Liberty, possessor of the most famous armpit in the world,
light of the lovers on Chinese soap operas, throwing BBQ'd ducks at each other
with that live-it-up-while-you're-young, Woo Me kind of love,
light of the old men sitting on crates outside geegaw shops
selling dried seahorses & plastic Temples of Heaven,
light of the Ying 'n' Yang Junk Palace,
light of the Golden Phoenix Hair Salon, light of Wig-o-ramas,
light of the suntanners in Central Park turning over like rotisserie chickens sizzling on a spit,
light of the Pluck U & Gone with the Wings fried-chicken shops,
the parking-meter-leaners, the Glamazons,
the oglers wearing fern-wilting quantities of cologne, strutting, trash-talking, glorious:
the immigrants, the refugees, the peddlars, stockbrokers and janitors, stenographers and cooks,
all of us making and unmaking ourselves,
hurrying forwards, toward who we'll become, one way only, one life only:
free in time but not from it,
here in the city the living make together, and make and unmake over and over
Quick, quick, ask heaven of it, of every mortal relation,
feeling that is fleeing,
for what would the heart be without a heaven to set it on?
I can't help thinking no word will ever be as full of life as this world,
I can't help thinking of thanks.

Drowning in Wheat

By John Kinsella

They'd been warned
on every farm
that playing
in the silos

would lead to death.
You sink in wheat.
Slowly. And the more
you struggle the worse it gets.
‘You’ll see a rat sail past
your face, nimble on its turf,
and then you’ll disappear.’
In there, hard work
has no reward.
So it became a kind of test
to see how far they could sink
without needing a rope
to help them out.
But in the midst of play
rituals miss a beat—like both
leaping in to resolve
an argument
as to who’d go first
and forgetting
to attach the rope.
Up to the waist
and afraid to move.
That even a call for help
would see the wheat
trickle down.
The painful consolidation
of time. The grains
in the hourglass
grotesquely swollen.
And that acrid
chemical smell
of treated wheat
coaxing them into
a near-dead sleep.

The City of Sleep

By Rudyard Kipling

Over the edge of the purple down,
  Where the single lamplight gleams,
Know ye the road to the Merciful Town
  That is hard by the Sea of Dreams –
Where the poor may lay their wrongs away,
  And the sick may forget to weep?
But we – pity us! Oh, pity us!

We wakeful; ah, pity us! –
We must go back with Policeman Day –
Back from the City of Sleep!

Weary they turn from the scroll and crown,
Fetter and prayer and plough –
They that go up to the Merciful Town,
For her gates are closing now.
It is their right in the Baths of Night
Body and soul to steep,
But we – pity us! ah, pity us!
We wakeful; oh, pity us! –
We must go back with Policeman Day –
Back from the City of Sleep!

Over the edge of the purple down,
Ere the tender dreams begin,
Look – we may look – at the Merciful Town,
But we may not enter in!
Outcasts all, from her guarded wall
Back to our watch we creep:
We – pity us! ah, pity us!
We wakeful; ah, pity us! –
We that go back with Policeman Day –
Back from the City of Sleep!

Harp Song of the Dane Women

By Rudyard Kipling

"The Knights of the Joyous Venture"—Puck of Pook's Hill

What is a woman that you forsake her,
And the hearth-fire and the home-acre,
To go with the old grey Widow-maker?

She has no house to lay a guest in—
But one chill bed for all to rest in,
That the pale suns and the stray bergs nest in.

She has no strong white arms to fold you,
But the ten-times-fingering weed to hold you—
Out on the rocks where the tide has rolled you.

Yet, when the signs of summer thicken,
And the ice breaks, and the birch-buds quicken,

Yearly you turn from our side, and sicken—

Sicken again for the shouts and the slaughters.
You steal away to the lapping waters,
And look at your ship in her winter-quarters.

You forget our mirth, and talk at the tables,
The kine in the shed and the horse in the stables—
To pitch her sides and go over her cables.

Then you drive out where the storm-clouds swallow,
And the sound of your oar-blades, falling hollow,
Is all we have left through the months to follow.

Ah, what is Woman that you forsake her,
And the hearth-fire and the home-acre,
To go with the old grey Widow-maker ?

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

Broken Promises

By David Kirby

I have met them in dark alleys, limping and one-armed;
I have seen them playing cards under a single light-bulb
and tried to join in, but they refused me rudely,
knowing I would only let them win.
I have seen them in the foyers of theaters,
coming back late from the interval

long after the others have taken their seats,
and in deserted shopping malls late at night,
peering at things they can never buy,
and I have found them wandering
in a wood where I too have wandered.

This morning I caught one;
small and stupid, too slow to get away,
it was only a promise I had made to myself once
and then forgot, but it screamed and kicked at me
and ran to join the others, who looked at me with reproach
in their long, sad faces.
When I drew near them, they scurried away,
even though they will sleep in my yard tonight.

I hate them for their ingratitude,
I who have kept countless promises,
as dead now as Shakespeare's children.
"You bastards," I scream,
"you have to love me—I gave you life!"

Through a Glass Eye, Lightly

By Carolyn Kizer

In the laboratory waiting room
containing
one television actor with a teary face
trying a contact lens;
two muscular victims of industrial accidents;
several vain women—I was one of them—
came Deborah, four, to pick up her glass eye.

It was a long day:
Deborah waiting for the blood vessels
painted
on her iris to dry.
Her mother said that, holding Deborah
when she was born,
"First I inspected her, from toes to navel,
then stopped at her head ..."
We wondered why
the inspection hadn't gone the other way.
"Looking into her eye
was like looking into a volcano:

"Her vacant pupil
went whirling down, down to the foundation
of the world ...
When she was three months old they took it out.
She giggled when she went under
the anaesthetic.
Forty-five minutes later she came back
happy! ...
The gas wore off, she found the hole in her face
(you know, it never bled?),
stayed happy, even when I went to pieces.
She's five, in June.

"Deborah, you get right down
from there, or I'll have to slap!"

Laughing, Deborah climbed into the lap
of one vain lady, who
had been discontented with her own beauty.
Now she held on to Deborah, looked her steadily
in the empty eye.

Squirrels

By Nate Klug

Something blurred, warmed
in the eye's corner, like woodsmoke
becoming tears;
but when you turned to look

the stoop was still, the pumpkin
and tacky mum pot wouldn't talk —
just a rattle
at the gutter and a sense

of curtains, somewhere, pulled.
Five of them later, scarfing the oak's
black bole,
laying a dream of snakes.

Needy and reticent
at once, these squirrels in charred November
recall, in Virgil,
what it is to feel:

moods, half-moods,
swarming, then darting loose; obscure
hunches that refuse
to speak, but still expect

in some flash of luck
to be revealed. The less you try
to notice them,
the more they will know of you.

The Sun Came

By Etheridge Knight

And if sun comes
How shall we greet him?
—*Gwen Brooks*

The sun came, Miss Brooks,—
After all the night years.
He came spitting fire from his lips.
And we flipped—We goofed the whole thing.
It looks like our ears were not equipped
For the fierce hammering.

And now the Sun has gone, has bled red,
Weeping behind the hills.
Again the night shadows form.
But beneath the placid face a storm rages.
The rays of Red have pierced the deep, have struck
The core. We cannot sleep.
The shadows sing: Malcolm, Malcolm, Malcolm.
The darkness ain't like before.

The Sun came, Miss Brooks.
And we goofed the whole thing.
I think.
(Though ain't no vision visited my cell.)

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

Poem for My Twentieth Birthday

By Kenneth Koch

Passing the American graveyard, for my birthday
the crosses stuttering, white on tropical green,
the years' quick focus of faces I do not remember . . .

The palm trees stalking like deliberate giants
for my birthday, and all the hot adolescent memories
seen through a screen of water . . .

For my birthday thrust into the adult and actual:
expected to perform the action, not to ponder
the reality beyond the fact,

the man standing upright in the dream.

bug's psalm

By Rodney Koeneke

The bug's psalm: don't get crushed.
Afterlives feel meaningless
but spring will come,
push out the nubs
the kids braid into pallets.
Take up your pallet
from lawns noon's hardly touched.
The small think gods
just loll on clouds.
Bugs think gods just crush.

Camouflaging the Chimera

By Yusef Komunyakaa

We tied branches to our helmets.
We painted our faces & rifles
with mud from a riverbank,

blades of grass hung from the pockets
of our tiger suits. We wove
ourselves into the terrain,
content to be a hummingbird's target.

We hugged bamboo & leaned
against a breeze off the river,
slow-dragging with ghosts

from Saigon to Bangkok,
with women left in doorways
reaching in from America.
We aimed at dark-hearted songbirds.

In our way station of shadows
rock apes tried to blow our cover,
throwing stones at the sunset. Chameleons

crawled our spines, changing from day
to night: green to gold,
gold to black. But we waited

till the moon touched metal,

till something almost broke
inside us. VC struggled
with the hillside, like black silk

wrestling iron through grass.
We weren't there. The river ran
through our bones. Small animals took refuge
against our bodies; we held our breath,

ready to spring the L-shaped
ambush, as a world revolved
under each man's eyelid.

Crossing a City Highway

By Yusef Komunyakaa

The city at 3 a.m. is an ungodly mask
the approaching day hides behind
& from, the coyote nosing forth,
the muscles of something ahead,

& a fiery blaze of eighteen-wheelers
zoom out of the curved night trees,
along the rim of absolute chance.
A question hangs in the oily air.

She knows he will follow her scent
left in the poisoned grass & buzz
of chainsaws, if he can unweave
a circle of traps around the subdivision.

For a breathy moment, she stops
on the world's edge, & then quick as that
masters the stars & again slips the noose
& darts straight between sedans & SUVs.

Don't try to hide from her kind of blues
or the dead nomads who walked trails
now paved by wanderlust, an epoch
somewhere between tamed & wild.

If it were Monday instead of Sunday
the outcome may be different,

but she's now in Central Park
searching for a Seneca village

among painted stones & shrubs,
where she's never been, & lucky
she hasn't forgotten how to jig
& kill her way home.

Dead Reckoning III

By Yusef Komunyakaa

They work fingers to bone & borrow
smudged paper, then make promises
to family, unmerciful gods, the unborn.
Some eat a favorite meal three times
in a row. Others partake only a pinch
of soil before boarding half-broken boats
& rubber rafts — half of the young women
big with life inside them, flesh & blood
for daydreams of the Arabian nights,
as makeshift charts & constellations
work their way through war & rumors
of war. The smugglers count their loot.
Hard winds rattle gongs over sea salt
till the rusty engines die, & cries alert
mermaid sirens as pirated schooners
adrift under a mute sky rock to & fro,
& the fight goes out of the few alive.
Their loved ones & friends, lost folk
songs, mountains & valleys, all left
behind. Searchlights spot the dead
hugging the living, & draglines raise
only those who were braver than us.
The lucky ones stumble out of stupor,
tried by raging water beneath black
skies, listening to the albatross talk.

Kindness

By Yusef Komunyakaa

For Carol Rigolot

When deeds splay before us
precious as gold & unused chances

stripped from the whine-bone,
we know the moment kindheartedness
walks in. Each praise be
echoes us back as the years uncount
themselves, eating salt. Though blood
first shaped us on the climbing wheel,
the human mind lit by the savanna's
ice star & thistle rose,
your knowing gaze enters a room
& opens the day,
saying we were made for fun.
Even the bedazzled brute knows
when sunlight falls through leaves
across honed knives on the table.
If we can see it push shadows
aside, growing closer, are we less
broken? A barometer, temperature
gauge, a ruler in minus fractions
& pedigrees, a thingmajig,
a probe with an all-seeing eye,
what do we need to measure
kindness, every unheld breath,
every unkind leapyear?
Sometimes a sober voice is enough
to calm the waters & drive away
the false witnesses, saying, Look,
here are the broken treaties Beauty
brought to us earthbound sentinels.

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

Abandoned Farmhouse

By Ted Kooser

He was a big man, says the size of his shoes
on a pile of broken dishes by the house;
a tall man too, says the length of the bed
in an upstairs room; and a good, God-fearing man,
says the Bible with a broken back
on the floor below the window, dusty with sun;
but not a man for farming, say the fields
cluttered with boulders and the leaky barn.

A woman lived with him, says the bedroom wall

papered with lilacs and the kitchen shelves
covered with oilcloth, and they had a child,
says the sandbox made from a tractor tire.
Money was scarce, say the jars of plum preserves
and canned tomatoes sealed in the cellar hole.
And the winters cold, say the rags in the window frames.
It was lonely here, says the narrow country road.

Something went wrong, says the empty house
in the weed-choked yard. Stones in the fields
say he was not a farmer; the still-sealed jars
in the cellar say she left in a nervous haste.
And the child? Its toys are strewn in the yard
like branches after a storm—a rubber cow,
a rusty tractor with a broken plow,
a doll in overalls. Something went wrong, they say.

In the Basement of the Goodwill Store

By Ted Kooser

In musty light, in the thin brown air
of damp carpet, doll heads and rust,
beneath long rows of sharp footfalls
like nails in a lid, an old man stands
trying on glasses, lifting each pair
from the box like a glittering fish
and holding it up to the light
of a dirty bulb. Near him, a heap
of enameled pans as white as skulls
looms in the catacomb shadows,
and old toilets with dry red throats
cough up bouquets of curtain rods.

You've seen him somewhere before.
He's wearing the green leisure suit
you threw out with the garbage,
and the Christmas tie you hated,
and the ventilated wingtip shoes
you found in your father's closet
and wore as a joke. And the glasses
which finally fit him, through which
he looks to see you looking back—
two mirrors which flash and glance—
are those through which one day
you too will look down over the years,

when you have grown old and thin
and no longer particular,
and the things you once thought
you were rid of forever
have taken you back in their arms.

So This is Nebraska

By Ted Kooser

The gravel road rides with a slow gallop
over the fields, the telephone lines
streaming behind, its billow of dust
full of the sparks of redwing blackbirds.

On either side, those dear old ladies,
the loosening barns, their little windows
dulled by cataracts of hay and cobwebs
hide broken tractors under their skirts.

So this is Nebraska. A Sunday
afternoon; July. Driving along
with your hand out squeezing the air,
a meadowlark waiting on every post.

Behind a shelterbelt of cedars,
top-deep in hollyhocks, pollen and bees,
a pickup kicks its fenders off
and settles back to read the clouds.

You feel like that; you feel like letting
your tires go flat, like letting the mice
build a nest in your muffler, like being
no more than a truck in the weeds,

clucking with chickens or sticky with honey
or holding a skinny old man in your lap
while he watches the road, waiting
for someone to wave to. You feel like

waving. You feel like stopping the car
and dancing around on the road. You wave
instead and leave your hand out gliding
larklike over the wheat, over the houses.

Nurture

By Maxine Kuman

From a documentary on marsupials I learn
that a pillowcase makes a fine
substitute pouch for an orphaned kangaroo.

I am drawn to such dramas of animal rescue.
They are warm in the throat. I suffer, the critic proclaims,
from an overabundance of maternal genes.

Bring me your fallen fledgling, your bummer lamb,

lead the abused, the starvelings, into my barn.
Advise the hunted deer to leap into my corn.

And had there been a wild child—
filthy and fierce as a ferret, he is called
in one nineteenth-century account—

a wild child to love, it is safe to assume,
given my fireside inked with paw prints,
there would have been room.

Think of the language we two, same and not-same,
might have constructed from sign,
scratch, grimace, grunt, vowel:

Laughter our first noun, and our long verb, howl.

End of Summer

By Stanley Kunitz

An agitation of the air, A perturbation of the light
Admonished me the unloved year
Would turn on its hinge that night.

I stood in the disenchanted field
Amid the stubble and the stones,
Amazed, while a small worm lisped to me
The song of my marrow-bones.

Blue poured into summer blue,
A hawk broke from his cloudless tower,
The roof of the silo blazed, and I knew

That part of my life was over.

Already the iron door of the north
Clangs open: birds, leaves, snows
Order their populations forth,
And a cruel wind blows.

I Dreamed That I Wad Old

By Stanley Kunitz

I dreamed that I was old: in stale declension
Fallen from my prime, when company
Was mine, cat-nimbleness, and green invention,
Before time took my leafy hours away.

My wisdom, ripe with body's ruin, found
Itself tart recompense for what was lost
In false exchange: since wisdom in the ground
Has no apocalypse or pentecost.

I wept for my youth, sweet passionate young thought,
And cozy women dead that by my side
Once lay: I wept with bitter longing, not
Remembering how in my youth I cried.

Summer at North Farm

By Stephen Kuusisto

Finnish rural life, ca. 1910

Fires, always fires after midnight,
the sun depending in the purple birches

and gleaming like a copper kettle.
By the solstice they'd burned everything,

the bad-luck sleigh, a twisted rocker,
things "possessed" and not-quite-right.

The bonfire coils and lurches,
big as a house, and then it settles.

The dancers come, dressed like rainbows
(if rainbows could be spun),

and linking hands they turn
to the melancholy fiddles.

A red bird spreads its wings now
and in the darker days to come.

Glitch

By Nick Laird

More than ample a deadfall of one meter eighty to split
my temple apart on the herringbone parquet and crash
the operating system, tripping an automated shutdown

in the casing and halting all external workings of the moist
robot I inhabit at the moment: I am out cold and when
my eyes roll in again I sit on the edge of the bed and tell

you just how taken I am with the place I'd been, had been
compelled to leave, airlifted mid-gesture, mid-sentence, risen
of a sudden like a bubble or its glisten or a victim snatched

and bundled out, helplessly, from sunlight, the usual day,
and all particulars of life there fled except the sense that stays
with me for hours and hours that I was valuable and needed there.

Silhouettes

By Kien Lam

A crow perches inside me.

Actually, it is a whale. It is hard to tell
by touch alone. Nothing I own ever looks
me properly in the eye. Sometimes

a loud caw at dusk feels
like the largest mammal on Earth.

A deep breath out the blowhole

into my stomach. One second it swims
and the next it is a small extension
of a tree. This is a kind of beginning—

a finger puppet show. The light
dancing around my hands.

Me dancing alone on a stem.

A persimmon blooms.
A boy learns a song and plants it
in an orchard. Inside of me

the large creatures change their shapes
to fit. A blackbird. An organ.

Animals with no names. I send them off
into the world daily. Little *sadness*
takes flight. *Love* is a brave child.

These things take the shape
of their containers.

I don’t have to do anything
to hold them.

Thoughless Cruelty

By Charles Lamb

There, Robert, you have kill'd that fly — ,
And should you thousand ages try
The life you've taken to supply,
You could not do it.

You surely must have been devoid
Of thought and sense, to have destroy'd
A thing which no way you annoy'd —
You'll one day rue it.

Twas but a fly perhaps you'll say,
That's born in April, dies in May;
That does but just learn to display
His wings one minute,

And in the next is vanish'd quite.
A bird devours it in his flight —
Or come a cold blast in the night,
There's no breath in it.

The bird but seeks his proper food —
And Providence, whose power endu'd
That fly with life, when it thinks good,
May justly take it.

But you have no excuses for't —
A life by Nature made so short,
Less reason is that you for sport
Should shorter make it.

A fly a little thing you rate —
But, Robert do not estimate
A creature's pain by small or great;
The greatest being

Can have but fibres, nerves, and flesh,
And these the smallest ones possess,
Although their frame and structure less
Escape our seeing.

Breakfast

By Mary Lamb

A dinner party, coffee, tea,
Sandwich, or supper, all may be
In their way pleasant. But to me
Not one of these deserves the praise
That welcomer of new-born days,
A breakfast, merits; ever giving
Cheerful notice we are living
Another day refreshed by sleep,
When its festival we keep.
Now although I would not slight
Those kindly words we use ‘Good night’,
Yet parting words are words of sorrow,
And may not vie with sweet ‘Good Morrow’,
With which again our friends we greet,
When in the breakfast-room we meet,
At the social table round,
Listening to the lively sound
Of those notes which never tire,
Of urn, or kettle on the fire.
Sleepy Robert never hears
Or urn, or kettle; he appears
When all have finished, one by one

Dropping off, and breakfast done.
Yet has he too his own pleasure,
His breakfast hour's his hour of leisure;
And, left alone, he reads or muses,
Or else in idle mood he uses
To sit and watch the venturous fly,
Where the sugar's piled high,
Clambering o'er the lumps so white,
Rocky cliffs of sweet delight.

Envy

By Mary Lamb

This rose-tree is not made to bear
The violet blue, nor lily fair,
  Nor the sweet mignionet:
And if this tree were discontent,
Or wished to change its natural bent,
  It all in vain would fret.

And should it fret, you would suppose
It ne'er had seen its own red rose,
  Nor after gentle shower
Had ever smelled its rose's scent,
Or it could ne'er be discontent
  With its own pretty flower.

Like such a blind and senseless tree
As I've imagined this to be,
  All envious persons are:
With care and culture all may find
Some pretty flower in their own mind,
  Some talent that is rare.

The Two Boys

By Mary Lamb

I saw a boy with eager eye
Open a book upon a stall,
And read as he'd devour it all;
Which when the stall-man did espy,
Soon to the boy I heard him call,
'You, Sir, you never buy a book,
Therefore in one you shall not look.'

The boy passed slowly on, and with a sigh
He wished he never had been taught to read,
Then of the old churl's books he should have had no need.

Of sufferings the poor have many,
Which never can the rich annoy.
I soon perceived another boy
Who looked as if he'd not had any
Food for that day at least, enjoy
The sight of cold meat in a tavern larder.
This boy's case, thought I, is surely harder,
Thus hungry longing, thus without a penny,
Beholding choice of dainty dressed meat;
No wonder if he wish he ne'er had learned to eat.

The End Game of Bloom

By Deborah Landau

Has it turned out we've wasted our time?
We've wasted our time.

Our magnificent bodies on the dissecting table.
Our day after tomorrow.
Our what to do now.

The stink of us so undignified.
The end game of bloom.

We will lose the sun
struck and disassembled
lightly down and crawling like a worm.

This earth it is a banquet and laid on its table we.
A puncture in the wound room, crude and obvious.

The raving lunatics they are upon us,
but we are raving too.

Revenge

By Letitia Elizabeth Landon

Ay, gaze upon her rose-wreathed hair,
And gaze upon her smile;
Seem as you drank the very air

Her breath perfumed the while:

And wake for her the gifted line,
That wild and witching lay,
And swear your heart is as a shrine,
That only owns her sway.

’Tis well: I am revenged at last,—
Mark you that scornful cheek,—
The eye averted as you pass’d,
Spoke more than words could speak.

Ay, now by all the bitter tears
That I have shed for thee,—
The racking doubts, the burning fears,—
Avenged they well may be—

By the nights pass’d in sleepless care,
The days of endless woe;
All that you taught my heart to bear,
All that yourself will know.

I would not wish to see you laid
Within an early tomb;
I should forget how you betray’d,
And only weep your doom:

But this is fitting punishment,
To live and love in vain,—
Oh my wrung heart, be thou content,
And feed upon his pain.

Go thou and watch her lightest sigh,—
Thine own it will not be;
And bask beneath her sunny eye,—
It will not turn on thee.

’Tis well: the rack, the chain, the wheel,
Far better hadst thou proved;
Ev’n I could almost pity feel,
For thou art not beloved.

The Maid's Lament

By Walter Savage Landor

I loved him not; and yet, now he is gone,
        I feel I am alone.
I check'd him while he spoke; yet, could he speak,
        Alas! I would not check.
For reasons not to love him once I sought,
        And wearied all my thought
To vex myself and him: I now would give
        My love could he but live
Who lately lived for me, and, when he found
        'Twas vain, in holy ground
He hid his face amid the shades of death.
        I waste for him my breath
Who wasted his for me! but mine returns,
        And this lorn bosom burns
With stifling heat, heaving it up in sleep,
        And waking me to weep
Tears that had melted his soft heart: for years
        Wept he as bitter tears.
Merciful God! such was his latest prayer,
        These may she never share.
Quieter is his breath, his breast more cold,
        Than daisies in the mould,
Where children spell, athwart the churchyard gate,
        His name and life's brief date.
Pray for him, gentle souls, whoe'er you be,
        And oh! pray too for me!

The Mower

By Philip Larkin

The mower stalled, twice; kneeling, I found
A hedgehog jammed up against the blades,
Killed. It had been in the long grass.

I had seen it before, and even fed it, once.
Now I had mauled its unobtrusive world
Unmendably. Burial was no help:

Next morning I got up and it did not.
The first day after a death, the new absence
Is always the same; we should be careful

Of each other, we should be kind
While there is still time.

It Isn't Me

By James Lasdun

It isn't me, he'd say,
stepping out of a landscape
that offered, he'd thought, the backdrop
to a plausible existence
until he entered it; *it's just not me*,
he'd murmur, walking away.

It's not quite me, he'd explain,
apologetic but firm,
leaving some job they'd found him.
They found him others: he'd go,
smiling his smile, putting
his best foot forward, till again

he'd find himself reluctantly concluding
that this, too, wasn't him.
He wanted to get married, make a home,
unfold a life among his neighbors' lives,
branching and blossoming like a tree,
but when it came to it, *it isn't me*

was all he seemed to learn
from all his diligent forays outward.
And why it should be so hard
for someone not so different from themselves,
to find what they'd found, barely even seeking;
what gift he'd not been given, what forlorn

charm of his they'd had the luck to lack,
puzzled them—though not unduly:
they lived inside their lives so fully
they couldn't, in the end, believe in him,
except as some half-legendary figure
destined, or doomed, to carry on his back

the weight of their own all-but-weightless, stray
doubts and discomforts. Only sometimes,
alone in offices or living rooms,
they'd hear that phrase again: *it isn't me*,

and wonder, briefly, what they were, and where,
and feel the strangeness of being there.

Southern Gothic

By Rickey Laurentiis

About the dead having available to them
all breeds of knowledge,
some pure, others wicked, especially what is
future, and the history that remains
once the waters recede, revealing the land
that couldn't reject or contain it, and the land
that is not new, is indigo, is ancient, lived
as all the trees that fit and clothe it are lived,
simple pine, oak, grand magnolia, he said
they frighten him, that what they hold in their silences
silences: sometimes a boy will slip
from his climbing, drown but the myth knows why,
sometimes a boy will swing with the leaves.

Dust

By Dorianne Laux

Someone spoke to me last night,
told me the truth. Just a few words,
but I recognized it.
I knew I should make myself get up,
write it down, but it was late,
and I was exhausted from working
all day in the garden, moving rocks.
Now, I remember only the flavor —
not like food, sweet or sharp.
More like a fine powder, like dust.
And I wasn't elated or frightened,
but simply rapt, aware.
That's how it is sometimes —
God comes to your window,
all bright light and black wings,
and you're just too tired to open it.

Spanglish

By Tato Laviera

pues estoy creando spanglish

bi-cultural systems
scientific lexicographical
inter-textual integrations
two expressions
existentially wired
two dominant languages
continentally abrazándose
en colloquial combate
en las aceras del soil
imperio spanglish emerges
control pandillaje
sobre territorio bi-lingual
las novelas mexicanas
mixing with radiorocknroll
condimented cocina lore
immigrant/migrant
nasal mispronouncements
baraja chismeteos social club
hip-hop prieto street salsa
corner soul enmixturando
spanish pop farándula
standard english classroom
with computer technicalities
spanglish is literally perfect
spanglish is ethnically snobbish
spanglish is cara-holy inteligencia
which u.s. slang do you speak?

My Darling Turns to Poetry at Night

By Anthony Lawrence

My darling turns to poetry at night.
What began as flirtation, an aside
Between abstract expression and first light

Now finds form as a silent, startled flight
Of commas on her face — a breath, a word ...
My darling turns to poetry at night.

When rain inspires the night birds to create
Rhyme and formal verse, stanzas can be made
Between abstract expression and first light.

Her heartbeat is a metaphor, a late
Bloom of red flowers that refuse to fade.

My darling turns to poetry at night.

I watch her turn. I do not sleep. I wait
For symbols, for a sign that fear has died
Between abstract expression and first light.

Her dreams have night vision, and in her sight
Our bodies leave ghostprints on the bed.
My darling turns to poetry at night
Between abstract expression and first light.

Piano

By D. H. Lawrence

Softly, in the dusk, a woman is singing to me;
Taking me back down the vista of years, till I see
A child sitting under the piano, in the boom of the tingling strings
And pressing the small, poised feet of a mother who smiles as she sings.

In spite of myself, the insidious mastery of song
Betrays me back, till the heart of me weeps to belong
To the old Sunday evenings at home, with winter outside
And hymns in the cosy parlour, the tinkling piano our guide.

So now it is vain for the singer to burst into clamour
With the great black piano appassionato. The glamour
Of childish days is upon me, my manhood is cast
Down in the flood of remembrance, I weep like a child for the past.

The New Colossus

By Emma Lazarus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she
With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.

Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

Elegy for Blue

By J. T. Ledbetter

Someone must have seen an old dog
dragging its broken body through
the wet grass;
someone should have known it was lost,
drinking from the old well, then lifting
its head to the wind off the bottoms,
and someone might have wanted that dog
trailing its legs along the ground
like vines sliding up the creek
searching for sun;
but they were not there when the dog
wandered through Turley’s Woods looking
for food and stopped beneath the thorn trees
and wrapped its tail around its nose
until it was covered by falling leaves
that piled up and up
until there was no lost dog at all
to hear the distant voice calling
through the timber,
only a tired heart breathing slower,
and breath, soft as mist, above the leaves.

That Everything’s Inevitable

By Katy Lederer

That everything's inevitable.
That fate is whatever has already happened.
The brain, which is an elemental, as sane, as the rest of the processing universe is.
In this world, I am the surest thing.
Scrunched-up arms, folded legs, lovely destitute eyes.
Please insert your spare coins.
I am filling them up.
Please insert your spare vision, your vigor, your vim.
But yet, I am a vatic one.
As vatic as the Vatican.
In the temper and the tantrum, in the well-kept arboretum
I am waiting, like an animal,
For poetry.

Eating Together

By Li-Young Lee

In the steamer is the trout
seasoned with slivers of ginger,
two sprigs of green onion, and sesame oil.
We shall eat it with rice for lunch,
brothers, sister, my mother who will
taste the sweetest meat of the head,
holding it between her fingers
deftly, the way my father did
weeks ago. Then he lay down
to sleep like a snow-covered road
winding through pines older than him,
without any travelers, and lonely for no one.

Falling: The Code

By Li-Young Lee

1.
Through the night
the apples
outside my window
one by one let go
their branches and
drop to the lawn.
I can't see, but hear
the stem-snap, the plummet
through leaves, then
the final thump against the ground.

Sometimes two
at once, or one
right after another.
During long moments of silence
I wait
and wonder about the bruised bodies,
the terror of diving through air, and
think I'll go tomorrow
to find the newly fallen, but they
all look alike lying there
dewsoaked, disappearing before me.

2.
I lie beneath my window listening

to the sound of apples dropping in

the yard, a syncopated code I long to know,
which continues even as I sleep, and dream I know

the meaning of what I hear, each dull
thud of unseen apple-

body, the earth
falling to earth

once and forever, over
and over.

From Blossoms

By Li-Young Lee

From blossoms comes
this brown paper bag of peaches
we bought from the boy
at the bend in the road where we turned toward
signs painted *Peaches*.

From laden boughs, from hands,
from sweet fellowship in the bins,
comes nectar at the roadside, succulent
peaches we devour, dusty skin and all,
comes the familiar dust of summer, dust we eat.

O, to take what we love inside,
to carry within us an orchard, to eat
not only the skin, but the shade,
not only the sugar, but the days, to hold
the fruit in our hands, adore it, then bite into
the round jubilance of peach.

There are days we live
as if death were nowhere
in the background; from joy
to joy to joy, from wing to wing,
from blossom to blossom to
impossible blossom, to sweet impossible blossom.

The Gift

By Li-Young Lee

To pull the metal splinter from my palm
my father recited a story in a low voice.
I watched his lovely face and not the blade.
Before the story ended, he'd removed
the iron sliver I thought I'd die from.

I can't remember the tale,
but hear his voice still, a well
of dark water, a prayer.
And I recall his hands,
two measures of tenderness
he laid against my face,
the flames of discipline
he raised above my head.

Had you entered that afternoon
you would have thought you saw a man
planting something in a boy's palm,
a silver tear, a tiny flame.
Had you followed that boy
you would have arrived here,
where I bend over my wife's right hand.

Look how I shave her thumbnail down
so carefully she feels no pain.
Watch as I lift the splinter out.
I was seven when my father
took my hand like this,
and I did not hold that shard
between my fingers and think,
Metal that will bury me,
christen it Little Assassin,
Ore Going Deep for My Heart.
And I did not lift up my wound and cry,
Death visited here!
I did what a child does
when he's given something to keep.
I kissed my father.

Little Father

By Li-Young Lee

I buried my father
in the sky.
Since then, the birds
clean and comb him every morning
and pull the blanket up to his chin
every night.

I buried my father underground.
Since then, my ladders
only climb down,
and all the earth has become a house
whose rooms are the hours, whose doors
stand open at evening, receiving
guest after guest.
Sometimes I see past them
to the tables spread for a wedding feast.

I buried my father in my heart.
Now he grows in me, my strange son,
my little root who won't drink milk,
little pale foot sunk in unheard-of night,
little clock spring newly wet
in the fire, little grape, parent to the future
wine, a son the fruit of his own son,
little father I ransom with my life.

Nocturne

By Li-Young Lee

That scraping of iron on iron when the wind
rises, what is it? Something the wind won't
quit with, but drags back and forth.
Sometimes faint, far, then suddenly, close, just
beyond the screened door, as if someone there
squats in the dark honing his wares against
my threshold. Half steel wire, half metal wing,
nothing and anything might make this noise
of saws and rasps, a creaking and groaning
of bone-growth, or body-death, marriages of rust,
or ore abraded. Tonight, something bows
that should not bend. Something stiffens that should
slide. Something, loose and not right,

rakes or forges itself all night.

Feasting

By Joseph O. Legaspi

Bitaug, Siquijor, Philippines

Three women dragged the spiky, bulky mass
onto a bamboo table on the side of an island

road. A raised hunting knife glinted in sunlight,
then plunged with a breathless gasp, slicing into

the unseen. To a passerby they were a curious
wall, a swarm of onlookers, barrio children

and younger women, buzzing with a rising
gleeful cadence as a mother busied herself

with the butchering. Surprisingly, a citrusy,
sugary scent sweetened the stranger's face

when offered the yellow flesh like thickened
petals, licorice to the touch, he stood awed

at the monstrous jackfruit, bloodless armadillo
halved, quartered, sectioned off for feasting.

His tongue tingled ripely. *This country's foreign*
to me, he continued, *but I'm not foreign to it*.

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

Arrhythmia

By Hailey Leithauser

The heart of a bear is a cloud-shuttered
mountain. The heart of a mountain's a kiln.
The white heart of a moth has nineteen white
chambers. The heart of a swan is a swan.

The heart of a wasp is a prick of plush.
The heart of a skunk is a mink. The heart

of an owl is part blood and part chalice.
The fey mouse heart rides a dawdy dust-cart.

The heart of a kestrel hides a house wren
at nest. The heart of lark is a czar.
The heart of a scorpion is swidden

and spark. The heart of a shark is a gear.
Listen and tell, thrums the grave heart of humans.
Listen well love, for it's pitch dark down here.

Fever

By Hailey Leithauser

The heat so peaked tonight

the moon can't cool

a scum-mucked swimming
pool, or breeze

emerge to lift the frowsy
ruff of owls too hot

to hoot, (the mouse and brown
barn rat astute

enough to know to drop
and dash) while

on the bunched up,
corkscrewed sheets of cots

and slumped brass beds,
the fitful twist

and kink and plead to dream
a dream of air

as bitter cruel as winter
gale that scrapes and blows

and gusts the grate
to luff

the whitened ashes from the coal.

Mockingbird

By Hailey Leithauser

No other song
or swoop (part
quiver, part swivel and
plash) with
tour de force
stray the course note
liquefactions
(its new,
bawdy air an
aria hangs in) en-
thralls,
trills, loops, soars,
startles, out-warbles,
out-brawns, more
juicily,
lifts up
the dawn, outlaws from
sackcloth, the cool
sloth of bed sheets,
from pillows
and silks
and blue-quilted, feminine
bolsters, fusses
of coverlets;
nips as the switch
of a juvenile willow, fuzz
of a nettle, to
window and window
and window and ever
toward egress, to
flurry, pollen
and petal shed,
to wet street
and wet pavement,
all sentiment intemperate,
all sentience
ephemeral.

In California: Morning, Evening, Late January

By Denise Levertov

Pale, then enkindled,
light
advancing,
emblazoning
summits of palm and pine,

the dew
lingering,
scripture of
scintillas.

Soon the roar
of mowers
cropping the already short
grass of lawns,

men with long-nozzled
cylinders of pesticide
poking at weeds,
at moss in cracks of cement,

and louder roar
of helicopters off to spray
vineyards where *braceros* try
to hold their breath,

and in the distance, bulldozers, excavators,
babel of destructive construction.

Banded by deep
oakshadow, airy
shadow of eucalyptus,

miner's lettuce,
tender, untasted,
and other grass, unmown,
luxuriant,
no green more brilliant.

Fragile paradise.

. . . .

At day’s end the whole sky,
vast, unstinting, flooded with transparent
mauve,
tint of wisteria,
cloudless
over the malls, the industrial parks,
the homes with the lights going on,
the homeless arranging their bundles.

. . . .

Who can utter
the poignance of all that is constantly
threatened, invaded, expended

and constantly
nevertheless
persists in beauty,

tranquil as this young moon
just risen and slowly
drinking light
from the vanished sun.

Who can utter
the praise of such generosity
or the shame?

Pleasures

By Denise Levertov

I like to find
what's not found
at once, but lies

within something of another nature,
in repose, distinct.
Gull feathers of glass, hidden

in white pulp: the bones of squid
which I pull out and lay
blade by blade on the draining board—

tapered as if for swiftness, to pierce
the heart, but fragile, substance

belying design. Or a fruit, *mamey*,

cased in rough brown peel, the flesh
rose-amber, and the seed:
the seed a stone of wood, carved and

polished, walnut-colored, formed
like a brazilnut, but large,
large enough to fill
the hungry palm of a hand.

I like the juicy stem of grass that grows
within the coarser leaf folded round,
and the butteryellow glow
in the narrow flute from which the morning-glory
opens blue and cool on a hot morning.

Prisoners

By Denise Levertov

Though the road turn at last
to death's ordinary door,
and we knock there, ready
to enter and it opens
easily for us,
                yet
all the long journey
we shall have gone in chains,
fed on knowledge-apples
acrid and riddled with grubs.

We taste other food that life,
like a charitable farm-girl,
holds out to us as we pass—
but our mouths are puckered,
a taint of ash on the tongue.

It's not joy that we've lost—
wildfire, it flares
in dark or shine as it will.
What's gone
is common happiness,
plain bread we could eat
with the old apple of knowledge.

That old one—it griped us sometimes,
but it was firm, tart,
sometimes delectable ...

The ashen apple of these days
grew from poisoned soil. We are prisoners
and must eat
our ration. All the long road
in chains, even if, after all,
we come to
death's ordinary door, with time
smiling its ordinary
long-ago smile.

An Anthology of Rain

By Phillis Levin

For this you may see no need,
You may think my aim
Dead set on something

Devoid of conceivable value:
An Anthology of Rain,
A collection of voices

Telling someone somewhere
What it means to follow a drop
Traveling to its final place of rest.

But do consider this request
If you have pressed your nose
Of any shape against a window,

Odor of metal faint, persistent,
While a storm cast its cloak
Over the shoulder of every cloud

In sight. You are free to say
Whatever crosses your mind
When you look at the face of time

In the passing of one drop
Gathering speed, one drop
Chasing another, racing to reach

A fork in the path, lingering
Before making a detour to join
Another, fattening on the way

Until entering a rivulet
Running to the sill.
So please accept this invitation:

You are welcome to submit,
There is no limit to its limit,
Even the instructions are a breeze

As long as you include
Nothing about yourself
Except your name. Your address

Remains unnecessary, for the rain
Will find you — if you receive it
It receives you (whether or not

You contribute, a volume
Is sent). And when you lift
The collection you may hear,

By opening anywhere, a drop
And its story reappear
As air turns to water, water to air.

Cloud Fishing

By Phillis Levin

To fish from a cloud in the sky
You must find a comfortable spot,
Spend a day looking down
Patiently, clear-sighted.

Peer at your ceiling:
Where a light dangles, hook & line
Could be slipping through.

Under the hull of a boat
A fish will see things this way,

Looking up while swimming by —

A wavering pole's refraction
Catching its eye.

What will you catch?
With what sort of bait?
Take care or you'll catch yourself,

A fish might say,
As inescapable skeins of shadow
Scatter a net
Over the face of the deep.

Lenten Song

By Phillis Levin

That the dead are real to us
Cannot be denied,
That the living are more real

When they are dead
Terrifies, that the dead can rise
As the living do is possible

Is possible to surmise,
But all the stars cannot come near
All we meet in an eye.

Flee from me, fear, as soot
Flies in a breeze, do not burn
Or settle in my sight,

I've tasted you long enough,
Let me savor
Something otherwise.

Who wakes beside me now
Suits my soul, so I turn to words
Only to say he changes

Into his robe, rustles a page,
He raises the lid of the piano
To release what's born in its cage.

If words come back
To say they compromise

Or swear again they have died,

There’s no news in that, I reply,
But a music without notes
These notes comprise, still

As spring beneath us lies,
Already something otherwise.

My Brother the Artist, at Seven

By Philip Levine

As a boy he played alone in the fields
behind our block, six frame houses
holding six immigrant families,
the parents speaking only gibberish
to their neighbors. Without the kids
they couldn't say "Good morning" and be
understood. Little wonder
he learned early to speak to himself,
to tell no one what truly mattered.
How much can matter to a kid
of seven? Everything. The whole world
can be his. Just after dawn he sneaks
out to hide in the wild, bleached grasses
of August and pretends he's grown up,
someone complete in himself without
the need for anyone, a warrior
from the ancient places our fathers
fled years before, those magic places:
Kiev, Odessa, the Crimea,
Port Said, Alexandria, Lisbon,
the Canaries, Caracas, Galveston.
In the damp grass he recites the names
over and over in a hushed voice
while the sun climbs into the locust tree
to waken the houses. The husbands leave
for work, the women return to bed, the kids
bend to porridge and milk. He advances
slowly, eyes fixed, an animal or a god,
while beneath him the earth holds its breath.

Make a Law So That the Spine Remembers Wings

By Larry Levis

So that the truant boy may go steady with the State,
So that in his spine a memory of wings
Will make his shoulders tense & bend
Like a thing already flown
When the bracelets of another school of love
Are fastened to his wrists,
Make a law that doesn't have to wait
Long until someone comes along to break it.

So that in jail he will have the time to read
How the king was beheaded & the hawk that rode
The king's wrist died of a common cold,
And learn that chivalry persists,
And what first felt like an insult to the flesh
Was the blank 'o' of love.
Put the fun back into punishment.
Make a law that loves the one who breaks it.

So that no empty court will make a judge recall
Ice fishing on some overcast bay,
Shivering in the cold beside his father, it ought
To be an interesting law,
The kind of thing that no one can obey,
A law that whispers "Break me."
Let the crows roost & caw.
A good judge is an example to us all.

So that the patrolman can still whistle
"The Yellow Rose of Texas" through his teeth
And even show some faint gesture of respect
While he cuffs the suspect,
Not ungently, & says things like *ok,*
That's it, relax,
It'll go better for you if you don't resist,
Lean back just a little, against me.

The Oldest Living Thing in L.A.

By Larry Levis

At Wilshire & Santa Monica I saw an opossum
Trying to cross the street. It was late, the street
Was brightly lit, the opossum would take

A few steps forward, then back away from the breath
Of moving traffic. People coming out of the bars
Would approach, as if to help it somehow.
It would lift its black lips & show them
The reddened gums, the long rows of incisors,
Teeth that went all the way back beyond
The flames of Troy & Carthage, beyond sheep
Grazing rock-strewn hills, fragments of ruins
In the grass at San Vitale. It would back away
Delicately & smoothly, stepping carefully
As it always had. It could mangle someone's hand
In twenty seconds. Mangle it for good. It could
Sever it completely from the wrist in forty.
There was nothing to be done for it. Someone
Or other probably called the LAPD, who then
Called Animal Control, who woke a driver, who
Then dressed in mailed gloves, the kind of thing
Small knights once wore into battle, who gathered
Together his pole with a noose on the end,
A light steel net to snare it with, someone who hoped
The thing would have vanished by the time he got there.

White Box

By Frances Leviston

Of Tribulation, these are They,
Denoted by the White.
— Emily Dickinson

Pained, permanent
wakefulness

Exposed
in the split geode

a Santa's grotto
Jagged milk

quartz crusts
constitute

every surface —
a mouth

all teeth
self-sharpening

like sea urchins' —
"Uncomfortably beautiful"

toughened glass
spikes

in the doorways
of award-

winning offices
— rough

sleepers from the womb
condemned

to make of anything succulent
rock

of porticoes
iron maidens

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

In a Dark Room

By Cassie Lewis

'Cause it's alright, alright to see a ghost.
— The National

Rock quartz next to a fence with upturned faces.
On the hill, on the other side
a storm, or plausibly, you.
Time keeps its footsteps regular until it is clapped upwards:
a falcon glides into view.

Dissolving into the pool in a splash of white,
I saw you. In summer,
the town goes to the drive-in.
The edges of the coin keep moving
as I stare at images through goggles, they
fog out.

Rooms go to pieces, sometimes, quietly. Curtains
are no longer red, now they're dusty. The cat
moves. The room turns ocher
and shifts, as wind blows through.

O Brecht's sky of streaming blue. It's been days since I opened the book
my face is watching. Cupboards slam in another part
of the flat. The room reassembles,
but it's different now —
outdated.

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

At Carmel Highlands

By Janet Loxley Lewis

Below the gardens and the darkening pines
The living water sinks among the stones,
Sinking yet foaming till the snowy tones
Merge with the fog drawn landward in dim lines.
The cloud dissolves among the flowering vines,
And now the definite mountain-side disowns
The fluid world, the immeasurable zones.
Then white oblivion swallows all designs.

But still the rich confusion of the sea,
Unceasing voice, sombre and solacing,
Rises through veils of silence past the trees;
In restless repetition bound, yet free,
Wave after wave in deluge fresh releasing
An ancient speech, hushed in tremendous ease.

Learning to Love America

By Shirley Geok-Lin Lim

because it has no pure products

because the Pacific Ocean sweeps along the coastline
because the water of the ocean is cold
and because land is better than ocean

because I say we rather than they

because I live in California
I have eaten fresh artichokes
and jacaranda bloom in April and May

because my senses have caught up with my body
my breath with the air it swallows
my hunger with my mouth

because I walk barefoot in my house

because I have nursed my son at my breast
because he is a strong American boy
because I have seen his eyes redden when he is asked who he is
because he answers I don't know

because to have a son is to have a country
because my son will bury me here
because countries are in our blood and we bleed them

because it is late and too late to change my mind
because it is time.

The Contract Says: We'd Like the Conversation to be Bilingual

By Ada Limón

When you come, bring your brown-
ness so we can be sure to please

the funders. Will you check this
box; we're applying for a grant.

Do you have any poems that speak
to troubled teens? Bilingual is best.

Would you like to come to dinner
with the patrons and sip Patrón?

Will you tell us the stories that make
us uncomfortable, but not complicit?

Don't read the one where you
are just like us. Born to a green house,

garden, don’t tell us how you picked
tomatoes and ate them in the dirt

watching vultures pick apart another
bird’s bones in the road. Tell us the one

about your father stealing hubcaps
after a colleague said that’s what his

kind did. Tell us how he came
to the meeting wearing a poncho

and tried to sell the man his hubcaps
back. Don’t mention your father

was a teacher, spoke English, loved
making beer, loved baseball, tell us

again about the poncho, the hubcaps,
how he stole them, how he did the thing

he was trying to prove he didn’t do.

How to Triumph Like a Girl

By Ada Limón

I like the lady horses best,
how they make it all look easy,
like running 40 miles per hour
is as fun as taking a nap, or grass.
I like their lady horse swagger,
after winning. Ears up, girls, ears up!
But mainly, let’s be honest, I like
that they’re ladies. As if this big
dangerous animal is also a part of me,
that somewhere inside the delicate
skin of my body, there pumps
an 8-pound female horse heart,
giant with power, heavy with blood.
Don’t you want to believe it?
Don’t you want to lift my shirt and see
the huge beating genius machine
that thinks, no, it knows,
it’s going to come in first.

What it Looks Like To Us and the Words We Use

By Ada Limón

All these great barns out here in the outskirts,
black creosote boards knee-deep in the bluegrass.
They look so beautifully abandoned, even in use.
You say they look like arks after the sea's
dried up, I say they look like pirate ships,
and I think of that walk in the valley where
J said, You don't believe in God? And I said,
No. I believe in this connection we all have
to nature, to each other, to the universe.
And she said, Yeah, God. And how we stood there,
low beasts among the white oaks, Spanish moss,
and spider webs, obsidian shards stuck in our pockets,
woodpecker flurry, and I refused to call it so.
So instead, we looked up at the unruly sky,
its clouds in simple animal shapes we could name
though we knew they were really just clouds—
disorderly, and marvelous, and ours.

Carnival

By Rebecca Lindenberg

The mask that burns like a violin, the mask
that sings only dead languages, that loves
the destruction of being put on. The mask
that sighs like a woman even though
a woman wears it. The mask beaded with
freshwater pearls, with seeds. The plumed mask,
the mask with a sutured mouth, a moonface,
with a healed gash that means *harvest*. A glower
that hides *wanting*. A grotesque pucker. Here's
a beaked mask, a braided mask, here's a mask
without eyes, a mask that looks like a mask
but isn't—please don't try to unribbon it.
The mask that snows coins, the mask full of wasps.
Lace mask to net escaping thoughts. Pass me
the rouged mask, the one made of sheet music.
Or the jackal mask, the hide-bound mask
that renders lovers identical with night.

Rain of Statues

By Sarah Lindsay

From the Mithridatic Wars, first century BC

Our general was elsewhere, but we drowned.
While he rested, he shipped us home
with the bulk of his spoils
that had weighed his army down.
The thrashing storm
that caught us cracked the hulls
and made us offerings to the sea floor —
a rain of statues, gold, and men.

Released from service,
done with war,
the crash and hiss muted,
we fell through streams of creatures
whose lives were their purpose.
We settled with treasure looted
from temples of rubbled Athenian Greece;
among us, bronze and marble gods and goddesses
moored without grace,
dodged by incurious fish.
Their power was never meant to buoy us —
our pleasures were incidental gifts —
but, shaken by their radiance in our dust,
we had given them our voices.

Their faces, wings, and limbs
lie here with our sanded bones
and motionless devices.
Little crabs attempt to don rings
set with agate and amethyst,
and many an octopus,
seeking an hour of rest,
finds shelter in our brain-cases.
So we are still of use.

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

Abraham Lincoln Walks at Midnight

By Vachel Lindsay

(In Springfield, Illinois)

It is portentous, and a thing of state
That here at midnight, in our little town
A mourning figure walks, and will not rest,
Near the old court-house pacing up and down.

Or by his homestead, or in shadowed yards
He lingers where his children used to play,
Or through the market, on the well-worn stones
He stalks until the dawn-stars burn away.

A bronzed, lank man! His suit of ancient black,
A famous high top-hat and plain worn shawl
Make him the quaint great figure that men love,
The prairie-lawyer, master of us all.

He cannot sleep upon his hillside now.
He is among us:—as in times before!
And we who toss and lie awake for long
Breathe deep, and start, to see him pass the door.

His head is bowed. He thinks on men and kings.
Yea, when the sick world cries, how can he sleep?
Too many peasants fight, they know not why,
Too many homesteads in black terror weep.

The sins of all the war-lords burn his heart.
He sees the dreadnaughts scouring every main.
He carries on his shawl-wrapped shoulders now
The bitterness, the folly and the pain.

He cannot rest until a spirit-dawn
Shall come;—the shining hope of Europe free;
The league of sober folk, the Workers' Earth,
Bringing long peace to Cornland, Alp and Sea.

It breaks his heart that kings must murder still,
That all his hours of travail here for men
Seem yet in vain. And who will bring white peace
That he may sleep upon his hill again?

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

Lincoln

By Vachel Lindsay

Would I might rouse the Lincoln in you all,
That which is gendered in the wilderness
From lonely prairies and God's tenderness.
Imperial soul, star of a weedy stream,
Born where the ghosts of buffaloes still dream,
Whose spirit hoof-beats storm above his grave,
Above that breast of earth and prairie-fire—
Fire that freed the slave.

The Traveller-Heart

By Vachel Lindsay

(To a Man who maintained that the Mausoleum is the Stateliest Possible Manner of Interment)

I would be one with the dark, dark earth:—
Follow the plough with a yokel tread.
I would be part of the Indian corn,
Walking the rows with the plumes o'erhead.

I would be one with the lavish earth,
Eating the bee-stung apples red:
Walking where lambs walk on the hills;
By oak-grove paths to the pools be led.

I would be one with the dark-bright night
When sparkling skies and the lightning wed—
Walking on with the vicious wind
By roads whence even the dogs have fled.

I would be one with the sacred earth
On to the end, till I sleep with the dead.
Terror shall put no spears through me.
Peace shall jewel my shroud instead.

I shall be one with all pit-black things
Finding their lowering threat unsaid:
Stars for my pillow there in the gloom,—
Oak-roots arching about my head!

Stars, like daisies, shall rise through the earth,
Acorns fall round my breast that bled.
Children shall weave there a flowery chain,
Squirrels on acorn-hearts be fed:—

Fruit of the traveller-heart of me,
Fruit of my harvest-songs long sped:
Sweet with the life of my sunburned days
When the sheaves were ripe, and the apples red.

Ghost Dance

By Sara Littlecrow-Russell

Two hundred seventy
Ghost Dancers died dreaming
That humanity would drown
In a flood of White sins.

Then the renewed earth
Would reclaim city and town,
Leaving only Ghost Dancers
And those who lived by nature's laws.

History books say the threat is gone.
The Ghost Dance died with the ancestors—
Wovoka and his sacred dream
Were destroyed.

Each time it rains,
I go out to the sidewalk,
Where the tree roots
Have broken the concrete
Listening to the water's whispering:

"It is coming soon."

Punta del Este Pantoum

By Chip Livingston

Accept my need and let me call you brother,
Slate blue oyster, wet sand crustacean,
In your hurrying to burrow, wait. Hover.
Parse opening's disaster to creation's

Slate, to another blue-eyed monstrous sand crustacean,
Water-bearer. Hear the ocean behind me,
Pursued, asking to be opened, asking Creation
To heed the tides that uncover you nightly.

Water-bearer, wear the water beside me,
Hide your burying shadow from the shorebirds,
But heed the tides that uncover you nightly.
Gems in sandcastles, stick-written words,

Hidden from the shadows of shorebirds,
Washed over by water. Waters revelatory
Gems, sand, castles, sticks, words—
Assured of erasure, voluntary erosion.

Watched over with warrior resolution,
Crab armor, claws, and nautilus heart,
Assured of a savior, reconstruct your evolution,
Clamor to hear, water scarab, what the tampered heart hears.

A scarab's armor is light enough to fly.
In your hurry to burrow, wait. Hover.
Hear the clamor of the crustacean's heart.
Heed this call of creation. Call me brother.

Invisible Children

By Mariana Llanos

Invisible children fall
through the cracks of the system
like Alice in the rabbit hole.
But these children won't find
an eat-me cake or a drink-me bottle.
They won't wake up on the lap
of a loving sister.
They'll open their eyes on the hand
of a monster called Negligence
who'll poke them with its sharp teeth
and bait them with its heartless laughter,
like a wild thing in a wild rumpus.
But the children won't awake
to the smell of a warm supper,
nor will they find a purple crayon
to draw an escape door or a window.

Instead they'll make a mirror
of a murky puddle on the city street
which won't tell them they're beautiful
but it'll show their scars, as invisible to others
as these children are.

Y2K

By Therese Lloyd

When I was "in despair" (the dark days
when I actually used such terms)
I noticed the behavior of animals —
sleep when tired, eat when hungry
That made a lot of sense to me
and yet I felt different
I felt my humanness too much
No fly ever wonders whether it should make
lots and lots of maggots
It gives birth on a mound of cat food
or inside the rubbish bin
As far as I know
it's not worried about overpopulation
or what sort of environment its kids
will grow up in
My humanness sees me at an art gallery
watching others
watching walls
My humanness gives me dark thoughts
of cruel behavior
You are in the States
a visa glitch and there you remain
Like Star Trek, I talk to you on a screen
your face half a second out of sync
with your speech
I'm in the future
my Tuesday is already over
and I want to tell you all about it
to prove my superiority
That lovely conceit of time
that saw people travel from all over the world
to be in Gisborne
for the first sunrise
of the new millennium
Remember
how we all thought the sewer pipes would burst

and the criminals would escape
or something like that
Y2K packs sent to every household
because no one knew for certain
what the numbers 2000 really meant
Somewhere, people, important people
cowered in bunkers
fearing the worst

Dead Men Walking

By William Logan

What did they desire, the dead who had returned?
The sons who had inherited their estates
pretended not to know them. The iron gates
were welded shut, but soon the dead had learned

to hire lawyers practiced in the laws
that bound the afterlife to lesser gods.
The angels thundered on like piston rods,
denying their gold wings to either cause.

The city streetlamps flared like learnèd ghosts.
The moon turned red. Beneath a scrim of clouds,
Spanish moss draped the myrtle trees like shrouds—
in politics the guests became the hosts.

Those days made angels of the better sort.
The cases languished in a lower court.

Talent

By Layli Long Soldier

my first try I made a hit it dropped from morning gray the smallest shadow both wings slipped inward mid-flight the man barked *Now* I shot again and again a third time with each arrow through the target I thought was it luck or was it skill luck or skill as the last one fell

its awkward shape made me run there pulsing on the ground I was astounded by its size a gangly white goose throbbed heaved its head my eyes dropped blood flowers opened in the snow of its neck behind my shoulder stepping down from a yellow bus

child made their way across the field I shot once more to end it quickly close range its death did I do this to spare the bird from suffering or to spare the children the sight my motives in humid cold yes my knuckles in the cold steamed bright red

because on my stomach in grass in rubber boots pockets and vests I slid along with that hunter I did as he directed from quiver my draw my black lashes in steely eyed release it felt good there it felt strong my breath in autumn was an animal there I thought did I really do this did *I* really yet what difference is muscle is an arrow powered upward or any flight to center when I did not hear it though I clearly mouthed *poor thing poor thing poor thing*

The Arrow and the Song

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

I shot an arrow into the air,
It fell to earth, I knew not where;
For, so swiftly it flew, the sight
Could not follow it in its flight.

I breathed a song into the air,
It fell to earth, I knew not where;
For who has sight so keen and strong,
That it can follow the flight of song?

Long, long afterward, in an oak
I found the arrow, still unbroke;
And the song, from beginning to end,
I found again in the heart of a friend.

The Children's Hour

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Between the dark and the daylight,
    When the night is beginning to lower,
Comes a pause in the day's occupations,
    That is known as the Children's Hour.

I hear in the chamber above me
    The patter of little feet,
The sound of a door that is opened,
    And voices soft and sweet.

From my study I see in the lamplight,
    Descending the broad hall stair,
Grave Alice, and laughing Allegra,
    And Edith with golden hair.

A whisper, and then a silence:

Yet I know by their merry eyes
They are plotting and planning together
To take me by surprise.

A sudden rush from the stairway,
A sudden raid from the hall!
By three doors left unguarded
They enter my castle wall!

They climb up into my turret
O'er the arms and back of my chair;
If I try to escape, they surround me;
They seem to be everywhere.

They almost devour me with kisses,
Their arms about me entwine,
Till I think of the Bishop of Bingen
In his Mouse-Tower on the Rhine!

Do you think, O blue-eyed banditti,
Because you have scaled the wall,
Such an old mustache as I am
Is not a match for you all!

I have you fast in my fortress,
And will not let you depart,
But put you down into the dungeon
In the round-tower of my heart.

And there will I keep you forever,
Yes, forever and a day,
Till the walls shall crumble to ruin,
And moulder in dust away!

The Cross of Snow

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

In the long, sleepless watches of the night,
A gentle face — the face of one long dead —
Looks at me from the wall, where round its head
The night-lamp casts a halo of pale light.
Here in this room she died; and soul more white
Never through martyrdom of fire was led
To its repose; nor can in books be read
The legend of a life more benedight.

There is a mountain in the distant West
  That, sun-defying, in its deep ravines
  Displays a cross of snow upon its side.
Such is the cross I wear upon my breast
  These eighteen years, through all the changing scenes
  And seasons, changeless since the day she died.

The Light of Stars

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The night is come, but not too soon;
  And sinking silently,
All silently, the little moon
  Drops down behind the sky.

There is no light in earth or heaven
  But the cold light of stars;
And the first watch of night is given
  To the red planet Mars.

Is it the tender star of love?
  The star of love and dreams?
O no! from that blue tent above,
  A hero's armor gleams.

And earnest thoughts within me rise,
  When I behold afar,
Suspended in the evening skies,
  The shield of that red star.

O star of strength! I see thee stand
  And smile upon my pain;
Thou beckonest with thy mailèd hand,
  And I am strong again.

Within my breast there is no light
  But the cold light of stars;
I give the first watch of the night
  To the red planet Mars.

The star of the unconquered will,
  He rises in my breast,
Serene, and resolute, and still,
  And calm, and self-possessed.

And thou, too, whosoe'er thou art,
  That readest this brief psalm,
As one by one thy hopes depart,
  Be resolute and calm.

O fear not in a world like this,
  And thou shalt know erelong,
Know how sublime a thing it is
  To suffer and be strong.

Mezzo Cammin

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Half of my life is gone, and I have let
  The years slip from me and have not fulfilled
  The aspiration of my youth, to build
  Some tower of song with lofty parapet.
Not indolence, nor pleasure, nor the fret
  Of restless passions that would not be stilled,
  But sorrow, and a care that almost killed,
  Kept me from what I may accomplish yet;
Though, half-way up the hill, I see the Past
  Lying beneath me with its sounds and sights,—
  A city in the twilight dim and vast,
With smoking roofs, soft bells, and gleaming lights,—
  And hear above me on the autumnal blast
  The cataract of Death far thundering from the heights.

The Tide Rises, the Tide Falls

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The tide rises, the tide falls,
The twilight darkens, the curlew calls;
Along the sea-sands damp and brown
The traveller hastens toward the town,
    And the tide rises, the tide falls.

Darkness settles on roofs and walls,
But the sea, the sea in the darkness calls;
The little waves, with their soft, white hands,
Efface the footprints in the sands,
    And the tide rises, the tide falls.

The morning breaks; the steeds in their stalls

Stamp and neigh, as the hostler calls;
The day returns, but nevermore
Returns the traveller to the shore,
And the tide rises, the tide falls.

Father Son and Holy Ghost

By Audre Lorde

I have not ever seen my father's grave.

Not that his judgment eyes
have been forgotten
nor his great hands' print
on our evening doorknobs
one half turn each night
and he would come
drabbled with the world's business
massive and silent
as the whole day's wish
ready to redefine
each of our shapes
but now the evening doorknobs
wait and do not recognize us
as we pass.

Each week a different woman
regular as his one quick glass
each evening
pulls up the grass his stillness grows
calling it weed.
Each week a different woman
has my mother's face
and he
who time has changeless
must be amazed
who knew and loved
but one.

My father died in silence
loving creation
and well-defined response
he lived still judgments
on familiar things
and died knowing
a January 15th that year me.

Lest I go into dust
I have not ever seen my father's grave.

A Litany for Survival

By Audre Lorde

For those of us who live at the shoreline
standing upon the constant edges of decision
crucial and alone
for those of us who cannot indulge
the passing dreams of choice
who love in doorways coming and going
in the hours between dawns
looking inward and outward
at once before and after
seeking a now that can breed
futures
like bread in our children's mouths
so their dreams will not reflect
the death of ours;

For those of us
who were imprinted with fear
like a faint line in the center of our foreheads
learning to be afraid with our mother's milk
for by this weapon
this illusion of some safety to be found
the heavy-footed hoped to silence us
For all of us
this instant and this triumph
We were never meant to survive.

And when the sun rises we are afraid
it might not remain
when the sun sets we are afraid
it might not rise in the morning
when our stomachs are full we are afraid
of indigestion
when our stomachs are empty we are afraid
we may never eat again
when we are loved we are afraid
love will vanish
when we are alone we are afraid
love will never return

and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid

So it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive.

Movement Song

By Audre Lorde

I have studied the tight curls on the back of your neck
moving away from me
beyond anger or failure
your face in the evening schools of longing
through mornings of wish and ripen
we were always saying goodbye
in the blood in the bone over coffee
before dashing for elevators going
in opposite directions
without goodbyes.

Do not remember me as a bridge nor a roof
as the maker of legends
nor as a trap
door to that world
where black and white clericals
hang on the edge of beauty in five oclock elevators
twitching their shoulders to avoid other flesh
and now
there is someone to speak for them
moving away from me into tomorrows
morning of wish and ripen
your goodbye is a promise of lightning
in the last angels hand
unwelcome and warning
the sands have run out against us
we were rewarded by journeys
away from each other
into desire
into mornings alone
where excuse and endurance mingle
conceiving decision.

Do not remember me
as disaster
nor as the keeper of secrets
I am a fellow rider in the cattle cars
watching
you move slowly out of my bed
saying we cannot waste time
only ourselves.

Who Said It Was Simple

By Audre Lorde

There are so many roots to the tree of anger
that sometimes the branches shatter
before they bear.

Sitting in Nedicks
the women rally before they march
discussing the problematic girls
they hire to make them free.
An almost white counterman passes
a waiting brother to serve them first
and the ladies neither notice nor reject
the slighter pleasures of their slavery.
But I who am bound by my mirror
as well as my bed
see causes in colour
as well as sex

and sit here wondering
which me will survive
all these liberations.

To Althea, from Prison

By Richard Lovelace

When Love with unconfinèd wings
Hovers within my Gates,
And my divine *Althea* brings
To whisper at the Grates;
When I lie tangled in her hair,
And fettered to her eye,
The Gods that wanton in the Air,
Know no such Liberty.

When flowing Cups run swiftly round
With no allaying *Thames*,
Our careless heads with Roses bound,
Our hearts with Loyal Flames;
When thirsty grief in Wine we steep,
When Healths and draughts go free,
Fishes that tipple in the Deep
Know no such Liberty.

When (like committed linnets) I
With shriller throat shall sing
The sweetness, Mercy, Majesty,
And glories of my King;
When I shall voice aloud how good
He is, how Great should be,
Enlargèd Winds, that curl the Flood,
Know no such Liberty.

Stone Walls do not a Prison make,
Nor Iron bars a Cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an Hermitage.
If I have freedom in my Love,
And in my soul am free,
Angels alone that soar above,
Enjoy such Liberty.

To Lucasta, Going to the Wars

By Richard Lovelace

Tell me not (Sweet) I am unkind,
    That from the nunnery
Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind
    To war and arms I fly.

True, a new mistress now I chase,
    The first foe in the field;
And with a stronger faith embrace
    A sword, a horse, a shield.

Yet this inconstancy is such
    As you too shall adore;
I could not love thee (Dear) so much,
    Lov'd I not Honour more.

Two Gates

By Denise Low

I look through glass and see a young woman
of twenty, washing dishes, and the window
turns into a painting. She is myself thirty years ago.
She holds the same blue bowls and brass teapot
I still own. I see her outline against lamplight;
she knows only her side of the pane. The porch
where I stand is empty. Sunlight fades. I hear
water run in the sink as she lowers her head,
blind to the future. She does not imagine I exist.

I step forward for a better look and she dissolves
into lumber and paint. A gate I passed through
to the next life loses shape. Once more I stand
squared into the present, among maple trees
and scissor-tailed birds, in a garden, almost
a mother to that faint, distant woman.

Walking with My Delaware Grandfather

By Denise Low

Walking home I feel a presence following
and realize he is always there

that Native man with coal-black-hair who is
my grandfather. In my first memories

he is present, mostly wordless,
resident in the house where I was born.

My mother shows him the cleft in my chin
identical to his. I am swaddled

and blinking in the kitchen light. So
we are introduced. We never part.

Sometimes I forget he lodges in my house still
the bone-house where my heart beats.

I carry his mother's framework
a sturdy structure. I learn his birthright.

I hear his mother's teachings through

what my mother said of her:

She kept a pot of stew on the stove
all day for anyone to eat.

She never went to church but said
you could be a good person anyway.

She fed hoboes during the ‘30s,
her back porch a regular stop-over.

Every person has rights no matter
what color. Be respectful.

This son of hers, my grandfather,
still walks the streets with me.

Some twist of blood and heat still spark
across the time bridge. Here, listen:

Air draws through these lungs made from his.
His blood still pulses through this hand.

A Fixed Idea

By Amy Lowell

What torture lurks within a single thought
When grown too constant; and however kind,
However welcome still, the weary mind
Aches with its presence. Dull remembrance taught
Remembers on unceasingly; unsought
The old delight is with us but to find
That all recurring joy is pain refined,
Become a habit, and we struggle, caught.
You lie upon my heart as on a nest,
Folded in peace, for you can never know
How crushed I am with having you at rest
Heavy upon my life. I love you so
You bind my freedom from its rightful quest.
In mercy lift your drooping wings and go.

Interlude

By Amy Lowell

When I have baked white cakes
And grated green almonds to spread upon them;
When I have picked the green crowns from the strawberries
And piled them, cone-pointed, in a blue and yellow platter;
When I have smoothed the seam of the linen I have been working;
What then?
To-morrow it will be the same:
Cakes and strawberries,
And needles in and out of cloth.
If the sun is beautiful on bricks and pewter,
How much more beautiful is the moon,
Slanting down the gauffered branches of a plum-tree;
The moon,
Wavering across a bed of tulips;
The moon,
Still,
Upon your face.
You shine, Beloved,
You and the moon.
But which is the reflection?
The clock is striking eleven.
I think, when we have shut and barred the door,
The night will be dark
Outside.

Nuit Blanche

By Amy Lowell

I want no horns to rouse me up to-night,
And trumpets make too clamorous a ring
To fit my mood, it is so weary white
I have no wish for doing any thing.

A music coaxed from humming strings would please;
Not plucked, but drawn in creeping cadences
Across a sunset wall where some Marquise
Picks a pale rose amid strange silences.

Ghostly and vaporous her gown sweeps by
The twilight dusking wall, I hear her feet
Delaying on the gravel, and a sigh,
Briefly permitted, touches the air like sleet

And it is dark, I hear her feet no more.
A red moon leers beyond the lily-tank.
A drunken moon ogling a sycamore,
Running long fingers down its shining flank.

A lurching moon, as nimble as a clown,
Cuddling the flowers and trees which burn like glass.
Red, kissing lips, I feel you on my gown—
Kiss me, red lips, and then pass—pass.

Music, you are pitiless to-night.
And I so old, so cold, so languorously white.

September, 1918

By Amy Lowell

This afternoon was the colour of water falling through sunlight;
The trees glittered with the tumbling of leaves;
The sidewalks shone like alleys of dropped maple leaves,
And the houses ran along them laughing out of square, open windows.
Under a tree in the park,
Two little boys, lying flat on their faces,
Were carefully gathering red berries
To put in a pasteboard box.
Some day there will be no war,
Then I shall take out this afternoon
And turn it in my fingers,
And remark the sweet taste of it upon my palate,
And note the crisp variety of its flights of leaves.
To-day I can only gather it
And put it into my lunch-box,
For I have time for nothing
But the endeavour to balance myself
Upon a broken world.

Epilogue

By Robert Lowell

Those blessèd structures, plot and rhyme—
why are they no help to me now
I want to make
something imagined, not recalled?
I hear the noise of my own voice:

The painter's vision is not a lens,
it trembles to caress the light.
But sometimes everything I write
with the threadbare art of my eye
seems a snapshot,
lurid, rapid, garish, grouped,
heightened from life,
yet paralyzed by fact.
All's misalliance.
Yet why not say what happened?
Pray for the grace of accuracy
Vermeer gave to the sun's illumination
stealing like the tide across a map
to his girl solid with yearning.
We are poor passing facts,
warned by that to give
each figure in the photograph
his living name.

July in Washington

By Robert Lowell

The stiff spokes of this wheel
touch the sore spots of the earth.

On the Potomac, swan-white
power launches keep breasting the sulphurous wave.

Otters slide and dive and slick back their hair,
raccoons clean their meat in the creek.

On the circles, green statues ride like South American
liberators above the breeding vegetation—

prongs and spearheads of some equatorial
backland that will inherit the globe.

The elect, the elected . . . they come here bright as dimes,
and die dishevelled and soft.

We cannot name their names, or number their dates—
circle on circle, like rings on a tree—

but we wish the river had another shore,
some further range of delectable mountains,

distant hills powdered blue as a girl's eyelid.
It seems the least little shove would land us there,

that only the slightest repugnance of our bodies
we no longer control could drag us back.

Skunk Hour

By Robert Lowell

(For Elizabeth Bishop)

Nautilus Island's hermit
heiress still lives through winter in her Spartan cottage;
her sheep still graze above the sea.
Her son's a bishop. Her farmer
is first selectman in our village;
she's in her dotage.

Thirsting for
the hierarchic privacy
of Queen Victoria's century,
she buys up all
the eyesores facing her shore,
and lets them fall.

The season's ill—
we've lost our summer millionaire,
who seemed to leap from an L. L. Bean
catalogue. His nine-knot yawl
was auctioned off to lobstermen.
A red fox stain covers Blue Hill.

And now our fairy
decorator brightens his shop for fall;
his fishnet's filled with orange cork,
orange, his cobbler's bench and awl;
there is no money in his work,
he'd rather marry.

One dark night,
my Tudor Ford climbed the hill's skull;
I watched for love-cars . Lights turned down,
they lay together, hull to hull,
where the graveyard shelves on the town. . . .

My mind's not right.

A car radio bleats,
"Love, O careless Love. . . ." I hear
my ill-spirit sob in each blood cell,
as if my hand were at its throat. . . .
I myself am hell;
nobody's here—

only skunks, that search
in the moonlight for a bite to eat.
They march on their soles up Main Street:
white stripes, moonstruck eyes' red fire
under the chalk-dry and spar spire
of the Trinitarian Church.

I stand on top
of our back steps and breathe the rich air—
a mother skunk with her column of kittens swills the garbage pail
She jabs her wedge-head in a cup
of sour cream, drops her ostrich tail,
and will not scare.

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

Lunar Baedeker

By Mina Loy

A silver Lucifer
serves
cocaine in cornucopia

To some somnambulists
of adolescent thighs
draped
in satirical draperies

Peris in livery
prepare
Lethe
for posthumous parvenues

Delirious Avenues
lit

with the chandelier souls
of infusoria
from Pharoah's tombstones

lead
to mercurial doomsdays
Odious oasis
in furrowed phosphorous

the eye-white sky-light
white-light district
of lunar lusts

Stellectric signs
"Wing shows on Starway"
"Zodiac carrousel"

Cyclones
of ecstatic dust
and ashes whirl
crusaders
from hallucinatory citadels
of shattered glass
into evacuate craters

A flock of dreams
browse on Necropolis

From the shores
of oval oceans
in the oxidized Orient

Onyx-eyed Odalisques
and ornithologists
observe
the flight
of Eros obsolete

And "Immortality"
mildews ...
in the museums of the moon

"Nocturnal cyclops"
"Crystal concubine"

Pocked with personification

the fossil virgin of the skies
waxes and wanes

It’s the Little Towns I Like

By Thomas Lux

It’s the little towns I like
with their little mills making ratchets
and stanchions, elastic web,
spindles, you
name it. I like them in New England,
America, particularly-providing
bad jobs good enough to live on, to live in
families even: kindergarten,
church suppers, beach umbrellas ... The towns
are real, so fragile in their loneliness
a flood could come along
(and floods have) and cut them in two,
in half. There is no mayor,
the town council’s not prepared
for this, three of the four policemen
are stranded on their roofs ... and it doesn’t stop
raining. The mountain
is so thick with water parts of it just slide
down on the heifers—soggy, suicidal—
in the pastures below. It rains, it rains
in these towns and, because
there’s no other way, your father gets in a rowboat
so he can go to work.

Ode to the Electric Fish that Eat Only the Tails of Other Electric Fish,

By Thomas Lux

hich regenerate their tails
and also eat only the tails of other electric eels,
presumably smaller, who, in turn, eat ...
Without consulting an ichthyologist — eels
are fish — I defer to biology’s genius.
I know little of their numbers
and habitat, other than they are river dwellers.
Guess which river. I have only a note,
a note taken in reading
or fever — I can’t tell, from my handwriting, which. All

I know is it seems
sensible, sustainable: no fish dies,
nobody ever gets so hungry he bites off more
than a tail; the sting, the trauma
keeps the bitten fish lean and alert.
The need to hide while regrowing a tail teaches guile.
They'll eat smaller tails for a while.
These eels, these eels themselves are odes!

Tarantulas on the Lifebuoy

By Thomas Lux

For some semitropical reason
when the rains fall
relentlessly they fall

into swimming pools, these otherwise
bright and scary
arachnids. They can swim
a little, but not for long

and they can't climb the ladder out.
They usually drown—but
if you want their favor,
if you believe there is justice,
a reward for not loving

the death of ugly
and even dangerous (the eel, hog snake,
rats) creatures, if

you believe these things, then
you would leave a lifebuoy
or two in your swimming pool at night.

And in the morning
you would haul ashore
the huddled, hairy survivors

and escort them
back to the bush, and know,
be assured that at least these saved,
as individuals, would not turn up

again someday

in your hat, drawer,
or the tangled underworld

of your socks, and that even—
when your belief in justice
merges with your belief in dreams—
they may tell the others

in a sign language
four times as subtle
and complicated as man’s

that you are good,
that you love them,
that you would save them again.

The Larger

By Joanie Mackowski

I don't know how it happened, but I fell—
and I was immense, one dislocated arm
wedged between two buildings. I felt some ribs
had broken, perhaps a broken neck, too;
I couldn't speak. My dress caught bunched
about my thighs, and where my glasses shattered
there'd spread something like a seacoast, or maybe
it was a port. Where my hair tangled with power lines
I felt a hot puddle of blood.
                I must have passed out,
but when I woke, a crew of about fifty
was building a winding stairway beside my breast
and buttressing a platform on my sternum.
I heard, as through cotton, the noise of hammers,
circular saws, laughter, and some radio
droning songs about love. Out the corner
of one eye (I could open one eye a bit) I saw
my pocketbook, its contents scattered, my lipstick's
toppled silo glinting out of reach.
And then, waving a tiny flashlight, a man
entered my ear. I felt his boots sloshing
the blood trickling there. He never came out.
So some went looking, with flares, dogs, dynamite
even: they burst my middle ear and found
my skull, its cavern crammed with dark matter
like a cross between a fungus and a cloud.

They never found his body, though. And they never
found or tried to find an explanation,
I think, for me; they didn't seem to need one.
Even now my legs subdue that dangerous
sea, the water bright enough to cut
the skin, where a lighthouse, perched on the tip
of my great toe, each eight seconds rolls
another flawless pearl across the waves.
It keeps most ships from wrecking against my feet.
On clear days, people stand beside the light;
they watch the waves' blue heads slip up and down
and scan for landmarks on the facing shore.

Ars Poetica

By Archibald MacLeish

A poem should be palpable and mute
As a globed fruit,

Dumb
As old medallions to the thumb,

Silent as the sleeve-worn stone
Of casement ledges where the moss has grown—

A poem should be wordless
As the flight of birds.

*

A poem should be motionless in time
As the moon climbs,

Leaving, as the moon releases
Twig by twig the night-entangled trees,

Leaving, as the moon behind the winter leaves,
Memory by memory the mind—

A poem should be motionless in time
As the moon climbs.

*

A poem should be equal to:

Not true.

For all the history of grief
An empty doorway and a maple leaf.

For love
The leaning grasses and two lights above the sea—

A poem should not mean
But be.

Immortal Autumn

By Archibald MacLeish

I speak this poem now with grave and level voice
In praise of autumn, of the far-horn-winding fall.

I praise the flower-barren fields, the clouds, the tall
Unanswering branches where the wind makes sullen noise.

I praise the fall: it is the human season.
Now
No more the foreign sun does meddle at our earth,
Enforce the green and bring the fallow land to birth,
Nor winter yet weigh all with silence the pine bough,

But now in autumn with the black and outcast crows
Share we the spacious world: the whispering year is gone:
There is more room to live now: the once secret dawn
Comes late by daylight and the dark unguarded goes.

Between the mutinous brave burning of the leaves
And winter's covering of our hearts with his deep snow
We are alone: there are no evening birds: we know
The naked moon: the tame stars circle at our eaves.

It is the human season. On this sterile air
Do words outcarry breath: the sound goes on and on.
I hear a dead man's cry from autumn long since gone.

I cry to you beyond upon this bitter air.

You, Andrew Marvell

By Archibald MacLeish

And here face down beneath the sun
And here upon earth's noonward height
To feel the always coming on
The always rising of the night:

To feel creep up the curving east
The earthy chill of dusk and slow
Upon those under lands the vast
And ever climbing shadow grow

And strange at Ecbatan the trees
Take leaf by leaf the evening strange
The flooding dark about their knees
The mountains over Persia change

And now at Kermanshah the gate
Dark empty and the withered grass
And through the twilight now the late
Few travelers in the westward pass

And Baghdad darken and the bridge
Across the silent river gone
And through Arabia the edge
Of evening widen and steal on

And deepen on Palmyra's street
The wheel rut in the ruined stone
And Lebanon fade out and Crete
High through the clouds and overblown

And over Sicily the air
Still flashing with the landward gulls
And loom and slowly disappear
The sails above the shadowy hulls

And Spain go under and the shore
Of Africa the gilded sand
And evening vanish and no more
The low pale light across that land

Nor now the long light on the sea:

And here face downward in the sun

To feel how swift how secretly
The shadow of the night comes on ...

Entirely

By Louis MacNeice

If we could get the hang of it entirely
  It would take too long;
All we know is the splash of words in passing
  And falling twigs of song,
And when we try to eavesdrop on the great
  Presences it is rarely
That by a stroke of luck we can appropriate
  Even a phrase entirely.

If we could find our happiness entirely
  In somebody else's arms
We should not fear the spears of the spring nor the city's
  Yammering fire alarms
But, as it is, the spears each year go through
  Our flesh and almost hourly
Bell or siren banishes the blue
  Eyes of Love entirely.

And if the world were black or white entirely
  And all the charts were plain
Instead of a mad weir of tigerish waters,
  A prism of delight and pain,
We might be surer where we wished to go
  Or again we might be merely
Bored but in brute reality there is no
  Road that is right entirely.

Meeting Point

By Louis MacNeice

Time was away and somewhere else,
There were two glasses and two chairs
And two people with the one pulse
(Somebody stopped the moving stairs):
Time was away and somewhere else.

And they were neither up nor down;
The stream's music did not stop

Flowing through heather, limpid brown,
Although they sat in a coffee shop
And they were neither up nor down.

The bell was silent in the air
Holding its inverted poise—
Between the clang and clang a flower,
A brazen calyx of no noise:
The bell was silent in the air.

The camels crossed the miles of sand
That stretched around the cups and plates;
The desert was their own, they planned
To portion out the stars and dates:
The camels crossed the miles of sand.

Time was away and somewhere else.
The waiter did not come, the clock
Forgot them and the radio waltz
Came out like water from a rock:
Time was away and somewhere else.

Her fingers flicked away the ash
That bloomed again in tropic trees:
Not caring if the markets crash
When they had forests such as these,
Her fingers flicked away the ash.

God or whatever means the Good
Be praised that time can stop like this,
That what the heart has understood
Can verify in the body's peace
God or whatever means the Good.

Time was away and she was here
And life no longer what it was,
The bell was silent in the air
And all the room one glow because
Time was away and she was here.

Snow

By Louis MacNeice

The room was suddenly rich and the great bay-window was
Spawning snow and pink roses against it

Soundlessly collateral and incompatible:
World is suddener than we fancy it.

World is crazier and more of it than we think,
Incorrigibly plural. I peel and portion
A tangerine and spit the pips and feel
The drunkenness of things being various.

And the fire flames with a bubbling sound for world
Is more spiteful and gay than one supposes—
On the tongue on the eyes on the ears in the palms of one's hands—
There is more than glass between the snow and the huge roses.

What pleasure a question,

By Angie Macri

not an answer. She leaned
into the apple tree, which then
was evergreen, to the snake's
hands, sweet flesh, no need
to be ashamed. We share

and share alike, the peel
not loose like night on day,
but tight. She took the snake's
hands, diamondbacked,
and opened its question.

It was the first time she had
something to give, what
the man couldn't take, the first time
the man said please:
please let me have a bite.

He found the iron ore
and brought it home.
He found the coal under
the forest and lit it on fire
to watch it go

so the snake couldn't catch her
if she fell and she couldn't
hold anything but its tongue.
Never let the fire go out or else,
he warned, and she held on.

For the Consideration of Poets

By Haki R. Madhubuti

where is the poetry of resistance,
the poetry of honorable defiance
unafraid of lies from career politicians and business men,
not respectful of journalist who write
official speak void of educated thought
without double search or sub surface questions
that war talk demands?
where is the poetry of doubt and suspicion
not in the service of the state, bishops and priests,
not in the service of beautiful people and late night promises,
not in the service of influence, incompetence and academic
clown talk?

The Dream Play

By Derek Mahon

What night-rule now about this haunted grove?

The spirits have dispersed, the woods
faded to grey from midnight blue
leaving a powdery residue,
night music fainter, frivolous gods
withdrawing, cries of yin and yang,
discords of the bionic young;
cobweb and insects, hares and deer,
wild strawberries and eglantine,
dawn silence of the biosphere,
amid the branches a torn wing
— what is this enchanted place?
Not the strict groves of academe
but an old thicket of lost time
too cool for school, recovered space
where the brain yields to nose and ear,
folk remedy and herbal cure,
old narratives of heart and hand,
and a dazed donkey, starry eyed,
with pearls and honeysuckle crowned,
beside her naked nibs is laid.
Wild viruses, Elysian fields —
our own planet lit by the fire
of molten substance, constant flux,
hot ice and acrobatic sex,

the electric moth-touch of desire
and a new vision, a new regime
where the white blaze of physics yields
to yellow moonlight, dance and dream
induced by what mind-altering drug
or rough-cast magic realism;
till morning bright with ant and bug
shines in a mist of glistening gism,
shifting identities, mutant forms,
angels evolved from snails and worms.

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

The Mortician in San Francisco

By Randall Mann

This may sound queer,
but in 1985 I held the delicate hands
of Dan White:
I prepared him for burial; by then, Harvey Milk
was made monument—no, myth—by the years
since he was shot.

I remember when Harvey was shot:
twenty, and I knew I was queer.
Those were the years,
Levi's and leather jackets holding hands
on Castro Street, cheering for Harvey Milk—
elected on the same day as Dan White.

I often wonder about Supervisor White,
who fatally shot
Mayor Moscone and Supervisor Milk,
who was one of us, a Castro queer.
May 21, 1979: a jury hands
down the sentence, seven years—

in truth, five years—
for ex-cop, ex-fireman Dan White,
for the blood on his hands;
when he confessed that he had shot
the mayor and the queer,
a few men in blue cheered. And Harvey Milk?

Why cry over spilled milk,
some wondered, semi-privately, for years—
it meant “one less queer.”
The jurors turned to White.
If just the mayor had been shot,
Dan might have had trouble on his hands—

but the twelve who held his life in their hands
maybe didn’t mind the death of Harvey Milk;
maybe, the second murder offered him a shot
at serving only a few years.
In the end, he committed suicide, this Dan White.
And he was made presentable by a queer.

A History Without Suffering

By E. A. Markham

In this poem there is no suffering.
It spans hundreds of years and records
no deaths, connecting when it can,
those moments where people are healthy

and happy, content to be alive. A Chapter,
maybe a Volume, shorn of violence
consists of an adult reading aimlessly.
This line is the length of a full life

smuggled in while no one was plotting
against a neighbour, except in jest.
Then, after a gap, comes Nellie. She
is in a drought-fisted field

with a hoe. This is her twelfth year
on the land, and today her back
doesn’t hurt. Catechisms of self-pity
and of murder have declared a day’s truce

in the Civil War within her. So today,
we can bring Nellie, content with herself,
with the world, into our History.
For a day. In the next generation

we find a suitable subject camping
near the border of a divided country:
for a while no one knows how near. For these

few lines she is ours. But how about

the lovers? you ask, the freshly-washed
body close to yours; sounds, smells, tastes;
anticipation of the young, the edited memory
of the rest of us? How about thoughts

higher than their thinkers?...Yes, yes.
Give them half a line and a mass of footnotes:
they have their own privileged history,
like inherited income beside our husbandry.

We bring our History up to date
in a city like London: someone's just paid
the mortgage, is free of guilt
and not dying of cancer; and going

past the news-stand, doesn't see a headline
advertising torture. This is all
recommended reading, but in small doses.
It shows you can avoid suffering, if you try.

The Passionate Shepherd to His Love

By Christopher Marlowe

Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove,
That Valleys, groves, hills, and fields,
Woods, or steepy mountain yields.

And we will sit upon the Rocks,
Seeing the Shepherds feed their flocks,
By shallow Rivers to whose falls
Melodious birds sing Madrigals.

And I will make thee beds of Roses
And a thousand fragrant posies,
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle
Embroidered all with leaves of Myrtle;

A gown made of the finest wool
Which from our pretty Lambs we pull;
Fair lined slippers for the cold,
With buckles of the purest gold;

A belt of straw and Ivy buds,
With Coral clasps and Amber studs:
And if these pleasures may thee move,
Come live with me, and be my love.

The Shepherds' Swains shall dance and sing
For thy delight each May-morning:
If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me, and be my love.

Harold's Chicken Shack #86

By Nate Marshall

we're trying to eliminate the shack.
— Kristen Pierce, Harold's CEO & daughter of founder Harold Pierce

when i went to summer camp the white kids had a tendency
to shorten names of important institutions. make Northwestern
University into *NU*. international relations into *IR*. everybody
started calling me *Nate*. before this i imagined myself

Nathaniel A. maybe even *N. Armstead* to big up my granddad.
i wrote my whole name on everything. eventually i started
unintentionally introducing myself as *Nate*. it never occurred
to me that they could escape the knowing of my name's
real length. as a shorty

most the kids in my neighborhood couldn't say my name.
Mick-daniel, Nick-thaniel, MacDonnel shot across the courts
like wild heaves toward the basket. the subconscious visual
of a chicken shack seems a poor fit for national expansion.

Harold's Chicken is easier, sounds like Columbus's flag stuck
into a cup of cole slaw. shack sounds too much like home
of poor people, like haven for weary
like building our own.

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

The Only Mexican

By David Tomas Martinez

The only Mexican that ever was Mexican, fought in the revolution

and drank nightly, and like all machos, crawled into work crudo,

letting his breath twirl, then clap and sing before sandpaper
juiced the metal. The only Mexican to never sit in a Catholic pew

was born on Halloween, and ate his lunch wrapped in foil against
the fence with the other Mexicans. They fixed old Fords where my

grandfather worked for years, him and the welder Juan wagered
each year on who would return first to the Yucatan. Neither did.

When my aunts leave, my dad paces the living room and then rests,
like a jaguar who once drank rain off the leaves of Cecropia trees,

but now caged, bends his paw on a speaker to watch crowds pass.
He asks me to watch grandpa, which means, for the day; in town

for two weeks, I have tried my best to avoid this. Many times he will swear,
and many times grandpa will ask to get in and out of bed, want a sweater,

he will ask the time, he will use the toilet, frequently ask for beer,
about dinner, when the Padres play, por que no novelas, about bed.

He will ask about his house, grandma, to sit outside, he will question
while answering, he will smirk, he will invent languages while tucked in bed.

He will bump the table, tap the couch, he will lose his slipper, wedging it in
the wheel of his chair, like a small child trapped in a well, everyone will care.

He will cry without tears—a broken carburetor of sobs. When I speak
Spanish, he shakes his head, and reminds me, he is the only Mexican.

Rest before you sleep

By Dionisio D. Martínez

Requiem after Fauré, for my father

Rest before you sleep You'll be walking for hours
then as usual away from home your shoes
in your hand your feet not yet used to the road
Perhaps they need to feel the gravel
to know where they're headed

A woman I knew who lived mostly in the woods
mentioned the danger in presuming to know

what an animal thinks The fox for example
stopping by her open tent and looking in

I suppose she would've felt this way about your feet
She would've said how could anyone know
what a pair of tired feet need along the way

I would've asked her how she knew the feet
were tired Such discourse produces nothing
but anything less would be silence
and that would be intolerable
I wish I knew why I was telling you this

It's easier to read the mind of a fox than to guess
what a man's about to say when he returns
from the woods head full of roots veins
more like branches shoes in one hand feet
blistered and none of this necessarily
an indication of how the feet feel what miles
uphill and back have done to the soles
and to the small bones that propel a man

It's safe now I think to speak for the fox
who is only as cunning as we say it is
We're the only creatures that claim to be anything
then build a house of facts around the claim

I've come for vindication No point in trying
to disguise it as a lesser wish Wake up stop
while you still know where you are Put away
your elusive country Give your sleep a rest

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

It Is Not

By Valerie Martínez

We have the body of a woman, an arch over the ground, but there
is no danger. Her hair falls, spine bowed, but no one is with her.
The desert, yes, with its cacti, bursage, sidewinders. She is not in
danger. If we notice, there are the tracks of animals moving east
toward the sunrise. And the light is about to touch a woman's body
without possession. Here, there are no girl's bones in the earth,
marked with violence. A cholla blooms, just two feet away. It

blooms.

There is a man, like her father, who wakes to a note saying *I have gone, for a day, to the desert*. Now he knows she is in danger. He will try to anticipate what happens to a young woman, how it will happen, how he will deal with the terrible. In him, he feels he knows this somehow. He knows because there are men he knows who are capable. This place she has gone to, where? But it doesn't matter. There is, first of all, the heat which scorches, snakes with their coils and open mouths, men who go there with the very thing in mind. The very thing.

It is the desert on its own. Miles. Beyond what anyone can see. Not peaceful nor vengeful. It does not bow down; it is not danger. I cannot speak of it without easing or troubling myself. It is not panorama nor theatre. I do not know. It is conception—the gifts or burdens I bear, whether arch, a prayer, or danger. They can happen, yes, we conceive them. This very woman I know. The man does sit tortured. The desert, created, merely embodies its place.
And watch us lay our visions, O god, upon it.

The Definition of Love

By Andrew Marvell

My love is of a birth as rare
As ’tis for object strange and high;
It was begotten by Despair
Upon Impossibility.

Magnanimous Despair alone
Could show me so divine a thing
Where feeble Hope could ne’er have flown,
But vainly flapp’d its tinsel wing.

And yet I quickly might arrive
Where my extended soul is fixt,
But Fate does iron wedges drive,
And always crowds itself betwixt.

For Fate with jealous eye does see
Two perfect loves, nor lets them close;
Their union would her ruin be,
And her tyrannic pow’r depose.

And therefore her decrees of steel

Us as the distant poles have plac'd,
(Though love's whole world on us doth wheel)
Not by themselves to be embrac'd;

Unless the giddy heaven fall,
And earth some new convulsion tear;
And, us to join, the world should all
Be cramp'd into a planisphere.

As lines, so loves oblique may well
Themselves in every angle greet;
But ours so truly parallel,
Though infinite, can never meet.

Therefore the love which us doth bind,
But Fate so enviously debars,
Is the conjunction of the mind,
And opposition of the stars.

The Fair Singer

By Andrew Marvell

To make a final conquest of all me,
Love did compose so sweet an enemy,
In whom both beauties to my death agree,
Joining themselves in fatal harmony;
That while she with her eyes my heart does bind,
She with her voice might captivate my mind.

I could have fled from one but singly fair,
My disentangled soul itself might save,
Breaking the curled trammels of her hair.
But how should I avoid to be her slave,
Whose subtle art invisibly can wreath
My fetters of the very air I breathe?

It had been easy fighting in some plain,
Where victory might hang in equal choice,
But all resistance against her is vain,
Who has th'advantage both of eyes and voice,
And all my forces needs must be undone,
She having gained both the wind and sun.

On a Drop of Dew

By Andrew Marvell

See how the orient dew,
Shed from the bosom of the morn
  Into the blowing roses,
Yet careless of its mansion new,
For the clear region where ’twas born
  Round in itself incloses:
  And in its little globe’s extent,
Frames as it can its native element.
  How it the purple flow’r does slight,
    Scarce touching where it lies,
  But gazing back upon the skies,
    Shines with a mournful light,
      Like its own tear,
Because so long divided from the sphere.
  Restless it rolls and unsecure,
    Trembling lest it grow impure,
  Till the warm sun pity its pain,
And to the skies exhale it back again.
    So the soul, that drop, that ray
Of the clear fountain of eternal day,
Could it within the human flow’r be seen,
    Remembering still its former height,
    Shuns the sweet leaves and blossoms green,
    And recollecting its own light,
Does, in its pure and circling thoughts, express
The greater heaven in an heaven less.
    In how coy a figure wound,
    Every way it turns away:
    So the world excluding round,
    Yet receiving in the day,
    Dark beneath, but bright above,
    Here disdaining, there in love.
  How loose and easy hence to go,
  How girt and ready to ascend,
  Moving but on a point below,
  It all about does upwards bend.
Such did the manna’s sacred dew distill,
White and entire, though congealed and chill,
Congealed on earth : but does, dissolving, run
Into the glories of th’ almighty sun.

Song of the Powers

By David Mason

Mine, said the stone,
mine is the hour.
I crush the scissors,
such is my power.
Stronger than wishes,
my power, alone.

Mine, said the paper,
mine are the words
that smother the stone
with imagined birds,
reams of them, flown
from the mind of the shaper.

Mine, said the scissors,
mine all the knives
gashing through paper's
ethereal lives;
nothing's so proper
as tattering wishes.

As stone crushes scissors,
as paper snuffs stone
and scissors cut paper,
all end alone.
So heap up your paper
and scissor your wishes
and uproot the stone
from the top of the hill.
They all end alone
as you will, you will.

The Story of Ferdinand the Bull

By Matt Mason

Dad would come home after too long at work
and I'd sit on his lap to hear
the story of Ferdinand the Bull; every night,
me handing him the red book until I knew
every word, couldn't read,
just recite along with drawings
of a gentle bull, frustrated matadors,

the all-important bee, and flowers—
flowers in meadows and flowers
thrown by the Spanish ladies.
Its lesson, really,
about not being what you're born into
but what you're born to be,
even if that means
not caring about the capes they wave in your face
or the spears they cut into your shoulders.
And Dad, wonderful Dad, came home
after too long at work
and read to me
the same story every night
until I knew every word, couldn't read,
just recite.

Anne Rutledge

By Edgar Lee Masters

Out of me unworthy and unknown
The vibrations of deathless music;
"With malice toward none, with charity for all."
Out of me the forgiveness of millions toward millions,
And the beneficent face of a nation
Shining with justice and truth.
I am Anne Rutledge who sleep beneath these weeds,
Beloved in life of Abraham Lincoln,
Wedded to him, not through union,
But through separation.
Bloom forever, O Republic,
From the dust of my bosom!

Lucinda Matlock

By Edgar Lee Masters

I went to the dances at Chandlerville,
And played snap-out at Winchester.
One time we changed partners,
Driving home in the moonlight of middle June,
And then I found Davis.
We were married and lived together for seventy years,
Enjoying, working, raising the twelve children,
Eight of whom we lost
Ere I had reached the age of sixty.

I spun, I wove, I kept the house, I nursed the sick,
I made the garden, and for holiday
Rambled over the fields where sang the larks,
And by Spoon River gathering many a shell,
And many a flower and medicinal weed —
Shouting to the wooded hills, singing to the green valleys.
At ninety-six I had lived enough, that is all,
And passed to a sweet repose.
What is this I hear of sorrow and weariness,
Anger, discontent and drooping hopes?
Degenerate sons and daughters,
Life is too strong for you —
It takes life to love Life.

Mrs. Kessler

By Edgar Lee Masters

Mr. Kessler, you know, was in the army,
And he drew six dollars a month as a pension,
And stood on the corner talking politics,
Or sat at home reading Grant's *Memoirs*;
And I supported the family by washing,
Learning the secrets of all the people
From their curtains, counterpanes, shirts and skirts.
For things that are new grow old at length,
They're replaced with better or none at all:
People are prospering or falling back.
And rents and patches widen with time;
No thread or needle can pace decay,
And there are stains that baffle soap,
And there are colors that run in spite of you,
Blamed though you are for spoiling a dress.
Handkerchiefs, napery, have their secrets
The laundress, Life, knows all about it.
And I, who went to all the funerals
Held in Spoon River, swear I never
Saw a dead face without thinking it looked
Like something washed and ironed.

Unfunky UFO

By Adrian Matejka

The first space shuttle launch got delayed until
Sunday, so we had to watch the shuttle's return

to Earth in class instead—PS113's paunchy black
& white rolled in, the antennae on top adjusted
sideways & down for better reception. That same
day, Garrett stole my new pencil box. That same
day, Cynthia peed her jeans instead of going
to the bathroom & letting Garrett steal her pencil
box. Both of us too upset to answer questions about
space flight, so we got sent to the back of the class.
I smelled like the kind of shame that starts a fight
on a Tuesday afternoon. Cynthia smelled like pee
& everyday Jordache. The shuttle made its slick way
back to Earth, peeling clouds from the monochromatic
sky & we all—even the astronomically marginal—
were winners. American, because a few days before,
a failed songwriter put a bullet in the president
in the name of Jodie Foster. The shuttle looked
like a bullet, only with wings & a cockpit, & when
it finally landed, the class broke into applause
& the teacher snatched a thinning American flag
from the corner, waved it back & forth in honor
of our wounded president & those astronauts.

Mingus at the Showplace

By William Matthews

I was miserable, of course, for I was seventeen,
and so I swung into action and wrote a poem,

and it was miserable, for that was how I thought
poetry worked: you digested experience and shat

literature. It was 1960 at The Showplace, long since
defunct, on West 4th St., and I sat at the bar,

casting beer money from a thin reel of ones,
the kid in the city, big ears like a puppy.

And I knew Mingus was a genius. I knew two
other things, but they were wrong, as it happened.

So I made him look at the poem.
"There's a lot of that going around," he said,

and Sweet Baby Jesus he was right. He laughed
amiably. He didn't look as if he thought

bad poems were dangerous, the way some poets do.
If they were baseball executives they'd plot

to destroy sandlots everywhere so that the game
could be saved from children. Of course later

that night he fired his pianist in mid-number
and flurried him from the stand.

"We've suffered a diminuendo in personnel,"
he explained, and the band played on.

Onions

By William Matthews

How easily happiness begins by
dicing onions. A lump of sweet butter
slithers and swirls across the floor
of the sauté pan, especially if its
errant path crosses a tiny slick
of olive oil. Then a tumble of onions.

This could mean soup or risotto
or chutney (from the Sanskrit
chatni, to lick). Slowly the onions
go limp and then nacreous
and then what cookbooks call clear,
though if they were eyes you could see

clearly the cataracts in them.
It's true it can make you weep
to peel them, to unfurl and to tease
from the taut ball first the brittle,
caramel-colored and decrepit
papery outside layer, the least

recent the reticent onion
wrapped around its growing body,
for there's nothing to an onion
but skin, and it's true you can go on
weeping as you go on in, through
the moist middle skins, the sweetest

and thickest, and you can go on

in to the core, to the bud-like,
acrid, fibrous skins densely
clustered there, stalky and in-
complete, and these are the most
pungent, like the nuggets of nightmare

and rage and murmury animal
comfort that infant humans secrete.
This is the best domestic perfume.
You sit down to eat with a rumor
of onions still on your twice-washed
hands and lift to your mouth a hint

of a story about loam and usual
endurance. It's there when you clean up
and rinse the wine glasses and make
a joke, and you leave the minutest
whiff of it on the light switch,
later, when you climb the stairs.

Respiration

By Jamaal May

A lot of it lives in the trachea, you know.
But not so much that you won't need more muscle:
the diaphragm, a fist clenching at the bottom.
Inhale. So many of us are breathless,
you know, like me
kneeling to collect the pottery shards
of a house plant my elbow has nudged
into oblivion. What if I sigh,
and the black earth beneath me scatters
like insects running from my breath?
Am I a god then? Am I insane
because I worry about the disassembling of earth
regularly? I walk more softly now

into gardens or up the steps of old houses
with impatiens stuffed in their window boxes.
When it's you standing there with a letter
or voice or face full of solemn news,
will you hold your breath before you knock?

There Are Birds Here

By Jamaal May

For Detroit

There are birds here,
so many birds here
is what I was trying to say
when they said those birds were metaphors
for what is trapped
between buildings
and buildings. No.
The birds are here
to root around for bread
the girl's hands tear
and toss like confetti. No,
I don't mean the bread is torn like cotton,
I said confetti, and no
not the confetti
a tank can make of a building.
I mean the confetti
a boy can't stop smiling about
and no his smile isn't much
like a skeleton at all. And no
his neighborhood is not like a war zone.
I am trying to say
his neighborhood
is as tattered and feathered
as anything else,
as shadow pierced by sun
and light parted
by shadow-dance as anything else,
but they won't stop saying
how lovely the ruins,
how ruined the lovely
children must be in that birdless city.

Ice

By Gail Mazur

In the warming house, children lace their skates,
bending, choked, over their thick jackets.

A Franklin stove keeps the place so cozy
it's hard to imagine why anyone would leave,

clumping across the frozen beach to the river.
December's always the same at Ware's Cove,

the first sheer ice, black, then white
and deep until the city sends trucks of men

with wooden barriers to put up the boys'
hockey rink. An hour of skating after school,

of trying wobbly figure-8's, an hour
of distances moved backwards without falling,

then—twilight, the warming house steamy
with girls pulling on boots, their chafed legs

aching. Outside, the hockey players keep
playing, slamming the round black puck

until it's dark, until supper. At night,
a shy girl comes to the cove with her father.

Although there isn't music, they glide
arm in arm onto the blurred surface together,

braced like dancers. She thinks she'll never
be so happy, for who else will find her graceful,

find her perfect, skate with her
in circles outside the emptied rink forever?

The Art Room

By Shara McCallum

for my sisters

Because we did not have threads
of turquoise, silver, and gold,
we could not sew a sun nor sky.
And our hands became balls of fire.
And our arms spread open like wings.

Because we had no chalk or pastels,
no toad, forest, or morning-grass slats
of paper, we had no colour

for creatures. So we squatted
and sprang, squatted and sprang.

Four young girls, plaits heavy
on our backs, our feet were beating
drums, drawing rhythms from the floor;
our mouths became woodwinds;
our tongues touched teeth and were reeds.

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

What the Oracle Said

By Shara McCallum

You will leave your home:
nothing will hold you.
You will wear dresses of gold; skins
of silver, copper, and bronze.
The sky above you will shift in meaning
each time you think you understand.
You will spend a lifetime chipping away layers
of flesh. The shadow of your scales
will always remain. You will be marked
by sulphur and salt.
You will bathe endlessly in clear streams and fail
to rid yourself of that scent.
Your feet will never be your own.
Stone will be your path.
Storms will follow in your wake,
destroying all those who take you in.
You will desert your children
kill your lovers and devour their flesh.
You will love no one
but the wind and ache of your bones.
Neither will love you in return.
With age, your hair will grow matted and dull,
your skin will gape and hang in long folds,
your eyes will cease to shine.
But nothing will be enough.
The sea will never take you back.

A January Dandelion

By George Marion McClellan

All Nashville is a chill. And everywhere
Like desert sand, when the winds blow,
There is each moment sifted through the air,
A powdered blast of January snow.
O! thoughtless Dandelion, to be misled
By a few warm days to leave thy natural bed,
Was folly growth and blooming over soon.
And yet, thou blasted yellow-coated gem,
Full many a heart has but a common boon
With thee, now freezing on thy slender stem.
When the heart has bloomed by the touch of love's warm breath
Then left and chilling snow is sifted in,
It still may beat but there is blast and death
To all that blooming life that might have been.

The Mystery of the Hunt

By Michael McClure

It's the mystery of the hunt that intrigues me,
That drives us like lemmings, but cautiously—
The search for a bright square cloud—the scent of lemon verbena—
Or to learn rules for the game the sea otters
Play in the surf.

It is these small things—and the secret behind them
That fill the heart.
The pattern, the spirit, the fiery demon
That link them together
And pull their freedom into our senses,

The smell of a shrub, a cloud, the action of animals

—The rising, the exuberance, when the mystery is unveiled.
It is these small things

That when brought into vision become an inferno.

In Flanders Fields

By John McCrae

In Flanders fields the poppies blow

Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie,
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

The Pilgrims

By John McCrae

An uphill path, sun-gleams between the showers,
Where every beam that broke the leaden sky
Lit other hills with fairer ways than ours;
Some clustered graves where half our memories lie;
And one grim Shadow creeping ever nigh:
And this was Life.

Wherein we did another's burden seek,
The tired feet we helped upon the road,
The hand we gave the weary and the weak,
The miles we lightened one another's load,
When, faint to falling, onward yet we strode:
This too was Life.

Till, at the upland, as we turned to go
Amid fair meadows, dusky in the night,
The mists fell back upon the road below;
Broke on our tired eyes the western light;
The very graves were for a moment bright:
And this was Death.

We’re Human Beings

By Jill McDonough

That's why we're here, said Julio Lugo
to the *Globe*. Sox fans booed
poor Lugo, booed his at-bat after
he dropped the ball in the pivotal fifth.

That ball, I got to it, I just
couldn't come up with it.

Lugo wants you to know
he is fast: a slower player
wouldn't even get close
enough to get booed. Lugo
wants you to know he's only
human: *We're human beings*.
That's why we're here. If not,

I would have wings.
I'd be beside God right now.
I'd be an angel.

But I'm not an angel.
I'm a human being that lives right here.

Next day, all
is forgiven. Lugo's home run, Lugo's
sweet comment to the press.

I wanted to make a poster like the ones that say
It's my birthday! or *First Time at Fenway*! or, pathetic, *ESPN*.
Posterboard, permanent marker to say *Lugo*: *me, too*.
I'm a human being that lives right here, decided
it's too esoteric, too ephemeral a reference, but it's true:
Oh, Lugo, Julio Lugo, I'm here with you.

He Mele Aloha no ka Niu

By Brandy Nālani McDougall

I’m so tired of pretending
each gesture is meaningless,

that the clattering of niu leaves
and the guttural call of birds

overhead say nothing.
There are reasons why

the lichen and moss kākau
the niu's bark, why

this tree has worn
an ahu of ua and lā

since birth. Scars were carved
into its trunk to record

the moʻolelo of its being
by the passage of insects

becoming one to move
the earth, speck by speck.

Try to tell them to let go
of the niu rings marking

each passing year, to abandon
their only home and move on.

I can't pretend there is
no memory held

in the dried coconut hat,
the star ornament, the midribs

bent and dangling away
from their roots, no thought

behind the kāwelewele
that continues to hold us

steady. There was a time
before they were bent

under their need to make
an honest living, when

each frond was bound
by its life to another

like a long, erect fin
skimming the surface

of a sea of grass and sand.
Eventually, it knew it would rise

higher, its flower would emerge
gold, then darken in the sun,

that its fruit would fall, only
to ripen before its brown fronds

bent naturally under the weight
of such memory, back toward

the trunk to drop to the sand,
back to its beginnings, again.

Let this be enough to feed us,
to remember: ka wailewa

i loko, that our own bodies
are buoyant when they bend

and fall, and that the ocean
shall carry us and weave us

back into the sand's fabric,
that the mo'opuna taste our sweet.

Born Like the Pines

By James Ephraim McGirt

Born like the pines to sing,
  The harp and song in m' breast,
Though far and near,
There's none to hear,
I'll sing as th' winds request.

To tell the trend of m' lay,
  Is not for th' harp or me;
I'm only to know,
From the winds that blow,
What th' theme of m' song shall be.

Born like the pines to sing,
  The harp and th' song in m' breast,
As th' winds sweep by,
I'll laugh or cry,
In th' winds I cannot rest.

Nothing to Do

By James Ephraim McGirt

The fields are white;
The laborers are few;
Yet say the idle:
There's nothing to do.

Jails are crowded;
In Sunday-schools few;
We still complain:
There's nothing to do.

Drunkards are dying—
Your sons, it is true;
Mothers' arms folded
With nothing to do.

Heathens are dying;
Their blood falls on you;
How can you people
Find nothing to do?

Pentatina for Five Vowels

By Campbell McGrath

Today is a trumpet to set the hounds baying.
The past is a fox the hunters are flaying.
Nothing unspoken goes without saying.
Love's a casino where lovers risk playing.
The future's a marker our hearts are prepaying.

The future's a promise there's no guaranteeing.
Today is a fire the field mice are fleeing.
Love is a marriage of feeling and being.
The past is a mirror for wishful sightseeing.
Nothing goes missing without absenteeing.

Nothing gets cloven except by dividing.
The future is chosen by atoms colliding.
The past's an elision forever eliding.
Today is a fog bank in which I am hiding.
Love is a burn forever debriding.

Love's an ascent forever plateauing.
Nothing is granted except by bestowing.
Today is an anthem the cuckoos are crowing.
The future's a convolute river onflowing.
The past is a lawn the neighbor is mowing.

The past is an answer not worth pursuing,
Nothing gets done except by the doing.
The future's a climax forever ensuing.
Love is only won by wooing.
Today is a truce between reaping and rueing.

Ode for the American Dead in Asia

By Thomas McGrath

1.

God love you now, if no one else will ever,
Corpse in the paddy, or dead on a high hill
In the fine and ruinous summer of a war
You never wanted. All your false flags were
Of bravery and ignorance, like grade school maps:
Colors of countries you would never see—
Until that weekend in eternity
When, laughing, well armed, perfectly ready to kill
The world and your brother, the safe commanders sent
You into your future. Oh, dead on a hill,
Dead in a paddy, leeched and tumbled to
A tomb of footnotes. We mourn a changeling: you:
Handselled to poverty and drummed to war
By distinguished masters whom you never knew.

2.

The bee that spins his metal from the sun,
The shy mole drifting like a miner ghost
Through midnight earth—all happy creatures run
As strict as trains on rails the circuits of
Blind instinct. Happy in your summer follies,

You mined a culture that was mined for war:
The state to mold you, church to bless, and always
The elders to confirm you in your ignorance.
No scholar put your thinking cap on nor
Warned that in dead seas fishes died in schools
Before inventing legs to walk the land.
The rulers stuck a tennis racket in your hand,
An Ark against the flood. In time of change
Courage is not enough: the blind mole dies,
And you on your hill, who did not know the rules.

3.

Wet in the windy counties of the dawn
The lone crow skirls his draggled passage home:
And God (whose sparrows fall aslant his gaze,
Like grace or confetti) blinks and he is gone,
And you are gone. Your scarecrow valor grows
And rusts like early lilac while the rose
Blooms in Dakota and the stock exchange
Flowers. Roses, rents, all things conspire
To crown your death with wreaths of living fire.
And the public mourners come: the politic tear
Is cast in the Forum. But, in another year,
We will mourn you, whose fossil courage fills
The limestone histories: brave: ignorant: amazed:
Dead in the rice paddies, dead on the nameless hills.

In Praise of Pain

By Heather McHugh

A brilliance takes up residence in flaws—
a brilliance all the unchipped faces of design
refuse. The wine collects its starlets
at a lip's fault, sunlight where the nicked
glass angles, and affection where the eye
is least correctable, where arrows of
unquivered light are lodged, where someone
else's eyes have come to be concerned.

For beauty's sake, assault and drive and burn
the devil from the simply perfect sun.
Demand a birthmark on the skin of love,
a tremble in the touch, in come a cry,
and let the silverware of nights be flecked,

the moon pocked to distribute more or less
indwelling alloys of its dim and shine
by nip and tuck, by chance's dance of laws.

The brightness drawn and quartered on a sheet,
the moment cracked upon a bed, will last
as if you soldered them with moon and flux.
And break the bottle of the eye to see
what lights are spun of accident and glass.

After the Winter

By Claude McKay

Some day, when trees have shed their leaves
    And against the morning's white
The shivering birds beneath the eaves
    Have sheltered for the night,
We'll turn our faces southward, love,
    Toward the summer isle
Where bamboos spire the shafted grove
    And wide-mouthed orchids smile.

And we will seek the quiet hill
    Where towers the cotton tree,
And leaps the laughing crystal rill,
    And works the droning bee.
And we will build a cottage there
    Beside an open glade,
With black-ribbed blue-bells blowing near,
    And ferns that never fade.

If We Must Die

By Claude McKay

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursèd lot.
If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,

And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

Lions

By Sandra McPherson

Lions don't need your help. In the Serengeti,
For instance, one thousand like the very rich

Hold sway over more than Connecticut. The mane
Of the lion, like the hooked jaw of the male salmon,

Acts as a shield for defense and is the gift
Of sexual selection. His eyes are fathomless amber.

The lion is the most social of the big cats.
Pride members are affectionate among themselves.

They rub cheeks when they meet. They rest
And hunt together. And cubs suckle indiscriminately.

But strangers or members of a neighboring pride are not
Usually accepted. If a pride male meets a strange female

He may greet her in a friendly fashion
And even mate with her

But the pride females will drive her off.
Male lions, usually depicted as indolent freeloaders

Who let the lionesses do all the hunting, are not mere
Parasites. They maintain the integrity of the territory.

Lions eat communally but completely lack table manners.
Indeed, lions give the impression that their evolution

Toward a social existence is incomplete—that cooperation
In achieving a task does not yet include

The equal division of the spoils.
More bad news: lions are not good parents.

But prowess, that they have. Their courage comes

From being built, like an automobile,

For power. A visible lion is usually a safe lion,
But one should never feel safe

Because almost always there is something one can't see.
Given protection and power

A lion does not need to be clever.
Now, lions are not the most likable kind of animal

Unless you are a certain type of person,
That is, not necessarily leonine in the sense of manly

Or ferocious, but one who wouldn't mind resting twenty
Of twenty-four hours a day and who is not beyond

Stealing someone else's kill
About half the time.

Lions are not my favorite kind of animal,
Gazelles seem nicer,

A zebra has his own sort of appealing pathos,
Especially when he is sure prey for the lion.

Lions have little to offer the spirit.
If we made of ourselves parks and placed the lion

In the constituent he most resembled
He would be in our blood.

Here

By Joshua Mehigan

Nothing has changed. They have a welcome sign,
a hill with cows and a white house on top,
a mall and grocery store where people shop,
a diner where some people go to dine.
It is the same no matter where you go,
and downtown you will find no big surprises.
Each fall the dew point falls until it rises.
White snow, green buds, green lawn, red leaves, white snow.

This is all right. This is their hope. And yet,

though what you see is never what you get,
it does feel somehow changed from what it was.
Is it the people? Houses? Fields? The weather?
Is it the streets? Is it these things together?
Nothing here ever changes, till it does.

The Hill

By Joshua Mehigan

On the crowded hill bordering the mill,
across the shallow stream, nearer than they seem,
they wait and will be waiting.

Rain. The small smilax is the same to the fly
as the big bush of lilacs exploding nearby.
The rain may be abating.

On the quiet hill beside the droning mill,
across the dirty stream, nearer than they seem,
they wait and will be waiting.

The glass-eyed cicada drones in the linden draped like a tent
above three polished stones. Aphids swarm at the scent
of the yellow petals.

A bird comes to prod a clump of wet fur.
The ferns idiotically nod when she takes it away with her.
Something somewhere settles.

On the crowded hill bordering the mill
is our best cemetery, pretty, but not very.
All are welcome here.

Sun finds a bare teak box on the tidy green plot.
It finds lichen-crusted blocks fringed with forget-me-not.
Angels preen everywhere.

On the crowded hill bordering the mill
is our best cemetery, pretty, but not very.
All are welcome here.

Future Memories

By Mario Meléndez
Translated By Eloisa Amezcua

My sister woke me very early
that morning and told me
"Get up, you have to come see this
the ocean's filled with stars"
Delighted by the revelation
I dressed quickly and thought
If the ocean's filled with stars
I must take the first flight
and collect all of the fish from the sky

The Maldive Shark

By Herman Melville

About the Shark, phlegmatical one,
Pale sot of the Maldive sea,
The sleek little pilot-fish, azure and slim,
How alert in attendance be.
From his saw-pit of mouth, from his charnel of maw
They have nothing of harm to dread,
But liquidly glide on his ghastly flank
Or before his Gorgonian head;
Or lurk in the port of serrated teeth
In white triple tiers of glittering gates,
And there find a haven when peril's abroad,
An asylum in jaws of the Fates!
They are friends; and friendly they guide him to prey,
Yet never partake of the treat—
Eyes and brains to the dotard lethargic and dull,
Pale ravener of horrible meat.

Shiloh: A Requiem (April, 1862)

By Herman Melville

Skimming lightly, wheeling still,
    The swallows fly low
Over the field in clouded days,
    The forest-field of Shiloh—
Over the field where April rain

Solaced the parched ones stretched in pain
Through the pause of night
That followed the Sunday fight
    Around the church of Shiloh—
The church so lone, the log-built one,
That echoed to many a parting groan
        And natural prayer
    Of dying foemen mingled there—
Foemen at morn, but friends at eve—
    Fame or country least their care:
(What like a bullet can undeceive!)
    But now they lie low,
While over them the swallows skim,
    And all is hushed at Shiloh.

At Cross Purposes

By Samuel Menashe

1
Is this writing mine
Whose name is this
Did I underline
What I was to miss?

2
An upheaval of leaves
Enlightens the tree
Rooted it receives
Gusts on a spree

3
Beauty makes me sad
Makes me grieve
I see what I must leave

4
Scaffold, gallows
Do whose will
Who hallows wood
To build, kill

5
Blind man, anvil
No hammer strikes
Your eyes are spikes

Infelix

By Adah Isaacs Menken

Where is the promise of my years;
   Once written on my brow?
Ere errors, agonies and fears
Brought with them all that speaks in tears,
Ere I had sunk beneath my peers;
   Where sleeps that promise now?

Naught lingers to redeem those hours,
   Still, still to memory sweet!
The flowers that bloomed in sunny bowers
Are withered all; and Evil towers
Supreme above her sister powers
   Of Sorrow and Deceit.

I look along the columned years,
   And see Life's riven fane,
Just where it fell, amid the jeers
Of scornful lips, whose mocking sneers,
For ever hiss within mine ears
   To break the sleep of pain.

I can but own my life is vain
   A desert void of peace;
I missed the goal I sought to gain,
I missed the measure of the strain
That lulls Fame's fever in the brain,
   And bids Earth's tumult cease.

Myself! alas for theme so poor
   A theme but rich in Fear;
I stand a wreck on Error's shore,
A spectre not within the door,
A houseless shadow evermore,
   An exile lingering here.

Dirge in Woods

By George Meredith

A wind sways the pines,
        And below
Not a breath of wild air;
Still as the mosses that glow

On the flooring and over the lines
Of the roots here and there.
The pine-tree drops its dead;
They are quiet, as under the sea.
Overhead, overhead
Rushes life in a race,
As the clouds the clouds chase;
        And we go,
And we drop like the fruits of the tree,
        Even we,
        Even so.

Catch a Little Rhyme

By Eve Merriam

Once upon a time
I caught a little rhyme

I set it on the floor
but it ran right out the door

I chased it on my bicycle
but it melted to an icicle

I scooped it up in my hat
but it turned into a cat

I caught it by the tail
but it stretched into a whale

I followed it in a boat
but it changed into a goat

When I fed it tin and paper
it became a tall skyscraper

Then it grew into a kite
and flew far out of sight ...

Good People

By W.S. Merwin

From the kindness of my parents
I suppose it was that I held

that belief about suffering

imagining that if only
it could come to the attention
of any person with normal
feelings certainly anyone
literate who might have gone

to college they would comprehend
pain when it went on before them
and would do something about it
whenever they saw it happen
in the time of pain the present
they would try to stop the bleeding
for example with their own hands

but it escapes their attention
or there may be reasons for it
the victims under the blankets
the meat counters the maimed children
the animals the animals
staring from the end of the world

The Night of the Shirts

By W.S. Merwin

Oh pile of white shirts who is coming
to breathe in your shapes to carry your numbers
to appear
what hearts
are moving toward their garments here
their days
what troubles beating between arms

you look upward through
each other saying nothing has happened
and it has gone away and is sleeping
having told the same story
and we exist from within
eyes of the gods

you lie on your backs
and the wounds are not made
the blood has not heard
the boat has not turned to stone

and the dark wires to the bulb
are full of the voice of the unborn

The River of Bees

By W.S. Merwin

In a dream I returned to the river of bees
Five orange trees by the bridge and
Beside two mills my house
Into whose courtyard a blindman followed
The goats and stood singing
Of what was older

Soon it will be fifteen years

He was old he will have fallen into his eyes

I took my eyes
A long way to the calendars
Room after room asking how shall I live

One of the ends is made of streets
One man processions carry through it
Empty bottles their
Image of hope
It was offered to me by name

Once once and once
In the same city I was born
Asking what shall I say

He will have fallen into his mouth
Men think they are better than grass

I return to his voice rising like a forkful of hay

He was old he is not real nothing is real
Nor the noise of death drawing water

We are the echo of the future

On the door it says what to do to survive
But we were not born to survive
Only to live

To Luck

By W.S. Merwin

In the cards and at the bend in the road
we never saw you
in the womb and in the crossfire
in the numbers
whatever you had your hand in
which was everything
we were told never to put
our faith in you
to bow to you humbly after all
because in the end there was nothing
else we could do
but not to believe in you

still we might coax you with pebbles
kept warm in the hand
or coins or the relics
of vanished animals
observances rituals
not binding upon you
who make no promises
we might do such things only
not to neglect you
and risk your disfavor
oh you who are never the same
who are secret as the day when it comes
you whom we explain
as often as we can
without understanding

Vixen

By W.S. Merwin

Comet of stillness princess of what is over
high note held without trembling without voice without sound
aura of complete darkness keeper of the kept secrets
of the destroyed stories the escaped dreams the sentences
never caught in words warden of where the river went
touch of its surface sibyl of the extinguished
window onto the hidden place and the other time
at the foot of the wall by the road patient without waiting
in the full moonlight of autumn at the hour when I was born
you no longer go out like a flame at the sight of me

you are still warmer than the moonlight gleaming on you
even now you are unharmed even now perfect
as you have always been now when your light paws are running
on the breathless night on the bridge with one end I remember you
when I have heard you the soles of my feet have made answer
when I have seen you I have waked and slipped from the calendars
from the creeds of difference and the contradictions
that were my life and all the crumbling fabrications
as long as it lasted until something that we were
had ended when you are no longer anything
let me catch sight of you again going over the wall
and before the garden is extinct and the woods are figures
guttering on a screen let my words find their own
places in the silence after the animals

Advection Blues

By Michael Metivier

The mower alone
saw from the median
the cloud come over
the mountain down to trawl
the valley like a whale
and the swifts like water
passing through her white baleen.

The mower alone patrolling
the haw with the hawks
saw from the median
the cloud come over
the mountain to swallow
where the sky had been
and where the town had been
pinned by steeples
and hummed electric hubris.

For everyone else
on either side of the narrow
the cloud was only a minute
of a single verse
because the highway treats the blues
as all the same as if Bentonia
were Sunflower County
but the land between the lanes
even while under the blades

sees the power in every cloud
and hears each song spiral out
of an old familiar tune just so
to devour our hearts.

Not for That City

By Charlotte Mew

Not for that city of the level sun,
    Its golden streets and glittering gates ablaze—
    The shadeless, sleepless city of white days,
White nights, or nights and days that are as one—
We weary, when all is said , all thought, all done.
    We strain our eyes beyond this dusk to see
    What, from the threshold of eternity
We shall step into. No, I think we shun
The splendour of that everlasting glare,
  The clamour of that never-ending song.
  And if for anything we greatly long,
It is for some remote and quiet stair
    Which winds to silence and a space for sleep
    Too sound for waking and for dreams too deep.

Desert

By Josephine Miles

When with the skin you do acknowledge drought,
The dry in the voice, the lightness of feet, the fine
Flake of the heat at every level line;

When with the hand you learn to touch without
Surprise the spine for the leaf, the prickled petal,
The stone scorched in the shine, and the wood brittle;

Then where the pipe drips and the fronds sprout
And the foot-square forest of clover blooms in sand,
You will lean and watch, but never touch with your hand.

September 1934

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

On Inhabiting an Orange

By Josephine Miles

All our roads go nowhere.
Maps are curled
To keep the pavement definitely
On the world.

All our footsteps, set to make
Metric advance,
Lapse into arcs in deference
To circumstance.

All our journeys nearing Space
Skirt it with care,
Shying at the distances
Present in air.

Blithely travel-stained and worn,
Erect and sure,
All our travels go forth,
Making down the roads of Earth
Endless detour.

Mansplaining

By Jennifer Militello

Dear sir, your air of authority
leaves me lost. Eases me from
a place of ease. Contracts with
my contradictions to take from me
a place. Autopilots my autobiography.
Frightens my fright. Sighs with
my breath. Wins at my race.
Your certainty has me curtained.
Your nerve has me nervous. Your
childhood has me childlike and
your nastiness nests in my belfry
like a hawk. You are beyond
and above my slice of sky, peach
as a pie, bourbon as its pit. You are
spit and vinegar while I sour
in my bowl. You bowl me over
while I tread lightly on
my feet. You walk on water

while I sink. You witness me,
fisherman, boat on the lake,
while I struggle and burble and brittle
and drop. You wink at me and
I must relate. I close my eyes
to erase you and you are written
in my lids. A litmus test. A form
of lair. God with three days
of facial growth and an old bouquet
for a face. Soap and water for
a brain. I have no handsome
answer. I have no pillar of salt
or shoulder to look over. I have
no feather to weigh. I have no
bubble to burst. I am less
to myself, a character in a drama,
a drumbeat, a benevolence, a
blight. All parts of me say shoot
on sight. Aim for an artery
or organ. Good night.

Dirge Without Music

By Edna St. Vincent Millay

I am not resigned to the shutting away of loving hearts in the hard ground.
So it is, and so it will be, for so it has been, time out of mind:
Into the darkness they go, the wise and the lovely. Crowned
With lilies and with laurel they go; but I am not resigned.

Lovers and thinkers, into the earth with you.
Be one with the dull, the indiscriminate dust.
A fragment of what you felt, of what you knew,
A formula, a phrase remains,—but the best is lost.

The answers quick and keen, the honest look, the laughter, the love,—
They are gone. They are gone to feed the roses. Elegant and curled
Is the blossom. Fragrant is the blossom. I know. But I do not approve.
More precious was the light in your eyes than all the roses in the world.

Down, down, down into the darkness of the grave
Gently they go, the beautiful, the tender, the kind;
Quietly they go, the intelligent, the witty, the brave.
I know. But I do not approve. And I am not resigned.

Ebb

By Edna St. Vincent Millay

I know what my heart is like
    Since your love died:
It is like a hollow ledge
Holding a little pool
    Left there by the tide,
    A little tepid pool,
Drying inward from the edge.

“I think I should have loved you presently”

By Edna St. Vincent Millay

I think I should have loved you presently,
And given in earnest words I flung in jest;
And lifted honest eyes for you to see,
And caught your hand against my cheek and breast;
And all my pretty follies flung aside
That won you to me, and beneath your gaze,
Naked of reticence and shorn of pride,
Spread like a chart my little wicked ways.
I, that had been to you, had you remained,
But one more waking from a recurrent dream,
Cherish no less the certain stakes I gained,
And walk your memory’s halls, austere, supreme,
A ghost in marble of a girl you knew
Who would have loved you in a day or two.

Recuerdo

By Edna St. Vincent Millay

We were very tired, we were very merry—
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.
It was bare and bright, and smelled like a stable—
But we looked into a fire, we leaned across a table,
We lay on a hill-top underneath the moon;
And the whistles kept blowing, and the dawn came soon.

We were very tired, we were very merry—
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry;
And you ate an apple, and I ate a pear,
From a dozen of each we had bought somewhere;
And the sky went wan, and the wind came cold,

And the sun rose dripping, a bucketful of gold.

We were very tired, we were very merry,
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.
We hailed, “Good morrow, mother!” to a shawl-covered head,
And bought a morning paper, which neither of us read;
And she wept, “God bless you!” for the apples and pears,
And we gave her all our money but our subway fares.

“Time does not bring relief; you all have lied”

By Edna St. Vincent Millay

Time does not bring relief; you all have lied
Who told me time would ease me of my pain!
I miss him in the weeping of the rain;
I want him at the shrinking of the tide;
The old snows melt from every mountain-side,
And last year’s leaves are smoke in every lane;
But last year’s bitter loving must remain
Heaped on my heart, and my old thoughts abide.
There are a hundred places where I fear
To go,—so with his memory they brim.
And entering with relief some quiet place
Where never fell his foot or shone his face
I say, “There is no memory of him here!”
And so stand stricken, so remembering him.

“What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why”

By Edna St. Vincent Millay

What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why,
I have forgotten, and what arms have lain
Under my head till morning; but the rain
Is full of ghosts tonight, that tap and sigh
Upon the glass and listen for reply,
And in my heart there stirs a quiet pain
For unremembered lads that not again
Will turn to me at midnight with a cry.

Thus in the winter stands the lonely tree,
Nor knows what birds have vanished one by one,
Yet knows its boughs more silent than before:
I cannot say what loves have come and gone,
I only know that summer sang in me

A little while, that in me sings no more.

New wings

By Alice Miller

Looking out at a man's name on a battered wingtip
in strong winds; was it planned that when
the cheap wing bends, the name stays steady?
What if it didn't matter how much
you trod over the body of your mother, what happened
when you were younger, how you tried forgetting
and forgot to forgive. Something has to hold you: numbers, columns,
cards to swipe, books to shelve,

pints to pour. A life filled with fixed wings, with hard grasps,
with the grateful. What's worth keeping?
Not the sad boy who blamed you for all the ways he was broken.
Not the man's name on the wing, but
why not the battered wing itself. Why not the woman thinking.
Why not the river below, its lips wet, footprints animal.
What forked tongues come when clouds crack open,
when this sky's watched you sleep all day,
and now lets down its darkness. There's all night to stay awake.

May You Always be the Darling of Fortune

By Jane Miller

March 10th and the snow flees like eloping brides
into rain. The imperceptible change begins
out of an old rage and glistens, chaste, with its new
craving, spring. May your desire always overcome

your need; your story that you have to tell,
enchanting, mutable, may it fill the world
you believe: a sunny view, flowers lunging
from the sill, the quilt, the chair, all things

fill with you and empty and fill. And hurry, because
now as I tire of my studied abandon, counting
the days, I'm sad. Yet I trust your absence, in everything
wholly evident: the rain in the white basin, and I

vigilant.

Encounter

By Czeslaw Milosz
Translated by Czeslaw Milosz and Lillian Vallee

We were riding through frozen fields in a wagon at dawn.
A red wing rose in the darkness.

And suddenly a hare ran across the road.
One of us pointed to it with his hand.

That was long ago. Today neither of them is alive,
Not the hare, nor the man who made the gesture.

O my love, where are they, where are they going
The flash of a hand, streak of movement, rustle of pebbles.
I ask not out of sorrow, but in wonder.

Wilno, 1936

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

On Shakespeare. 1630

By John Milton

What needs my Shakespeare for his honoured bones,
The labor of an age in pilèd stones,
Or that his hallowed relics should be hid
Under a star-ypointing pyramid?
Dear son of Memory, great heir of fame,
What need'st thou such weak witness of thy name?
Thou in our wonder and astonishment
Hast built thyself a live-long monument.
For whilst to th' shame of slow-endeavouring art,
Thy easy numbers flow, and that each heart
Hath from the leaves of thy unvalued book
Those Delphic lines with deep impression took,
Then thou, our fancy of itself bereaving,
Dost make us marble with too much conceiving;
And so sepúlchred in such pomp dost lie,
That kings for such a tomb would wish to die.

Sonnet 19: When I consider how my light is spent

By John Milton

When I consider how my light is spent,
  Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
  And that one Talent which is death to hide
  Lodged with me useless, though my Soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
  My true account, lest he returning chide;
  “Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?”
  I fondly ask. But patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, “God doth not need
  Either man’s work or his own gifts; who best
  Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
  And post o’er Land and Ocean without rest:
  They also serve who only stand and wait.”

Sonnet 23: Methought I saw my late espoused saint

By John Milton

Methought I saw my late espoused saint
    Brought to me, like Alcestis, from the grave,
    Whom Jove's great son to her glad husband gave,
    Rescu'd from death by force, though pale and faint.
Mine, as whom wash'd from spot of child-bed taint
    Purification in the old Law did save,
    And such as yet once more I trust to have
    Full sight of her in Heaven without restraint,
Came vested all in white, pure as her mind;
    Her face was veil'd, yet to my fancied sight
    Love, sweetness, goodness, in her person shin'd
So clear as in no face with more delight.
    But Oh! as to embrace me she inclin'd,
    I wak'd, she fled, and day brought back my night.

The Bear

By Susan Mitchell

Tonight the bear
comes to the orchard and, balancing
on her hind legs, dances under the apple trees,
hanging onto their boughs,
dragging their branches down to earth.

Look again. It is not the bear
but some afterimage of her
like the car I once saw in the driveway
after the last guest had gone.
Snow pulls the apple boughs to the ground.
Whatever moves in the orchard—
heavy, lumbering—is clear as wind.

The bear is long gone.
Drunk on apples,
she banged over the trash cans that fall night,
then skidded downstream. By now
she must be logged in for the winter.
Unless she is choosy.
I imagine her as very choosy,
sniffing at the huge logs, pawing them, trying
each one on for size,
but always coming out again.

Until tonight.
Tonight sap freezes under her skin.
Her breath leaves white apples in the air.
As she walks she dozes,
listening to the sound of axes chopping wood.
Somewhere she can never catch up to
trees are falling. Chips pile up like snow
When she does find it finally,
the log draws her in as easily as a forest,
and for a while she continues to see,
just ahead of her, the moon
trapped like a salmon in the ice.

The Delight Song of Tsoai-talee

By N. Scott Momaday

I am a feather on the bright sky
I am the blue horse that runs in the plain
I am the fish that rolls, shining, in the water
I am the shadow that follows a child
I am the evening light, the lustre of meadows
I am an eagle playing with the wind
I am a cluster of bright beads
I am the farthest star
I am the cold of dawn
I am the roaring of the rain

I am the glitter on the crust of the snow
I am the long track of the moon in a lake
I am a flame of four colors
I am a deer standing away in the dusk
I am a field of sumac and the pomme blanche
I am an angle of geese in the winter sky
I am the hunger of a young wolf
I am the whole dream of these things

You see, I am alive, I am alive
I stand in good relation to the earth
I stand in good relation to the gods
I stand in good relation to all that is beautiful
I stand in good relation to the daughter of Tsen-tainte
You see, I am alive, I am alive

To Fashion

By Elizabeth Moody

Gay Fashion thou Goddess so pleasing,
  However imperious thy sway;
Like a mistress capricious and teasing,
  Thy slaves tho' they murmur obey.

The simple, the wise, and the witty,
  The learned, the dunce, and the fool,
The crooked, straight, ugly, and pretty,
  Wear the badge of thy whimsical school.

Tho' thy shape be so fickle and changing,
  That a Proteus thou art to the view;
And our taste so for ever deranging,
  We know not which form to pursue.

Yet wave but thy frolicksome banners,
  And hosts of adherents we see;
Arts, morals, religion, and manners,
  Yield implicit obedience to thee.

More despotic than beauty thy power,
  More than virtue thy rule o'er the mind:
Tho' transient thy reign as a flower,
  That scatters its leaves to the wind.

Ah! while folly thou dealest such measure,

No matter how fleeting thy day!
Be Wisdom, dear goddess, thy pleasure!
Then lasting as time be thy stay.

A Graveyard

By Marianne Moore

Man, looking into the sea—
taking the view from those who have as much right to it as you have it to yourself—
it is human nature to stand in the middle of a thing
but you cannot stand in the middle of this:
the sea has nothing to give but a well excavated grave.
The firs stand in a procession—each with an emerald turkey-foot at the top—
reserved as their contours, saying nothing;
repression, however, is not the most obvious characteristic of the sea;
the sea is a collector, quick to return a rapacious look.
There are others besides you who have worn that look—
whose expression is no longer a protest; the fish no longer investigate them
for their bones have not lasted;
men lower nets, unconscious of the fact that they are desecrating a grave,
and row quickly away—the blades of the oars
moving together like the feet of water-spiders as if there were no such thing as death.
The wrinkles progress upon themselves in a phalanx—beautiful under networks of foam,
and fade breathlessly while the sea rustles in and out of the seaweed;
the birds swim through the air at top speed, emitting cat-calls as heretofore—
the tortoise-shell scourges about the feet of the cliffs, in motion beneath them
and the ocean, under the pulsation of light-houses and noise of bell-buoys,
advances as usual, looking as if it were not that ocean in which dropped things are bound to
sink—
in which if they turn and twist, it is neither with volition nor consciousness.

The Time I've Lost in Wooing

By Thomas Moore

The time I've lost in wooing,
In watching and pursuing
The light, that lies
In woman's eyes,
Has been my heart's undoing.
Though Wisdom oft has sought me,
I scorn'd the lore she brought me,
My only books
Were woman's looks,
And folly's all they've taught me.

Her smile when Beauty granted,
I hung with gaze enchanted,
Like him the Sprite,
Whom maids by night
Oft meet in glen that's haunted.
Like him, too, Beauty won me,
But while her eyes were on me,
If once their ray
Was turn'd away,
Oh! winds could not outrun me.

And are those follies going?
And is my proud heart growing
Too cold or wise
For brilliant eyes
Again to set it glowing?
No, vain, alas! th' endeavour
From bonds so sweet to sever;
Poor Wisdom's chance
Against a glance
Is now as weak as ever.

Curandera

By Pat Mora

They think she lives alone
on the edge of town in a two-room house
where she moved when her husband died
at thirty-five of a gunshot wound
in the bed of another woman. The *curandera*
and house have aged together to the rhythm
of the desert.

She wakes early, lights candles before
her sacred statues, brews tea of *yerbabuena*.
She moves down her porch steps, rubs
cool morning sand into her hands, into her arms.
Like a large black bird, she feeds on
the desert, gathering herbs for her basket.

Her days are slow, days of grinding
dried snake into powder, of crushing
wild bees to mix with white wine.
And the townspeople come, hoping

to be touched by her ointments,
her hands, her prayers, her eyes.
She listens to their stories, and she listens
to the desert, always, to the desert.

By sunset she is tired. The wind
strokes the strands of long gray hair,
the smell of drying plants drifts
into her blood, the sun seeps
into her bones. She dozes
on her back porch. Rocking, rocking.

Yellowtail

By Mary Morris

The war was over.
We sutured the wounded,

buried the dead, sat at the bar
with the enemy, near the blue

throat of the sea. A sushi chef
slivered salmon into orchids,

etched clouds from oysters,
as they rose snowing pearls.

From shrimp and seaweed
he shaped hummingbirds,

which hovered above
our heads.

With the world's smallest blade
he carved from yellowfin,

miniature flanks of horses.
They cantered around our hands.

History of sleep

By Rusty Morrison

(a myth of consequences)

The ivy across our back fence tangles gray
into a green evening light.

How a second emptiness
un-punctuates the first.

Disloyal,
we attempt to construct.

An ache will tighten
but not form.

Making impossible
even this upsurge of crows across our sightline.

The Mayans invented zero so as not to ignore even the gods
who *wouldn't* carry their burdens.

Too slippery as prayer, too effortless
as longing.

Our problem was preparation. Premeditation
neutered any rage potential.

Years later, the spine of our backyard
appears to have always been crooked.

White jasmine, dove-calm in the lattice, is not
a finely crafted lure.

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

Scale

By Helen Mort

My weight is
four whippets,

two Chinese gymnasts,
half a shot-putter.

It can be measured
in bags of sugar, jam jars,

enough feathers for sixty pillows,
or a flock of dead birds

but some days it's more
than the house, the span

of Blair Athol Road.
I'm the Crooked Spire

warping itself,
doubled up over town.

I measure myself against
the sky in its winter coat,

peat traces in water, air
locked in the radiators at night,

against my own held breath,
or your unfinished sentences,

your hand on my back
like a passenger

touching the dashboard
when a driver brakes,

as if they could slow things down.
I measure myself against

love — heavier, lighter
than both of us.

The Angelfish Greet Odysseus

By Eisder Mosquera

Angelfish perturb
the area
around pink gauze,
are the details
of a threaded
diamond string
and its fake
catachrestic applause.
Like that of the angelheaded

beast spreading
its wings, as if to swim
under the light
of the glowworm
and hyacinth,
the fish are oratory
and not.
The pulchritude
of bombazine
on a shattering
geoidal mid-afternoon,
dribbling from
sea rock to splint,
the wing tips
are hardly bleak
accoutrements,
their own swinging
by the bay of a chest
and a previous rock.
Here we are stranded,
pelagic with clot,
and the fish
burble with oratory
and I kind of like them
a lot.

A Blind Fisherman

By Stanley Moss

I teach my friend, a fisherman gone blind, to cast
true left, right or center and how far
between lily pads and the fallen cedar.
Darkness is precious, how long will darkness last?
Our bait, worms, have no professors, they live
in darkness, can be taught fear of light.
Cut into threes even sixes they live
separate lives, recoil from light.
He tells me, “I am seldom blind
when I dream, morning is anthracite,
I play blind man’s bluff,
I cannot find myself,
my shoe, the sink,
tell time, but that’s spilled milk and ink,
the lost and found I cannot find.
I can tell the difference between a mollusk and a whelk,

a grieving liar and a lemon rind."
Laughing, he says, "I still hope the worm will turn,
pink, lank, and warm, dined
out on apples of good fortune.
Books have a faintly legible smell.
Divorced from the sun, I am a kind
of bachelor henpecked by the night.
Sometimes I use my darkness well—
in the overcast and sunlight of my mind.
I can still wink, sing, my eyes are songs."
Darkness is precious, how long will darkness last?
He could not fish, he could not walk, he fell
in his own feces. He wept. He died where he fell.
The power of beauty to right all wrongs
is hard for me to sell.

War Ballad

By Stanley Moss

(after the Russian)

The piano has crawled into the quarry. Hauled
In last night for firewood, sprawled
With frozen barrels, crates and sticks,
The piano is waiting for the axe.

Legless, a black box, still polished;
It lies on its belly like a lizard,
Droning, heaving, hardly fashioned
For the quarry's primordial art.

Blood red: his frozen fingers cleft,
Two on the right hand, five on the left,
He goes down on his knees to reach the keyboard,
To strike the lizard's chord.

Seven fingers pick out rhymes and rhythm,
The frozen skin, steaming, peels off them,
As from a boiled potato. Their schemes,
Their beauty, ivory and anthracite,
Flicker and flash like the great Northern Lights.

Everything played before is a great lie.
The reflections of flaming chandeliers—
Deceit, the white columns, the grand tiers

In warm concert halls—wild lies.

But the steel of the piano howls in me,
I lie in the quarry and I am deft
As the lizard. I accept the gift.
I'll be a song for Russia, I'll be
an étude, warmth and bread for everybody.

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

Virtuosi

By Lisel Mueller

In memory of my parents

People whose lives have been shaped
by history—and it is always tragic—
do not want to talk about it,
would rather dance, give parties
on thrift-shop china. You feel
wonderful in their homes,
two leaky rooms, nests
they stowed inside their hearts
on the road into exile.
They know how to fix potato peelings
and apple cores so you smack your lips.

The words *start over again*
hold no terror for them.
Obediently they rise
and go with only a rucksack
or tote bag. If they weep,
it's when you're not looking.

To tame their nightmares, they choose
the most dazzling occupations,
swallow the flames in the sunset sky,
jump through burning hoops
in their elegant tiger suits.
Cover your eyes: there's one
walking on a thread
thirty feet above us—
shivering points of light
leap across her body,

and she works without a net.

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

When I Am Asked

By Lisel Mueller

When I am asked
how I began writing poems,
I talk about the indifference of nature.

It was soon after my mother died,
a brilliant June day,
everything blooming.

I sat on a gray stone bench
in a lovingly planted garden,
but the day lilies were as deaf
as the ears of drunken sleepers
and the roses curved inward.
Nothing was black or broken
and not a leaf fell
and the sun blared endless commercials
for summer holidays.

I sat on a gray stone bench
ringed with the ingenue faces
of pink and white impatiens
and placed my grief
in the mouth of language,
the only thing that would grieve with me.

Hedgehog

By Paul Muldoon

The snail moves like a
Hovercraft, held up by a
Rubber cushion of itself,
Sharing its secret

With the hedgehog. The hedgehog
Shares its secret with no one.
We say, Hedgehog, come out

Of yourself and we will love you.

We mean no harm. We want
Only to listen to what
You have to say. We want
Your answers to our questions.

The hedgehog gives nothing
Away, keeping itself to itself.
We wonder what a hedgehog
Has to hide, why it so distrusts.

We forget the god
Under this crown of thorns.
We forget that never again
Will a god trust in the world.

The Loaf

By Paul Muldoon

When I put my finger to the hole they've cut for a dimmer switch
in a wall of plaster stiffened with horsehair
it seems I've scratched a two-hundred-year-old itch

with a pink and a pink and a pinkie-pick.

When I put my ear to the hole I'm suddenly aware
of spades and shovels turning up the gain
all the way from Raritan to the Delaware

with a clink and a clink and a clinky-click.

When I put my nose to the hole I smell the floodplain
of the canal after a hurricane
and the spots of green grass where thousands of Irish have lain

with a stink and a stink and a stinky-stick.

When I put my eye to the hole I see one holding horse dung to the rain
in the hope, indeed, indeed,
of washing out a few whole ears of grain

with a wink and a wink and a winkie-wick.

And when I do at last succeed

in putting my mouth to the horsehair-fringed niche
I can taste the small loaf of bread he baked from that whole seed

with a link and a link and a linky-lick.

We Are Not Responsible

By Harryette Mullen

We are not responsible for your lost or stolen relatives.
We cannot guarantee your safety if you disobey our instructions.
We do not endorse the causes or claims of people begging for handouts.
We reserve the right to refuse service to anyone.

Your ticket does not guarantee that we will honor your reservations.
In order to facilitate our procedures, please limit your carrying on.
Before taking off, please extinguish all smoldering resentments.

If you cannot understand English, you will be moved out of the way.
In the event of a loss, you'd better look out for yourself.
Your insurance was cancelled because we can no longer handle
your frightful claims. Our handlers lost your luggage and we
are unable to find the key to your legal case.

You were detained for interrogation because you fit the profile.
You are not presumed to be innocent if the police
have reason to suspect you are carrying a concealed wallet.
It's not our fault you were born wearing a gang color.
It is not our obligation to inform you of your rights.

Step aside, please, while our officer inspects your bad attitude.
You have no rights we are bound to respect.
Please remain calm, or we can't be held responsible
for what happens to you.

Disenchantment Bay

By Timothy Murphy

Touch and go. Our Cessna bumped the sand,

thumped its tundra tires,
lifted as if on wires,
banked over ice and rocked its wings to land.

We pitched our camp hard by the Hubbard's face,

some sixty fathoms tall,
a seven-mile-long wall
seven leagues from Yakutat, our base.

Crack! A blue serac tottered and gave.

Stunned at the water's edge,
we fled our vantage ledge
like oyster catchers skittering from a wave.

Separation has become my fear.
What was does not console,
what is, is past control—
the disembodiment that looms so near.

Detachment? So an ice cliff by the sea
calves with a seismic crash
of bergy bits and brash,
choking a waterway with its debris.

We clear the neap tide beach of glacial wrack,
pace and mark the ground,
then wave the Cessna round.
Pilot, we bank on you to bear us back.

To the Oppressors

By Pauli Murray

Now you are strong
And we are but grapes aching with ripeness.
Crush us!
Squeeze from us all the brave life
Contained in these full skins.
But ours is a subtle strength
Potent with centuries of yearning,
Of being kegged and shut away
In dark forgotten places.

We shall endure
To steal your senses
In that lonely twilight
Of your winter's grief.

Words

By Pauli Murray

We are spendthrifts with words,
We squander them,
Toss them like pennies in the air–
Arrogant words,
Angry words,
Cruel words,
Comradely words,
Shy words tiptoeing from mouth to ear.

But the slowly wrought words of love
and the thunderous words of heartbreak–
Those we hoard.

Daughters 1900

By Marilyn Nelson

Five daughters, in the slant light on the porch,
are bickering. The eldest has come home
with new truths she can hardly wait to teach.

She lectures them: the younger daughters search
the sky, elbow each other's ribs, and groan.
Five daughters, in the slant light on the porch

and blue-sprigged dresses, like a stand of birch
saplings whose leaves are going yellow-brown
with new truths. They can hardly wait to teach,

themselves, to be called "Ma'am," to march
high-heeled across the hanging bridge to town.
Five daughters. In the slant light on the porch

Pomp lowers his paper for a while, to watch
the beauties he's begotten with his Ann:
these new truths they can hardly wait to teach.

The eldest sniffs, "A lady doesn't scratch."
The third snorts back, "Knock, knock: nobody home."
The fourth concedes, "Well, maybe not in *church* . . . "
Five daughters in the slant light on the porch.

How I Discovered Poetry

By Marilyn Nelson

It was like soul-kissing, the way the words
filled my mouth as Mrs. Purdy read from her desk.
All the other kids zoned an hour ahead to 3:15,
but Mrs. Purdy and I wandered lonely as clouds borne
by a breeze off Mount Parnassus. She must have seen
the darkest eyes in the room brim: The next day
she gave me a poem she'd chosen especially for me
to read to the all except for me white class.
She smiled when she told me to read it, smiled harder,
said oh yes I could. She smiled harder and harder
until I stood and opened my mouth to banjo playing
darkies, pickaninnies, disses and dats. When I finished
my classmates stared at the floor. We walked silent
to the buses, awed by the power of words.

Worth

By Marilyn Nelson

For Ruben Ahoueya

Today in America people were bought and sold:
five hundred for a "likely Negro wench."
If someone at auction is worth her weight in gold,
how much would she be worth by pound? By ounce?
If I owned an unimaginable quantity of wealth,
could I buy an iota of myself?
How would I know which part belonged to me?
If I owned part, could I set my part free?
It must be worth something—maybe a lot—
that my great-grandfather, they say, killed a lion.
They say he was black, with muscles as hard as iron,
that he wore a necklace of the claws of the lion he'd fought.
How much do I hear, for his majesty in my blood?
I auction myself. And I make the highest bid.

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

The Consent

By Howard Nemerov

Late in November, on a single night
Not even near to freezing, the ginkgo trees
That stand along the walk drop all their leaves
In one consent, and neither to rain nor to wind
But as though to time alone: the golden and green
Leaves litter the lawn today, that yesterday
Had spread aloft their fluttering fans of light.

What signal from the stars? What senses took it in?
What in those wooden motives so decided
To strike their leaves, to down their leaves,
Rebellion or surrender? and if this
Can happen thus, what race shall be exempt?
What use to learn the lessons taught by time,
If a star at any time may tell us: *Now*.

Life Cycle of Common Man

By Howard Nemerov

Roughly figured, this man of moderate habits,
This average consumer of the middle class,
Consumed in the course of his average life span
Just under half a million cigarettes,
Four thousand fifths of gin and about
A quarter as much vermouth; he drank
Maybe a hundred thousand cups of coffee,
And counting his parents' share it cost
Something like half a million dollars
To put him through life. How many beasts
Died to provide him with meat, belt and shoes
Cannot be certainly said.
But anyhow,
It is in this way that a man travels through time,
Leaving behind him a lengthening trail
Of empty bottles and bones, of broken shoes,
Frayed collars and worn out or outgrown
Diapers and dinnerjackets, silk ties and slickers.

Given the energy and security thus achieved,
He did . . . ? What? The usual things, of course,
The eating, dreaming, drinking and begetting,
And he worked for the money which was to pay

For the eating, et cetera, which were necessary
If he were to go on working for the money, et cetera,
But chiefly he talked. As the bottles and bones
Accumulated behind him, the words proceeded
Steadily from the front of his face as he
Advanced into the silence and made it verbal.
Who can tally the tale of his words? A lifetime
Would barely suffice for their repetition;
If you merely printed all his commas the result
Would be a very large volume, and the number of times
He said "thank you" or "very little sugar, please,"
Would stagger the imagination. There were also
Witticisms, platitudes, and statements beginning
"It seems to me" or "As I always say."
Consider the courage in all that, and behold the man
Walking into deep silence, with the ectoplastic
Cartoon's balloon of speech proceeding
Steadily out of the front of his face, the words
Borne along on the breath which is his spirit
Telling the numberless tale of his untold Word
Which makes the world his apple, and forces him to eat.

Magnitudes

By Howard Nemerov

Earth's Wrath at our assaults is slow to come
But relentless when it does. It has to do
With catastrophic change, and with the limit
At which one order more of Magnitude
Will bring us to a qualitative change
And disasters drastically different
From those we daily have to know about.

As with the speed of light, where speed itself
Becomes a limit and an absolute;
As with the splitting of the atom
And a little later of the nucleus;
As with the millions rising into billions—
The piker's kind in terms of money, yes,
But a million in terms of time and space
As the universe grew vast while the earth
Our habitat diminished to the size
Of a billiard ball, both relative
To the cosmos and to the numbers of ourselves,
The doubling numbers, the earth could accommodate.

We stand now in the place and limit of time
Where hardest knowledge is turning into dream,
And nightmares still contained in sleeping dark
Seem on the point of bringing into day
The sweating panic that starts the sleeper up.
One or another nightmare may come true,
And what to do then? What in the world to do?

To David, About His Education

By Howard Nemerov

The world is full of mostly invisible things,
And there is no way but putting the mind's eye,
Or its nose, in a book, to find them out,
Things like the square root of Everest
Or how many times Byron goes into Texas,
Or whether the law of the excluded middle
Applies west of the Rockies. For these
And the like reasons, you have to go to school
And study books and listen to what you are told,
And sometimes try to remember. Though I don't know
What you will do with the mean annual rainfall
On Plato's Republic, or the calorie content
Of the Diet of Worms, such things are said to be
Good for you, and you will have to learn them
In order to become one of the grown-ups
Who sees invisible things neither steadily nor whole,
But keeps gravely the grand confusion of the world
Under his hat, which is where it belongs,
And teaches small children to do this in their turn.

The Vacuum

By Howard Nemerov

The house is so quiet now
The vacuum cleaner sulks in the corner closet,
Its bag limp as a stopped lung, its mouth
Grinning into the floor, maybe at my
Slovenly life, my dog-dead youth.

I've lived this way long enough,
But when my old woman died her soul
Went into that vacuum cleaner, and I can't bear

To see the bag swell like a belly, eating the dust
And the woolen mice, and begin to howl

Because there is old filth everywhere
She used to crawl, in the corner and under the stair.
I know now how life is cheap as dirt,
And still the hungry, angry heart
Hangs on and howls, biting at air.

The War in the Air

By Howard Nemerov

For a saving grace, we didn't see our dead,
Who rarely bothered coming home to die
But simply stayed away out there
In the clean war, the war in the air.

Seldom the ghosts come back bearing their tales
Of hitting the earth, the incompressible sea,
But stayed up there in the relative wind,
Shades fading in the mind,

Who had no graves but only epitaphs
Where never so many spoke for never so few:
Per ardua, said the partisans of Mars,
Per aspera, to the stars.

That was the good war, the war we won
As if there was no death, for goodness's sake.
With the help of the losers we left out there
In the air, in the empty air.

Writing

By Howard Nemerov

The cursive crawl, the squared-off characters
these by themselves delight, even without
a meaning, in a foreign language, in
Chinese, for instance, or when skaters curve
all day across the lake, scoring their white
records in ice. Being intelligible,
these winding ways with their audacities
and delicate hesitations, they become
miraculous, so intimately, out there

at the pen's point or brush's tip, do world
and spirit wed. The small bones of the wrist
balance against great skeletons of stars
exactly; the blind bat surveys his way
by echo alone. Still, the point of style
is character. The universe induces
a different tremor in every hand, from the
check-forger's to that of the Emperor
Hui Tsung, who called his own calligraphy
the 'Slender Gold.' A nervous man
writes nervously of a nervous world, and so on.

Miraculous. It is as though the world
were a great writing. Having said so much,
let us allow there is more to the world
than writing: continental faults are not
bare convoluted fissures in the brain.
Not only must the skaters soon go home;
also the hard inscription of their skates
is scored across the open water, which long
remembers nothing, neither wind nor wake.

Finale

By Pablo Neruda
Translated by William O'Daly

Matilde, years or days
sleeping, feverish,
here or there,
gazing off,
twisting my spine,
bleeding true blood,
perhaps I awaken
or am lost, sleeping:
hospital beds, foreign windows,
white uniforms of the silent walkers,
the clumsiness of feet.

And then, these journeys
and my sea of renewal:
your head on the pillow,
your hands floating
in the light, in my light,
over my earth.

It was beautiful to live
when you lived!

The world is bluer and of the earth
at night, when I sleep
enormous, within your small hands.

One Hundred Love Sonnets: XVII

By Pablo Neruda
Translated by Mark Eisner

I don't love you as if you were a rose of salt, topaz,
or arrow of carnations that propagate fire:
I love you as one loves certain obscure things,
secretly, between the shadow and the soul.

I love you as the plant that doesn't bloom but carries
the light of those flowers, hidden, within itself,
and thanks to your love the tight aroma that arose
from the earth lives dimly in my body.

I love you without knowing how, or when, or from where,
I love you directly without problems or pride:
I love you like this because I don't know any other way to love,
except in this form in which I am not nor are you,
so close that your hand upon my chest is mine,
so close that your eyes close with my dreams.

On Listening to Your Teacher Take Attendance

By Aimee Nezhukumatathil

Breathe deep even if it means you wrinkle
your nose from the fake-lemon antiseptic

of the mopped floors and wiped-down
doorknobs. The freshly soaped necks

and armpits. Your teacher means well,
even if he butchers your name like

he has a bloody sausage casing stuck
between his teeth, handprints

on his white, sloppy apron. And when

everyone turns around to check out

your face, no need to flush red and warm.
Just picture all the eyes as if your classroom

is one big scallop with its dozens of icy blues
and you will remember that winter your family

took you to the China Sea and you sank
your face in it to gaze at baby clams and sea stars

the size of your outstretched hand. And when
all those necks start to crane, try not to forget

someone once lathered their bodies, once patted them
dry with a fluffy towel after a bath, set out their clothes

for the first day of school. Think of their pencil cases
from third grade, full of sharp pencils, a pink pearl eraser.

Think of their handheld pencil sharpener and its tiny blade.

Sea Church

By Aimee Nezhukumatathil

Give me a church
made entirely of salt.
Let the walls hiss
and smoke when
I return to shore.

I ask for the grace
of a new freckle
on my cheek, the lift
of blue and my mother's
soapy skin to greet me.

Hide me in a room
with no windows.
Never let me see
the dolphins leaping
into commas

for this water-prayer
rising like a host

of sky lanterns into
the inky evening.
Let them hang

in the sky until
they vanish at the edge
of the constellations —
the heroes and animals
too busy and bright to notice.

What I Learned From the Incredible Hulk

By Aimee Nezhukumatathil

When it comes to clothes, make
an allowance for the unexpected.
Be sure the spare in the trunk
of your station wagon with wood paneling

isn't in need of repair. A simple jean jacket
says *Hey, if you aren't trying to smuggle*
rare Incan coins through this peaceful
little town and kidnap the local orphan,

I can be one heck of a mellow kinda guy.
But no matter how angry a man gets, a smile
and a soft stroke on his bicep can work
wonders. I learned that male chests

also have nipples, warm and established—
green doesn't always mean envy.
It's the meadows full of clover
and chicory the Hulk seeks for rest, a return

to normal. And sometimes, a woman
gets to go with him, her tiny hands
correcting his rumpled hair, the cuts
in his hand. Green is the space between

water and sun, cover for a quiet man,
each rib shuttling drops of liquid light.

Uptown, Minneapolis, Minnesota

By Hieu Minh Nguyen

Even though it's May & the ice cream truck
parked outside my apartment is somehow certain,
I have a hard time believing winter is somehow,
all of a sudden, over — *the worst one of my life*,
the woman at the bank tells me. Though I'd like to be,
it's impossible to be prepared for everything.
Even the mundane hum of my phone catches me
off guard today. Every voice that says my name
is a voice I don't think I could possibly leave
(*it's unfair to not ask for the things you need*)
even though I think about it often, even though
leaving is a train headed somewhere I'd probably hate.
Crossing Lyndale to meet a friend for coffee
I have to maneuver around a hearse that pulled too far
into the crosswalk. It's empty. Perhaps spring is here.
Perhaps it will all be worth it. Even though I knew
even then it was worth it, staying, I mean.
Even now, there is someone, somehow, waiting for me.

Snowy Owl Near Ocean Shores

By Duane Niatum

A castaway blown south from the arctic tundra
sits on a stump in an abandoned farmer's field.
Beyond the dunes cattails toss and bend as snappy
as the surf, rushing and crashing down the jetty.

His head a swivel of round glances,
his eyes a deeper yellow than the winter sun,
he wonders if the spot two hundred feet away
is a mouse on the crawl from mud hole
to deer-grass patch.

An hour of wind and sleet whips the air,
nothing darts or passes but the river underground.
A North Pole creature shows us how to last.
The wind ruffles his feathers from crown to claw

while he gazes into zeroes the salt-slick rain.
As a double-rainbow before us arcs
sky and owl, we leave him surrendering
to the echo of his white refrain.

[He Lived—Childhood Summers]

By Lorine Niedecker

He lived—childhood summers
thru bare feet
then years of money's lack
and heat

beside the river—out of flood
came his wood, dog,
woman, lost her, daughter—
prologue

to planting trees. He buried carp
beneath the rose
where grass-still
the marsh rail goes.

To bankers on high land
he opened his wine tank.
He wished his only daughter
to work in the bank

but he'd given her a source
to sustain her—
a weedy speech,
a marshy retainer.

[I married]

By Lorine Niedecker

I married

in the world's black night
for warmth
if not repose.
At the close—
someone.

I hid with him
from the long range guns.
We lay leg
in the cupboard, head
in closet.

A slit of light
at no bird dawn—
Untaught
I thought
he drank

too much.
I say
I married
and lived unburied.
I thought—

Linnaeus in Lapland

By Lorine Niedecker

Nothing worth noting
except an Andromeda
with quadrangular shoots—
the boots
of the people

wet inside: they must swim
to church thru the floods
or be taxed—the blossoms
from the bosoms
of the leaves

*

Fog-thick morning—
I see only
where I now walk. I carry
my clarity
with me.

*

Hear
where her snow-grave is
the *You*
ah you
of mourning doves

[My mother saw the green tree toad]

By Lorine Niedecker

My mother saw the green tree toad
on the window sill
her first one
since she was young.
We saw it breathe

and swell up round.
My youth is no sure sign
I'll find this kind of thing
tho it does sing.
Let's take it in

I said so grandmother can see
but she could not
it changed to brown
and town
changed us, too.

[What horror to awake at night]

By Lorine Niedecker

What horror to awake at night
and in the dimness see the light.
        Time is white
        mosquitoes bite
I've spent my life on nothing.

The thought that stings. How are you, Nothing,
sitting around with Something's wife.
        Buzz and burn
        is all I learn
I've spent my life on nothing.

I'm pillowed and padded, pale and puffing
lifting household stuffing—
        carpets, dishes
        benches, fishes
I've spent my life in nothing.

Strange!

By John Frederick Nims

I'd have you known! It puzzles me forever
To hear, day in, day out, the words men use,
But never a single word about you, never.
Strange!—in your every gesture, worlds of news.
On busses people talk. On curbs I hear them;
In parks I listen, barbershop and bar.
In banks they murmur, and I sidle near them;
But none allude to you there. None so far.

I read books too, and turn the pages, spying:
You must be there, one beautiful as you!
But never, not by name. No planes are flying
Your name in lacy trailers past the blue
Marquees of heaven. No trumpets cry your fame.

Strange!—how no constellations spell your name!

The Poet

By Yone Noguchi

Out of the deep and the dark,
A sparkling mystery, a shape,
Something perfect,
Comes like the stir of the day:
One whose breath is an odor,
Whose eyes show the road to stars,
The breeze in his face,
The glory of heaven on his back.
He steps like a vision hung in air,
Diffusing the passion of eternity;
His abode is the sunlight of morn,
The music of eve his speech:
In his sight,
One shall turn from the dust of the grave,
And move upward to the woodland.

Mrs. Adam

By Kathleen Norris

I have lately come to the conclusion that I am Eve,
alias Mrs. Adam. You know, there is no account

of her death in the Bible, and why am I not Eve?
Emily Dickinson in a letter,
12 January, 1846

Wake up,
you'll need your wits about you.
This is not a dream,
but a woman who loves you, speaking.

She was there
when you cried out;
she brushed the terror away.
She knew
when it was time to sin.
You were wise
to let her handle it,
and leave that place.

We couldn't speak at first
for the bitter knowledge,
the sweet taste of memory
on our tongues.

Listen, it's time.
You were chosen too,
to put the world together.

The Film

By Kate Northrop

Come, let's go in.
The ticket-taker
has shyly grinned
and it's almost time,
Lovely One.
Let's go in.

The wind tonight's too wild.
The sky too deep,
too thin. Already it's time.
The lights have dimmed.
Come, Loveliest.
Let's go in

and know these bodies

we do not have to own, passing
quietly as dreams, as snow.
Already leaves are falling
and music begins.
Lovely One,

it's time.
Let's go in.

The Goddess Who Created This Passing World

By Alice Notley

The Goddess who created this passing world
Said Let there be lightbulbs & liquefaction
Life spilled out onto the street, colors whirled
Cars & the variously shod feet were born
And the past & future & I born too
Light as airmail paper away she flew
To Annapurna or Mt. McKinley
Or both but instantly
Clarified, composed, forever was I
Meant by her to recognize a painting
As beautiful or a movie stunning
And to adore the finitude of words
And understand as surfaces my dreams
Know the eye the organ of affection
And depths to be inflections
Of her voice & wrist & smile

Immortal Sails

By Alfred Noyes

Now, in a breath, we'll burst those gates of gold,
  And ransack heaven before our moment fails.
Now, in a breath, before we, too, grow old,
  We'll mount and sing and spread immortal sails.

It is not time that makes eternity.
  Love and an hour may quite out-span the years,
And give us more to hear and more to see
  Than life can wash away with all its tears.

Dear, when we part, at last, that sunset sky
  Shall not be touched with deeper hues than this;

But we shall ride the lightning ere we die
  And seize our brief infinitude of bliss,

With time to spare for all that heaven can tell,
While eyes meet eyes, and look their last farewell.

First Night

By D. Nurske

We brought that newborn home from Maimonides
and showed her nine blue glittering streets.
Would she like the semis with hoods of snow?
The precinct? Bohack's? A lit diner?
Her eyes were huge and her gaze tilted
like milk in a pan, toward shadow.
Would she like the tenement, three dim flights,
her crib that smelled of Lemon Pledge?
We slept beside her in our long coats,
rigid with fatigue in the unmade bed.
Her breath woke us with its slight catch.
Would she approve of gray winter dawn?
We showed her daylight in our cupped hands.
Then the high clocks began booming
in this city and the next, we counted for her,
but just the strokes, not the laggards
or the tinny echoes, and we taught her
how to wait, how to watch, how to be held,
in that icy room, until our own alarm chimed.

300 Goats

By Naomi Shihab Nye

In icy fields.

Is water flowing in the tank?

Will they huddle together, warm bodies pressing?

(Is it the year of the goat or the sheep?

Scholars debating Chinese zodiac,

follower or leader.)

O lead them to a warm corner,

little ones toward bulkier bodies.

Lead them to the brush, which cuts the icy wind.

Another frigid night swooping down —

Aren't you worried about them? I ask my friend,

who lives by herself on the ranch of goats,

far from here near the town of Ozona.

She shrugs, "Not really,

they know what to do. They're *goats*."

Boy and Egg

By Naomi Shihab Nye

Every few minutes, he wants
to march the trail of flattened rye grass
back to the house of muttering
hens. He too could make
a bed in hay. Yesterday the egg so fresh
it felt hot in his hand and he pressed it
to his ear while the other children
laughed and ran with a ball, leaving him,
so little yet, too forgetful in games,
ready to cry if the ball brushed him,
riveted to the secret of birds
caught up inside his fist,
not ready to give it over
to the refrigerator
or the rest of the day.

Burning the Old Year

By Naomi Shihab Nye

Letters swallow themselves in seconds.
Notes friends tied to the doorknob,
transparent scarlet paper,
sizzle like moth wings,

marry the air.

So much of any year is flammable,
lists of vegetables, partial poems.
Orange swirling flame of days,
so little is a stone.

Where there was something and suddenly isn't,
an absence shouts, celebrates, leaves a space.
I begin again with the smallest numbers.

Quick dance, shuffle of losses and leaves,
only the things I didn't do
crackle after the blazing dies.

Famous

By Naomi Shihab Nye

The river is famous to the fish.

The loud voice is famous to silence,
which knew it would inherit the earth
before anybody said so.

The cat sleeping on the fence is famous to the birds
watching him from the birdhouse.

The tear is famous, briefly, to the cheek.

The idea you carry close to your bosom
is famous to your bosom.

The boot is famous to the earth,
more famous than the dress shoe,
which is famous only to floors.

The bent photograph is famous to the one who carries it
and not at all famous to the one who is pictured.

I want to be famous to shuffling men
who smile while crossing streets,
sticky children in grocery lines,
famous as the one who smiled back.

I want to be famous in the way a pulley is famous,

or a buttonhole, not because it did anything spectacular,
but because it never forgot what it could do.

Fundamentalism

By Naomi Shihab Nye

Because the eye has a short shadow or
it is hard to see over heads in the crowd?

If everyone else seems smarter
but you need your own secret?

If mystery was never your friend?

If one way could satisfy
the infinite heart of the heavens?

If you liked the king on his golden throne
more than the villagers carrying baskets of lemons?

If you wanted to be sure
his guards would admit you to the party?

The boy with the broken pencil
scrapes his little knife against the lead
turning and turning it as a point
emerges from the wood again

If he would believe his life is like that
he would not follow his father into war

Truth Serum

By Naomi Shihab Nye

We made it from the ground-up corn in the old back pasture.
Pinched a scent of night jasmine billowing off the fence,
popped it right in.
That frog song wanting nothing but echo?
We used that.
Stirred it widely. Noticed the clouds while stirring.
Called upon our ancient great aunts and their long slow eyes
of summer. Dropped in their names.
Added a mint leaf now and then
to hearten the broth. Added a note of cheer and worry.

Orange butterfly between the claps of thunder?
Perfect. And once we had it,
had smelled and tasted the fragrant syrup,
placing the pan on a back burner for keeping,
the sorrow lifted in small ways.
We boiled down the lies in another pan till they disappeared.
We washed that pan.

The Calm

By Sean O'Brien

At the mouth of the river,
Moon, stars, an Arctic calm,
The twin lights at the end of the piers
Revolving with the smoothness
We expect of supernatural machinery.

Seen from down here on the beach
The harbored ocean slowly tilts,
Like a mirror discreetly manhandled
By night from the giant room
It was supposed to occupy forever.

The mind says *now*, but the stars
On their angelic gimbals roll
And fade, a tide of constellations
Breaking nowhere, every night
About this time. Strike up the band.

In the tumbledown bar, the singer
Has fallen from stardom and grace,
But though her interests nowadays
Are wholly secular, she can
Still refer back to the angels,

And knowing that song, we share
A moment with the saved before
We leave to make the crossing.
No captain, no ferry, but
Cross we shall, believe you me.

Tomorrow

By Dennis O'Driscoll

I

Tomorrow I will start to be happy.
The morning will light up like a celebratory cigar.
Sunbeams sprawling on the lawn will set
dew sparkling like a cut-glass tumbler of champagne.
Today will end the worst phase of my life.

I will put my shapeless days behind me,
fencing off the past, as a golden rind
of sand parts slipshod sea from solid land.
It is tomorrow I want to look back on, not today.
Tomorrow I start to be happy; today is almost yesterday.

II

Australia, how wise you are to get the day
over and done with first, out of the way.
You have eaten the fruit of knowledge, while
we are dithering about which main course to choose.
How liberated you must feel, how free from doubt:

the rise and fall of stocks, today's closing prices
are revealed to you before our bidding has begun.
Australia, you can gather in your accident statistics
like a harvest while our roads still have hours to kill.
When we are in the dark, you have sagely seen the light.

III

Cagily, presumptuously, I dare to write 2018.
A date without character or tone. 2018.
A year without interest rates or mean daily temperature.
Its hit songs have yet to be written, its new-year
babies yet to be induced, its truces to be signed.

Much too far off for prophecy, though one hazards
a tentative guess—a so-so year most likely,
vague in retrospect, fizzling out with the usual
end-of-season sales; everything slashed:
your last chance to salvage something of its style.

Back Up Quick They're Hippies

By Lani O'Hanlon

That was the year we drove
into the commune in Cornwall.
"Jesus Jim," mam said,
"back up quick they're hippies."

Through the car window,
tents, row after row, flaps open,
long-haired men and women
curled around each other like babies

and the babies themselves
wandered naked across the grass.

I reached for the handle, ready, almost,
to open the door, drop out and away
from my sister's aggressive thighs,
Daddy's slapping hands.

Back home in the Dandelion Market
I unlearnt the steps my mother taught,
bought a headband, an afghan coat,
a fringed skirt — leather skin.

Barefoot on common grass I lay down with kin.

Chez Jane

By Frank O'Hara

The white chocolate jar full of petals
swills odds and ends around in a dizzying eye
of four o'clocks now and to come. The tiger,
marvellously striped and irritable, leaps
on the table and without disturbing a hair
of the flowers' breathless attention, pisses
into the pot, right down its delicate spout.
A whisper of steam goes up from that porcelain
urethra. "Saint-Saëns!" it seems to be whispering,
curling unerringly around the furry nuts
of the terrible puss, who is mentally flexing.
Ah be with me always, spirit of noisy
contemplation in the studio, the Garden
of Zoos, the eternally fixed afternoons!

There, while music scratches its scrofulous
stomach, the brute beast emerges and stands,
clear and careful, knowing always the exact peril
at this moment caressing his fangs with
a tongue given wholly to luxurious usages;
which only a moment before dropped aspirin
in this sunset of roses, and now throws a chair
in the air to aggravate the truly menacing.

The Day Lady Died

By Frank O'Hara

It is 12:20 in New York a Friday
three days after Bastille day, yes
it is 1959 and I go get a shoeshine
because I will get off the 4:19 in Easthampton
at 7:15 and then go straight to dinner
and I don't know the people who will feed me

I walk up the muggy street beginning to sun
and have a hamburger and a malted and buy
an ugly NEW WORLD WRITING to see what the poets
in Ghana are doing these days
                I go on to the bank
and Miss Stillwagon (first name Linda I once heard)
doesn't even look up my balance for once in her life
and in the GOLDEN GRIFFIN I get a little Verlaine
for Patsy with drawings by Bonnard although I do
think of Hesiod, trans. Richmond Lattimore or
Brendan Behan's new play or *Le Balcon* or *Les Nègres*
of Genet, but I don't, I stick with Verlaine
after practically going to sleep with quandariness

and for Mike I just stroll into the PARK LANE
Liquor Store and ask for a bottle of Strega and
then I go back where I came from to 6th Avenue
and the tobacconist in the Ziegfeld Theatre and
casually ask for a carton of Gauloises and a carton
of Picayunes, and a NEW YORK POST with her face on it

and I am sweating a lot by now and thinking of
leaning on the john door in the 5 SPOT
while she whispered a song along the keyboard
to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing

To the Harbormaster

By Frank O'Hara

I wanted to be sure to reach you;
though my ship was on the way it got caught
in some moorings. I am always tying up
and then deciding to depart. In storms and
at sunset, with the metallic coils of the tide
around my fathomless arms, I am unable
to understand the forms of my vanity
or I am hard alee with my Polish rudder
in my hand and the sun sinking. To
you I offer my hull and the tattered cordage
of my will. The terrible channels where
the wind drives me against the brown lips
of the reeds are not all behind me. Yet
I trust the sanity of my vessel; and
if it sinks, it may well be in answer
to the reasoning of the eternal voices,
the waves which have kept me from reaching you.

Ode

By Arthur O'Shaughnessy

We are the music makers,
  And we are the dreamers of dreams,
Wandering by lone sea-breakers,
  And sitting by desolate streams; —
World-losers and world-forsakers,
  On whom the pale moon gleams:
Yet we are the movers and shakers
  Of the world for ever, it seems.

With wonderful deathless ditties
We build up the world's great cities,
  And out of a fabulous story
  We fashion an empire's glory:
One man with a dream, at pleasure,
  Shall go forth and conquer a crown;
And three with a new song's measure
  Can trample a kingdom down.

We, in the ages lying,
  In the buried past of the earth,
Built Nineveh with our sighing,

And Babel itself in our mirth;
And o'erthrew them with prophesying
To the old of the new world's worth;
For each age is a dream that is dying,
Or one that is coming to birth.

A breath of our inspiration
Is the life of each generation;
A wondrous thing of our dreaming
Unearthly, impossible seeming —
The soldier, the king, and the peasant
Are working together in one,
Till our dream shall become their present,
And their work in the world be done.

They had no vision amazing
Of the goodly house they are raising;
They had no divine foreshowing
Of the land to which they are going:
But on one man's soul it hath broken,
A light that doth not depart;
And his look, or a word he hath spoken,
Wrought flame in another man's heart.

And therefore to-day is thrilling
With a past day's late fulfilling;
And the multitudes are enlisted
In the faith that their fathers resisted,
And, scorning the dream of to-morrow,
Are bringing to pass, as they may,
In the world, for its joy or its sorrow,
The dream that was scorned yesterday.

But we, with our dreaming and singing,
Ceaseless and sorrowless we!
The glory about us clinging
Of the glorious futures we see,
Our souls with high music ringing:
O men! it must ever be
That we dwell, in our dreaming and singing,
A little apart from ye.

For we are afar with the dawning
And the suns that are not yet high,
And out of the infinite morning
Intrepid you hear us cry —

How, spite of your human scorning,
   Once more God's future draws nigh,
And already goes forth the warning
   That ye of the past must die.

Great hail! we cry to the comers
   From the dazzling unknown shore;
Bring us hither your sun and your summers;
   And renew our world as of yore;
You shall teach us your song's new numbers,
   And things that we dreamed not before:
Yea, in spite of a dreamer who slumbers,
   And a singer who sings no more.

At the city pound

By Vincent O'Sullivan

I'm in charge of a cage. I know those that won't.
I don't mean can't. Just *won't*. There's a roster
for Tuesdays, Fridays. Dogs to die.

The disconsolate, the abandoned, those with recurrent
symptoms, the incorrigible mutt — oh, a dozen
choices by way of reasons. Even so,

some *won't*. Won't play along once their number's
up. The "rainbow bridge" in the offing
as the posher clinics put it, a pig's ear

as a final treat, a venison chew, the profession
behaving beautifully at a time like this.
Still, those that won't. Won't go nicely, I mean,

with a gaze to melt, a last slobbed lick.
Those with a soul's defiance, though embarrassment
in the lunchroom should you come at that one!

Even after the bag is zipped, you feel it:
We're real at the end as you are, buster. We sniff
the wind. What say if we say it together? Won't.

Grandmothers Land

By William Oandasan

around the house stood an
orchard of plum, apple and pear
a blackwalnut tree, one white pine,
groves of white oak and willow clumps
the home of Jessie was largely redwood

blood, flesh and bone sprouted
inside her womb of redwood
for five generations
the trees now stand unpruned and wild

after relocating so many years before the War
the seeds of Jessie have returned

afternoon sunlight on the field
breezes moving grass and leaves
memories with family names wait
within the earth, the mountains,
the valley, the field, the trees

Ars Poetica

By José Olivarez

Migration is derived from the word "migrate," which is a verb defined by Merriam-Webster as "to move from one country, place, or locality to another." Plot twist: migration never ends. My parents moved from Jalisco, México to Chicago in 1987. They were dislocated from México by capitalism, and they arrived in Chicago just in time to be dislocated by capitalism. Question: is migration possible if there is no "other" land to arrive in. My work: to imagine. My family started migrating in 1987 and they never stopped. I was born mid-migration. I've made my home in that motion. Let me try again: I tried to become American, but America is toxic. I tried to become Mexican, but México is toxic. My work: to do more than reproduce the toxic stories I inherited and learned. In other words: just because it is art doesn't mean it is inherently nonviolent. My work: to write poems that make my people feel safe, seen, or otherwise loved. My work: to make my enemies feel afraid, angry, or otherwise ignored. My people: my people. My enemies: capitalism. Susan Sontag: "victims are interested in the representation of their own sufferings." Remix: survivors are interested in the representation of their own survival. My work: survival. Question: Why poems? Answer:

The Songs of Maximus: SONG 1

By Charles Olson

colored pictures
of all things to eat: dirty
postcards
And words, words, words
all over everything
No eyes or ears left
to do their own doings (all

invaded, appropriated, outraged, all senses

including the mind, that worker on what is
And that other sense
made to give even the most wretched, or any of us, wretched,
that consolation (greased
lulled
even the street-cars

song

The Songs of Maximus: SONG 2

By Charles Olson

all
wrong
And I am asked—ask myself (I, too, covered
with the gurry of it) where
shall we go from here, what can we do
when even the public conveyances
sing?
how can we go anywhere,
even cross-town
how get out of anywhere (the bodies
all buried
in shallow graves?

Time of the Missile

By George Oppen

I remember a square of New York's Hudson River glinting between warehouses.
Difficult to approach the water below the pier

Swirling, covered with oil the ship at the pier
A steel wall: tons in the water,

Width.
The hand for holding,
Legs for walking,
The eye *sees*! It floods in on us from here to Jersey tangled in the grey bright air!

Become the realm of nations.

My love, my love,
We are endangered
Totally at last. Look
Anywhere to the sight's limit: space
Which is viviparous:

Place of the mind
And eye. Which can destroy us,
Re-arrange itself, assert
Its own stone chain reaction.

Blind Curse

By Simon J. Ortiz

You could drive blind
for those two seconds
and they would be forever.
I think that as a diesel truck
passes us eight miles east of Mission.
Churning through the storm, heedless
of the hill sliding away.
There isn't much use to curse but I do.
Words fly away, tumbling invisibly
toward the unseen point where
the prairie and sky meet.
The road is like that in those seconds,
nothing but the blind white side
of creation.

You're there somewhere,
a tiny struggling cell.
You just might be significant
but you might not be anything.
Forever is a space of split time
from which to recover after the mass passes.

My curse flies out there somewhere,
and then I send my prayer into the wake
of the diesel truck headed for Sioux Falls
one hundred and eighty miles through the storm.

Anthem for Doomed Youth

By Wilfred Owen

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
— Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.
No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells;
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,—
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?
Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes
Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

The Last Laugh

By Wilfred Owen

‘O Jesus Christ! I’m hit,’ he said; and died.
Whether he vainly cursed or prayed indeed,
The Bullets chirped—In vain, vain, vain!
Machine-guns chuckled—Tut-tut! Tut-tut!
And the Big Gun guffawed.

Another sighed,—‘O Mother,—mother,—Dad!’
Then smiled at nothing, childlike, being dead.
And the lofty Shrapnel-cloud
Leisurely gestured,—Fool!
And the splinters spat, and tittered.

‘My Love!’ one moaned. Love-languid seemed his mood,
Till slowly lowered, his whole face kissed the mud.
And the Bayonets’ long teeth grinned;
Rabbles of Shells hooted and groaned;
And the Gas hissed.

Deaf-Mute in the Pear Tree

By P. K. Page

His clumsy body is a golden fruit
pendulous in the pear tree

Blunt fingers among the multitudinous buds

Adriatic blue the sky above and through
the forking twigs

Sun ruddying tree's trunk, his trunk
his massive head thick-nobbed with burnished curls
tight-clenched in bud

(Painting by Generalíc. Primitive.)

I watch him prune with silent secateurs

Boots in the crotch of branches shift their weight
heavily as oxen in a stall

Hear small inarticulate mews from his locked mouth
a kitten in a box

Pear clippings fall
soundlessly on the ground
Spring finches sing
soundlessly in the leaves

A stone. A stone in ears and on his tongue

Through palm and fingertip he knows the tree's
quick springtime pulse

Smells in its sap the sweet incipient pears

Pale sunlight's choppy water glistens on
his mutely snipping blades

and flags and scraps of blue
above him make regatta of the day

But when he sees his wife's foreshortened shape
sudden and silent in the grass below
uptilt its face to him

then air is kisses, kisses

stone dissolves

his locked throat finds a little door

and through it feathered joy
flies screaming like a jay

The Metal and the Flower

By P. K. Page

Intractable between them grows
a garden of barbed wire and roses.
Burning briars like flames devour
their too innocent attire.
Dare they meet, the blackened wire
tears the intervening air.

Trespassers have wandered through
texture of flesh and petals.
Dogs like arrows moved along
pathways that their noses knew.
While the two who laid it out
find the metal and the flower
fatal underfoot.

Black and white at midnight glows
this garden of barbed wire and roses.
Doused with darkness roses burn
coolly as a rainy moon:
beneath a rainy moon or none
silver the sheath on barb and thorn.

Change the garden, scale and plan;
wall it, make it annual.
There the briary flower grew.
There the brambled wire ran.
While they sleep the garden grows,
deepest wish annuls the will:
perfect still the wire and rose.

That Country

By Grace Paley

This is about the women of that country
Sometimes they spoke in slogans
They said
    We patch the roads as we patch our sweetheart's trousers
    The heart will stop but not the transport
They said
    We have ensured production even near bomb craters
    Children let your voices sing higher than the explosions
                of the bombs
They said
    We have important tasks to teach the children
    that the people are the collective masters
    to bear hardship
    to instill love in the family
    to guide the good health of the children (they must
    wear clothing according to climate)
They said
    Once men beat their wives
    now they may not
    Once a poor family sold its daughter to a rich old man
    now the young may love one another
They said
    Once we planted our rice any old way
    now we plant the young shoots in straight rows
    so the imperialist pilot can see how steady our
    hands are

In the evening we walked along the shores of the Lake
                of the Restored Sword

I said is it true? we are sisters?
They said Yes, we are of one family

Written by Himself

By Gregory Pardlo

I was born in minutes in a roadside kitchen a skillet whispering my name. I was born to
        rainwater and lye;
I was born across the river where I
was borrowed with clothespins, a harrow tooth,
broadsides sewn in my shoes. I returned, though
it please you, through no fault of my own,

pockets filled with coffee grounds and eggshells.
I was born still and superstitious; I bore an unexpected burden.
I gave birth, I gave blessing, I gave rise to suspicion.
I was born abandoned outdoors in the heat-shaped air,
air drifting like spirits and old windows.
I was born a fraction and a cipher and a ledger entry;
I was an index of first lines when I was born.
I was born waist-deep stubborn in the water crying
                ain't I a woman and a brother I was born
to this hall of mirrors, this horror story I was
born with a prologue of references, pursued
by mosquitoes and thieves, I was born passing
off the problem of the twentieth century: I was born.
I read minds before I could read fishes and loaves;
I walked a piece of the way alone before I was born.

Wife's Disaster Manual

By Deborah Paredez

When the forsaken city starts to burn,
after the men and children have fled,
stand still, silent as prey, and slowly turn

back. Behold the curse. Stay and mourn
the collapsing doorways, the unbroken bread
in the forsaken city starting to burn.

Don't flinch. Don't join in.
Resist the righteous scurry and instead
stand still, silent as prey. Slowly turn

your thoughts away from escape: the iron
gates unlatched, the responsibilities shed.
When the forsaken city starts to burn,

surrender to your calling, show concern
for those who remain. Come to a dead
standstill. Silent as prey, slowly turn

into something essential. Learn
the names of the fallen. Refuse to run ahead
when the forsaken city starts to burn.
Stand still and silent. Pray. Return.

Nowhere Else to Go

By Linda Sue Park

Turn off the lights.
Wear another layer.
(Sounds like a dad.)
(Sounds like a mom.)

You say hand-me-down.
I say retro.

Walk.
Bike.
Walk some more.
Recycle.

(See what I did there,
bike—re*cycle*?)

Your name in Sharpie
on a good water bottle.
Backpack. New habits.
No thanks, don't need a bag.

What else.
Oh yeah.

Tell ten friends
who can tell ten friends
who can tell ten friends ...
Make enough noise,

maybe the grown-ups
will finally hear

the scream in the title.

Love Song

By Dorothy Parker

My own dear love, he is strong and bold
    And he cares not what comes after.
His words ring sweet as a chime of gold,
    And his eyes are lit with laughter.
He is jubilant as a flag unfurled—

Oh, a girl, she’d not forget him.
My own dear love, he is all my world,—
And I wish I’d never met him.

My love, he’s mad, and my love, he’s fleet,
And a wild young wood-thing bore him!
The ways are fair to his roaming feet,
And the skies are sunlit for him.
As sharply sweet to my heart he seems
As the fragrance of acacia.
My own dear love, he is all my dreams,—
And I wish he were in Asia.

My love runs by like a day in June,
And he makes no friends of sorrows.
He’ll tread his galloping rigadoon
In the pathway of the morrows.
He’ll live his days where the sunbeams start,
Nor could storm or wind uproot him.
My own dear love, he is all my heart,—
And I wish somebody’d shoot him.

Song in a Minor Key

By Dorothy Parker

There's a place I know where the birds swing low,
And wayward vines go roaming,
Where the lilacs nod, and a marble god
Is pale, in scented gloaming.
And at sunset there comes a lady fair
Whose eyes are deep with yearning.
By an old, old gate does the lady wait
Her own true love's returning.

But the days go by, and the lilacs die,
And trembling birds seek cover;
Yet the lady stands, with her long white hands
Held out to greet her lover.
And it's there she'll stay till the shadowy day
A monument they grave her.
She will always wait by the same old gate, —
The gate her true love gave her.

I Am Learning to Abandon the World

By Linda Pastan

I am learning to abandon the world
before it can abandon me.
Already I have given up the moon
and snow, closing my shades
against the claims of white.
And the world has taken
my father, my friends.
I have given up melodic lines of hills,
moving to a flat, tuneless landscape.
And every night I give my body up
limb by limb, working upwards
across bone, towards the heart.
But morning comes with small
reprieves of coffee and birdsong.
A tree outside the window
which was simply shadow moments ago
takes back its branches twig
by leafy twig.
And as I take my body back
the sun lays its warm muzzle on my lap
as if to make amends.

The Obligation to Be Happy

By Linda Pastan

It is more onerous
than the rites of beauty
or housework, harder than love.
But you expect it of me casually,
the way you expect the sun
to come up, not in spite of rain
or clouds but because of them.

And so I smile, as if my own fidelity
to sadness were a hidden vice—
that downward tug on my mouth,
my old suspicion that health
and love are brief irrelevancies,
no more than laughter in the warm dark
strangled at dawn.

Happiness. I try to hoist it

on my narrow shoulders again—
a knapsack heavy with gold coins.
I stumble around the house,
bump into things.
Only Midas himself
would understand.

At the New Year

By Kenneth Patchen

In the shape of this night, in the still fall
of snow, Father
In all that is cold and tiny, these little birds
and children
In everything that moves tonight, the trolleys
and the lovers, Father
In the great hush of country, in the ugly noise
of our cities
In this deep throw of stars, in those trenches
where the dead are, Father
In all the wide land waiting, and in the liners
out on the black water
In all that has been said bravely, in all that is
mean anywhere in the world, Father
In all that is good and lovely, in every house
where sham and hatred are
In the name of those who wait, in the sound
of angry voices, Father
Before the bells ring, before this little point in time
has rushed us on
Before this clean moment has gone, before this night
turns to face tomorrow, Father
There is this high singing in the air
Forever this sorrowful human face in eternity's window
And there are other bells that we would ring, Father
Other bells that we would ring.

'Be Music, Night'

By Kenneth Patchen

Be music, night,
That her sleep may go
Where angels have their pale tall choirs

Be a hand, sea,
That her dreams may watch
Thy guidesman touching the green flesh of the world

Be a voice, sky,
That her beauties may be counted
And the stars will tilt their quiet faces
Into the mirror of her loveliness

Be a road, earth,
That her walking may take thee
Where the towns of heaven lift their breathing spires

O be a world and a throne, God,
That her living may find its weather
And the souls of ancient bells in a child's book
Shall lead her into Thy wondrous house

The Snow Is Deep on the Ground

By Kenneth Patchen

The snow is deep on the ground.
Always the light falls
Softly down on the hair of my belovèd.

This is a good world.
The war has failed.
God shall not forget us.
Who made the snow waits where love is.

Only a few go mad.
The sky moves in its whiteness
Like the withered hand of an old king.
God shall not forget us.
Who made the sky knows of our love.

The snow is beautiful on the ground.
And always the lights of heaven glow
Softly down on the hair of my belovèd.

Monstrance Man

By Ricardo Pau-Llosa

As a boy he had trouble speaking,

past three before a real word preened
from his lips. And for the longest time,
malaprops haunted him. His older sister
did what she could to train the bitten seal
of his brain to twirl the red ball
on the nose of eloquence, and his grandmother
tired of insisting he utter the names
of toys or foods — for every desire
was coded — and gave him whatever
he grunted and pointed to.
O, the man then a boy
thought, when I tower among them
I should invent my own speech
and leave others empty and afraid
that they did not know it, could not ask
or plead their case in the one tongue
that mattered. I shall have them
look upon the simplest things,
the man then a boy thought,
and fill up with stolen awe,
and point with their faces,
their pupils wide as blackened coins,
and hope with all the revenue
shattered heart-glass can muster
that someone had grasped
their need as need and not
as the monstrous coupling
of sounds in a trance of whims.
Then, the grind of his teeth
vowed, then the plazas of my city
will fill with my name,
and their blood will matter
as little to them as to me.

Wind, Water, Stone

By Octavio Paz
Translated By Eliot Weinberger

for Roger Caillois

Water hollows stone,
wind scatters water,
stone stops the wind.
Water, wind, stone.

Wind carves stone,
stone's a cup of water,
water escapes and is wind.
Stone, wind, water.

Wind sings in its whirling,
water murmurs going by,
unmoving stone keeps still.
Wind, water, stone.

Each is another and no other:
crossing and vanishing
through their empty names:
water, stone, wind.

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

The Rain-bow

By Thomas Love Peacock

The day has pass'd in storms, though not unmix'd
With transitory calm. The western clouds,
Dissolving slow, unveil the glorious sun,
Majestic in decline. The wat'ry east
Glows with the many-tinted arch of Heav'n.
We hail it as a pledge that brighter skies
Shall bless the coming morn. Thus rolls the day,
The short dark day of life; with tempests thus,
And fleeting sun-shine chequer'd. At its close,
When the dread hour draws near, that bursts all ties,
All commerce with the world, Religion pours
Hope's fairy-colors on the virtuous mind,
And, like the rain-bow on the ev'ning clouds,
Gives the bright promise that a happier dawn
Shall chase the night and silence of the grave.

That's My Heart Right There

By Willie Perdomo

We used to say,
That's my heart right there.

As if to say,

Don’t mess with her right there.

As if, don’t even play,
That’s a part of me right there.

In other words, okay okay,
That’s the start of me right there.

As if, come that day,
That’s the end of me right there.

As if, push come to shove,
I would fend for her right there.

As if, come what may,
I would lie for her right there.

As if, come love to pay,
I would die for that right there.

Say This

By Lucia Perillo

I live a small life, barely bigger than a speck,
barely more than a blip on the radar sweep
though it is not nothing, as the garter snake
climbs the rock rose shrub and the squirrel creeps
on bramble thorns. Not nothing to the crows
who heckle from the crowns of the last light’s trees
winterstripped of green, except for the boles
that ivy winds each hour round. See, the world is busy
and the world is quick, barely time for a spider
to suck the juice from a hawk moth’s head
so it can use the moth as a spindle that it wraps in fiber
while the moth constricts until it’s thin as a stick
you might think was nothing, a random bit
caught in a web coming loose from the window frame, in wind.

Epitaph

By Katherine Philips

On her Son H.P. at St. Syth’s Church where her body also lies interred

What on Earth deserves our trust?

Youth and Beauty both are dust.
Long we gathering are with pain,
What one moment calls again.
Seven years childless marriage past,
A Son, a son is born at last:
So exactly lim'd and fair,
Full of good Spirits, Meen, and Air,
As a long life promised,
Yet, in less than six weeks dead.
Too promising, too great a mind
In so small room to be confined:
Therefore, as fit in Heaven to dwell,
He quickly broke the Prison shell.
So the subtle Alchemist,
Can't with *Hermes* Seal resist
The powerful spirit's subtler flight,
But t'will bid him long good night.
And so the Sun if it arise
Half so glorious as his Eyes,
Like this Infant, takes a shrowd,
Buried in a morning Cloud.

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

A Kind of Meadow

By Carl Phillips

—shored
by trees at its far ending,
as is the way in moral tales:

whether trees as trees actually,
for their shadow and what
inside of it

hides, threatens, calls to;
or as ever-wavering conscience,
cloaked now, and called Chorus;

or, between these, whatever
falls upon the rippling and measurable,
but none to measure it, thin

fabric of *this stands for*.

A kind of meadow, and then
trees—many, assembled, a wood

therefore. Through the wood
the worn
path, emblematic of Much

Trespass: *Halt. Who goes there?*
A kind of meadow, where it ends
begin trees, from whose twinning

of late light and the already underway
darkness you were expecting perhaps
the stag to step forward, to make

of its twelve-pointed antlers
the branching foreground to a backdrop
all branches;

or you wanted the usual
bird to break cover at that angle
at which wings catch entirely

what light's left,
so that for once the bird isn't miracle
at all, but the simplicity of patience

and a good hand assembling: first
the thin bones, now in careful
rows the feathers, like fretwork,

now the brush, for the laying-on
of sheen.... *As is always the way,*
you tell yourself, *in*

poems—Yes, always,
until you have gone there,
and gone there, "into the

field," vowing *Only until*
there's nothing more
I want—thinking it, wrongly,

a thing attainable, any real end
to wanting, and that it is close, and that
it is likely, how will you not

this time catch hold of it: flashing,
flesh at once

lit and lightless, a way
out, the one dappled way, back—

Luna Moth

By Carl Phillips

No eye that sees could fail to remark you:
like any leaf the rain leaves fixed to and
flat against the barn's gray shingle. But

what leaf, this time of year, is so pale,
the pale of leaves when they've lost just
enough green to become the green that *means*

loss and more loss, approaching? Give up
the flesh enough times, and whatever is lost
gets forgotten: that was the thought that I

woke to, those words in my head. I rose,
I did not dress, I left no particular body
sleeping and, stepping into the hour, I saw

you, strange sign, at once transparent and
impossible to entirely see through. and how
still: the still of being unmoved, and then

the still of no longer being able to be
moved. If I think of a heart, his, as I've
found it.... If I think of, increasingly, my

own.... If I look at you now, as from above,
and see the diva when she is caught in mid-
triumph, arms half-raised, the body as if

set at last free of the green sheath that has—
how many nights?—held her, it is not
without remembering another I once saw:

like you, except that something, a bird, some
wild and necessary hunger, had gotten to it;
and like the diva, but now broken, splayed

and torn, the green torn piecemeal from her.
I remember the hands, and—how small they
seemed, bringing the small ripped thing to me.

Dream of the Phone Booth

By Emilia Phillips

My story's told in the mis-dial's
hesitance & anonyms of crank calls,

in the wires' electric elegy
& glass expanded by the moth

flicker of filament. I call a past
that believes I'm dead. On the concrete

here, you can see where
I stood in rust, lashed to the grid.

On the corner of Pine & Idlewood,
I've seen a virgin on her knees

before the angel
of a streetlight & Moses stealing the *Times*

to build a fire. I've seen the city fly
right through a memory & not break

its neck. But the street still needs a shrine,
so return my ringing heart & no one

to answer it, a traveler whose only destination is
waywardness. Forgive us

our apologies, the bees in our bells, the receiver's
grease, days horizoned

into words. If we stand
monument to anything,

it's that only some voices belong
to men.

Violins

By Rowan Ricardo Phillips

He never saw a violin.
But he saw a lifetime of violence.

This is not to presume
That if he had simply seen

A violin he would have seen
Less violence. Or that living among

Violins, as though they were
Boulangeries or toppling stacks

Of other glazed goods like young adult
Fiction, would have made the violence

Less crack and more cocaine,
Less of course and more why god oh why.

More of one thing
Doesn't rhyme with one thing.

A swill of stars doesn't rhyme
With star. A posse of poets doesn't rhyme

With poet. We are all in prison.
This is the brutal lesson of the 21st century,

Swilled like a sour stone
Through the vein of the beast

Who watches you while you eat;
Our eternal host, the chummed fiddler,

The better tomorrow,
MMXVI.

Note to Poetry Out Loud Students: *In regards to "MMXVI" either the Roman numerals or the year may be recited.*

To be of use

By Marge Piercy

The people I love the best
jump into work head first
without dallying in the shallows
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.
They seem to become natives of that element,
the black sleek heads of seals
bouncing like half-submerged balls.

I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,
who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,
who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,
who do what has to be done, again and again.

I want to be with people who submerge
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest
and work in a row and pass the bags along,
who are not parlor generals and field deserters
but move in a common rhythm
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.

The work of the world is common as mud.
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.
But the thing worth doing well done
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums
but you know they were made to be used.
The pitcher cries for water to carry
and a person for work that is real.

To have without holding

By Marge Piercy

Learning to love differently is hard,
love with the hands wide open, love
with the doors banging on their hinges,
the cupboard unlocked, the wind
roaring and whimpering in the rooms
rustling the sheets and snapping the blinds
that thwack like rubber bands
in an open palm.

It hurts to love wide open
stretching the muscles that feel
as if they are made of wet plaster,
then of blunt knives, then
of sharp knives.

It hurts to thwart the reflexes
of grab, of clutch ; to love and let
go again and again. It pesters to remember
the lover who is not in the bed,
to hold back what is owed to the work
that gutters like a candle in a cave
without air, to love consciously,
conscientiously, concretely, constructively.

I can’t do it, you say it’s killing
me, but you thrive, you glow
on the street like a neon raspberry,
You float and sail, a helium balloon
bright bachelor’s button blue and bobbing
on the cold and hot winds of our breath,
as we make and unmake in passionate
diastole and systole the rhythm
of our unbound bonding, to have
and not to hold, to love
with minimized malice, hunger
and anger moment by moment balanced.

A Song: Lying in an occupation

By Laetitia Pilkington

Lying is an occupation,
    Used by all who mean to rise;
Politicians owe their station,
    But to well concerted lies.

These to lovers give assistance,
    To ensnare the fair-one's heart;
And the virgin's best resistance
    Yields to this commanding art.

Study this superior science,
    Would you rise in Church or State;
Bid to Truth a bold defiance,
    'Tis the practice of the great.

The Wish, By a Young Lady

By Laetitia Pilkington

I ask not wit, nor beauty do I crave,
Nor wealth, nor pompous titles wish to have;
But since, 'tis doomed through all degrees of life,
Whether a daughter, sister, or a wife;
That females should the stronger males obey,
And yield implicit to their lordly sway;
Since this, I say, is ev'ry woman's fate,
Give me a mind to suit my slavish state.

Poem about People

By Robert Pinsky

The jaunty crop-haired graying
Women in grocery stores,
Their clothes boyish and neat,
New mittens or clean sneakers,

Clean hands, hips not bad still,
Buying ice cream, steaks, soda,
Fresh melons and soap—or the big
Balding young men in work shoes

And green work pants, beer belly
And white T-shirt, the porky walk
Back to the truck, polite; possible
To feel briefly like Jesus,

A gust of diffuse tenderness
Crossing the dark spaces
To where the dry self burrows
Or nests, something that stirs,

Watching the kinds of people
On the street for a while—
But how love falters and flags
When anyone’s difficult eyes come

Into focus, terrible gaze of a unique
Soul, its need unlovable: my friend
In his divorced schoolteacher
Apartment, his own unsuspected

Paintings hung everywhere,
Which his wife kept in a closet—
Not, he says, that she wasn't
Perfectly right; or me, mis-hearing

My rock radio sing my self-pity:
"The Angels Wished Him Dead"—all
The hideous, sudden stare of self,
Soul showing through like the lizard

Ancestry showing in the frontal gaze
Of a robin busy on the lawn.
In the movies, when the sensitive
Young Jewish soldier nearly drowns

Trying to rescue the thrashing
Anti-semitic bully, swimming across
The river raked by nazi fire,
The awful part is the part truth:

Hate my whole kind, but me,
Love me for myself. The weather
Changes in the black of night,
And the dream-wind, bowling across

The sopping open spaces
Of roads, golf courses, parking lots,
Flails a commotion
In the dripping treetops,

Tries a half-rotten shingle
Or a down-hung branch, and we
All dream it, the dark wind crossing
The wide spaces between us.

The Conqueror Worm

By Edgar Allan Poe

Lo! 't is a gala night
  Within the lonesome latter years!
An angel throng, bewinged, bedight
  In veils, and drowned in tears,
Sit in a theatre, to see
  A play of hopes and fears,
While the orchestra breathes fitfully

The music of the spheres.

Mimes, in the form of God on high,
Mutter and mumble low,
And hither and thither fly—
Mere puppets they, who come and go
At bidding of vast formless things
That shift the scenery to and fro,
Flapping from out their Condor wings
Invisible Wo!

That motley drama—oh, be sure
It shall not be forgot!
With its Phantom chased for evermore
By a crowd that seize it not,
Through a circle that ever returneth in
To the self-same spot,
And much of Madness, and more of Sin,
And Horror the soul of the plot.

But see, amid the mimic rout,
A crawling shape intrude!
A blood-red thing that writhes from out
The scenic solitude!
It writhes!—it writhes!—with mortal pangs
The mimes become its food,
And seraphs sob at vermin fangs
In human gore imbued.

Out—out are the lights—out all!
And, over each quivering form,
The curtain, a funeral pall,
Comes down with the rush of a storm,
While the angels, all pallid and wan,
Uprising, unveiling, affirm
That the play is the tragedy, "Man,"
And its hero, the Conqueror Worm.

Israfel

By Edgar Allan Poe

> *And the angel Israfel, whose heart-strings are a lute, and who has the sweetest voice of all God's creatures. —KORAN*

In Heaven a spirit doth dwell

"Whose heart-strings are a lute";
None sing so wildly well
As the angel Israfel,
And the giddy stars (so legends tell),
Ceasing their hymns, attend the spell
Of his voice, all mute.

Tottering above
In her highest noon,
The enamoured moon
Blushes with love,
While, to listen, the red levin
(With the rapid Pleiads, even,
Which were seven,)
Pauses in Heaven.

And they say (the starry choir
And the other listening things)
That Israfeli's fire
Is owing to that lyre
By which he sits and sings—
The trembling living wire
Of those unusual strings.

But the skies that angel trod,
Where deep thoughts are a duty,
Where Love's a grown-up God,
Where the Houri glances are
Imbued with all the beauty
Which we worship in a star.

Therefore, thou art not wrong,
Israfeli, who despisest
An unimpassioned song;
To thee the laurels belong,
Best bard, because the wisest!
Merrily live, and long!

The ecstasies above
With thy burning measures suit—
Thy grief, thy joy, thy hate, thy love,
With the fervour of thy lute—
Well may the stars be mute!

Yes, Heaven is thine; but this
Is a world of sweets and sours;

Our flowers are merely—flowers,
And the shadow of thy perfect bliss
Is the sunshine of ours.

If I could dwell
Where Israfel
Hath dwelt, and he where I,
He might not sing so wildly well
A mortal melody,
While a bolder note than this might swell
From my lyre within the sky.

Note to Poetry Out Loud Participants: *The epigraph of this poem is optional for recitation.*

To Helen

By Edgar Allan Poe

Helen, thy beauty is to me
Like those Nicéan barks of yore,
That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,
The weary, way-worn wanderer bore
To his own native shore.

On desperate seas long wont to roam,
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home
To the glory that was Greece,
And the grandeur that was Rome.

Lo! in yon brilliant window-niche
How statue-like I see thee stand,
The agate lamp within thy hand!
Ah, Psyche, from the regions which
Are Holy-Land!

Old Mama Saturday

By Marie Ponsot

"Saturday's child must work for a living."

"I'm moving from Grief Street.
Taxes are high here
though the mortgage's cheap.

The house is well built.
With stuff to protect, that
mattered to me,
the security.

These things that I mind,
you know, aren't mine.
I mind minding them.
They weigh on my mind.

I don't mind them well.
I haven't got the knack
of kindly minding.
I say Take them back
but you never do.

When I throw them out
it may frighten you
and maybe me too.

Maybe
it will empty me
too emptily

and keep me here
asleep, at sea
under the guilt quilt,
under the you tree."

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

Winter

By Marie Ponsot

I don't know what to say to you, neighbor,
as you shovel snow from your part of our street
neat in your Greek black. I've waited for
chance to find words; now, by chance, we meet.

We took our boys to the same kindergarten,
thirteen years ago when our husbands went.
Both boys hated school, dropped out feral, dropped in
to separate troubles. You shift snow fast, back bent,
but your boy killed himself, six days dead.

My boy washed your wall when the police were done.
He says, “We weren’t friends?” and shakes his head,
“I told him it was great he had that gun,”
and shakes. I shake, close to you, close to you.
You have a path to clear, and so you do.

Ode on Solitude

By Alexander Pope

Happy the man, whose wish and care
  A few paternal acres bound,
Content to breathe his native air,
                In his own ground.

Whose herds with milk, whose fields with bread,
  Whose flocks supply him with attire,
Whose trees in summer yield him shade,
                In winter fire.

Blest, who can unconcernedly find
  Hours, days, and years slide soft away,
In health of body, peace of mind,
                Quiet by day,

Sound sleep by night; study and ease,
  Together mixed; sweet recreation;
And innocence, which most does please,
                With meditation.

Thus let me live, unseen, unknown;
  Thus unlamented let me die;
Steal from the world, and not a stone
                Tell where I lie.

Envoi

By Ezra Pound

Go, dumb-born book,
Tell her that sang me once that song of Lawes:
Hadst thou but song
As thou hast subjects known,
Then were there cause in thee that should condone
Even my faults that heavy upon me lie

And build her glories their longevity.

Tell her that sheds
Such treasure in the air,
Recking naught else but that her graces give
Life to the moment,
I would bid them live
As roses might, in magic amber laid,
Red overwrought with orange and all made
One substance and one colour
Braving time.

Tell her that goes
With song upon her lips
But sings not out the song, nor knows
The maker of it, some other mouth,
May be as fair as hers,
Might, in new ages, gain her worshippers,
When our two dusts with Waller's shall be laid,
Siftings on siftings in oblivion,
Till change hath broken down
All things save Beauty alone.

Portrait d'une Femme

By Ezra Pound

Your mind and you are our Sargasso Sea,
    London has swept about you this score years
And bright ships left you this or that in fee:
    Ideas, old gossip, oddments of all things,
Strange spars of knowledge and dimmed wares of price.
    Great minds have sought you — lacking someone else.
You have been second always. Tragical?
    No. You preferred it to the usual thing:
One dull man, dulling and uxorious,
    One average mind — with one thought less, each year.
Oh, you are patient, I have seen you sit
    Hours, where something might have floated up.
And now you pay one. Yes, you richly pay.
    You are a person of some interest, one comes to you
And takes strange gain away:
    Trophies fished up; some curious suggestion;
Fact that leads nowhere; and a tale for two,
    Pregnant with mandrakes, or with something else
That might prove useful and yet never proves,

That never fits a corner or shows use,
Or finds its hour upon the loom of days:
The tarnished, gaudy, wonderful old work;
Idols and ambergris and rare inlays,
These are your riches, your great store; and yet
For all this sea-hoard of deciduous things,
Strange woods half sodden, and new brighter stuff:
In the slow float of differing light and deep,
No! there is nothing! In the whole and all,
Nothing that's quite your own.
Yet this is you.

The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter

By Ezra Pound

After Li Po

While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead
I played about the front gate, pulling flowers.
You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse,
You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums.
And we went on living in the village of Chōkan:
Two small people, without dislike or suspicion.
At fourteen I married My Lord you.
I never laughed, being bashful.
Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.
Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back.

At fifteen I stopped scowling,
I desired my dust to be mingled with yours
Forever and forever, and forever.
Why should I climb the look out?

At sixteen you departed
You went into far Ku-tō-en, by the river of swirling eddies,
And you have been gone five months.
The monkeys make sorrowful noise overhead.

You dragged your feet when you went out.
By the gate now, the moss is grown, the different mosses,
Too deep to clear them away!
The leaves fall early this autumn, in wind.
The paired butterflies are already yellow with August
Over the grass in the West garden;
They hurt me.

I grow older.
If you are coming down through the narrows of the river Kiang,
Please let me know beforehand,
And I will come out to meet you
As far as Chō-fū-Sa.

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

A Virginal

By Ezra Pound

No, no! Go from me. I have left her lately.
I will not spoil my sheath with lesser brightness,
For my surrounding air hath a new lightness;
Slight are her arms, yet they have bound me straitly
And left me cloaked as with a gauze of æther;
As with sweet leaves; as with subtle clearness.
Oh, I have picked up magic in her nearness
To sheathe me half in half the things that sheathe her.
No, no! Go from me. I have still the flavour,
Soft as spring wind that's come from birchen bowers.
Green come the shoots, aye April in the branches,
As winter's wound with her sleight hand she staunches,
Hath of the trees a likeness of the savour:
As white their bark, so white this lady's hours.

Orchestral Maneuvers in the Dark

By D. A. Powell

I play the egg
and I play the triangle
I play the reed
and I play each angle
I play the lyre
and I play the lute
I play the snare
and I play the flute
I play the licorice stick
and I play the juke
I play the kettle
and I play the uke
who ever thought of the triangle
who ever thought of the clarinet

the castanets the cornet the
discotheque the harmonium
the euphonium marimbas and
maracas harmonicas
tom-toms and tatas
I play the fiddle
and I play the jug
I play the washboard
and the washtub
I play kalimba
and I play the koto
I play the organ
and I play the banjo
I play the fool I play it cool
I play hot and I play pranks
I played your mixtape
forgot to say thanks

An Ode

By Matthew Prior

The merchant, to secure his treasure,
Conveys it in a borrowed name;
Euphelia serves to grace my measure,
But Cloe is my real flame.

My softest verse, my darling lyre,
Upon Euphelia's toilet lay;
When Cloe noted her desire
That I should sing, that I should play.

My lyre I tune, my voice I raise,
But with my numbers mix my sighs;
And whilst I sing Euphelia's praise,
I fix my soul on Cloe's eyes.

Fair Cloe blushed; Euphelia frowned;
I sung and gazed; I played and trembled;
And Venus to the Loves around
Remarked how ill we all dissembled.

Ode to Langston

By Dawn Quigley

Langston, we too, sing Turtle Island.

We are the 574 Nations.
They want to hide us
In the past tense,
Yet we love,
And dream,
And are still here.

Today, now,
We are at the oval table
As our women lead.
Nobody can ever
Say to us,
"Natives lived, Natives ate, drank, led."
We are *present* tense.

Because,
They will know what we've always known
And be humbled—

We, too, sing Turtle Island.

Haiti

By Jennifer Rahim

For the earth has spoken,
to you, her magma Creole.

Full-throated syllables, up-
rising from deep down,

an honest elocution —
rudimentary sound: guttural

nouns, forthright, strong,
the rumbled conviction of verbs

unfettered by reticence
as the first poetry of creation.

A secret has passed between you

so wonderfully terrible,

it laid your cities prostrate,
raptured your citizenry.

Now, we look to your remnant
courtesy cable TV

and garble theories thinking
ourselves saved.

Only the wise among us pin
our ears to the ground,

listening in hope of catching
even a half syllable

of the language forming
like a new world on your tongue.

Nature, That Washed Her Hands in Milk

By Sir Walter Ralegh

Nature, that washed her hands in milk,
And had forgot to dry them,
Instead of earth took snow and silk,
At love's request to try them,
If she a mistress could compose
To please love's fancy out of those.

Her eyes he would should be of light,
A violet breath, and lips of jelly;
Her hair not black, nor overbright,
And of the softest down her belly;
As for her inside he'd have it
Only of wantonness and wit.

At love's entreaty such a one
Nature made, but with her beauty
She hath framed a heart of stone;
So as love, by ill destiny,
Must die for her whom nature gave him,
Because her darling would not save him.

But time (which nature doth despise,

And rudely gives her love the lie,
Makes hope a fool, and sorrow wise)
His hands do neither wash nor dry;
But being made of steel and rust,
Turns snow and silk and milk to dust.

The light, the belly, lips, and breath,
He dims, discolors, and destroys;
With those he feeds but fills not death,
Which sometimes were the food of joys.
Yea, time doth dull each lively wit,
And dries all wantonness with it.

Oh, cruel time! which takes in trust
Our youth, our joys, and all we have,
And pays us but with age and dust;
Who in the dark and silent grave
When we have wandered all our ways
Shuts up the story of our days.

The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd

By Sir Walter Ralegh

If all the world and love were young,
And truth in every Shepherd's tongue,
These pretty pleasures might me move,
To live with thee, and be thy love.

Time drives the flocks from field to fold,
When Rivers rage and Rocks grow cold,
And *Philomel* becometh dumb,
The rest complains of cares to come.

The flowers do fade, and wanton fields,
To wayward winter reckoning yields,
A honey tongue, a heart of gall,
Is fancy's spring, but sorrow's fall.

Thy gowns, thy shoes, thy beds of Roses,
Thy cap, thy kirtle, and thy posies
Soon break, soon wither, soon forgotten:
In folly ripe, in reason rotten.

Thy belt of straw and Ivy buds,
The Coral clasps and amber studs,

All these in me no means can move
To come to thee and be thy love.

But could youth last, and love still breed,
Had joys no date, nor age no need,
Then these delights my mind might move
To live with thee, and be thy love.

The Current Isolationism

By Camille Rankine

In the half-light, I am most
at home, my shadow
as company.

When I feel hot, I push a button
to make it stop. I mean this stain on my mind
I can't get out. How human

I seem. Like modern man,
I traffic in extinction. I have a gift.
Like an animal, I sustain.

A flock of birds
when touched, I scatter. I won't approach
until the back is turned.

My heart betrays. I confess: I am afraid.
How selfish of me.
When there's no one here, I halve

the distance between
our bodies infinitesimally.
In this long passageway, I pose

against the wallpaper, dig
my heels in, catch the light.
In my vision, the back door opens

on a garden that is always
in bloom. The dogs
are chained so they can't attack like I know

they want to. In the next yard
over, honeybees swarm

and their sound is huge.

History

By Camille Rankine

Our stone wall was built by slaves and my bones, my bones
are paid for. We have two

of everything, twice heavy
in our pockets, warming
our two big hands.

This is the story, as I know it. One morning:
the ships came, as foretold, and death
pearl-handled, almost

and completely.
How cheap a date I turned out to be.

Each finger weak with the memory:
lost teeth, regret. Our ghosts
walk the shoulders of the road at night.
I get the feeling you've been lying to me.

Symptoms of Prophecy

By Camille Rankine

In the new century,
we lose the art of many things.

For example, at the beep, I communicate
using the wrong machine.

I called to say we have two lives
and only one of them is real.

When the phone rings: you could be anybody.
In the evening: you are homeless

and hunting for good light, as safe a place
as any to make a bed for the night.

In both my lives, my nerves go bust.
I'm certain that I'm not

as I appear, that I'm a figment and
you're not really here.

The struggle
is authenticity.

I have a message.
You must believe me.

Don't Let Me Be Lonely: "At the airport-security checkpoint..."

By Claudia Rankine

At the airport-security checkpoint on my way to visit my grandmother, I am asked to drink from my water bottle.

This water bottle?

That's right. Open it and drink from it.

/

At the airport-security checkpoint on my way to visit my grandmother, I am asked to take off my shoes.

Take off my shoes?

Yes. Both Please.

/

At the airport-security checkpoint on my way to visit my grandmother, I am asked if I have a fever.

A fever? Really?

Yes. Really.

/

My grandmother is in a nursing home. It's not bad. It doesn't smell like pee. It doesn't smell like anything. When I go to see her, as I walk through the hall past the common room and the nurses' station, old person after old person puts out his or her hand to me. Steven, one says. Ann, another calls. It's like being in a third-world country, but instead of food or

money you are what is wanted, your company. In third-world countries I have felt overwhelmingly American, calcium-rich, privileged, and white. Here, I feel young, lucky, and sad. Sad is one of those words that has given up its life for our country, it's been a martyr for the American dream, it's been neutralized, co-opted by our culture to suggest a tinge of discomfort that lasts the time it takes for this and then for that to happen, the time it takes to change a channel. But sadness is real because once it meant something real. It meant dignified, grave; it meant trustworthy; it meant exceptionally bad, deplorable, shameful; it meant massive, weighty, forming a compact body; it meant falling heavily; and it meant of a color: dark. It meant dark in color, to darken. It meant me. I felt sad.

Janet Waking

By John Crowe Ransom

Beautifully Janet slept
Till it was deeply morning. She woke then
And thought about her dainty-feathered hen,
To see how it had kept.

One kiss she gave her mother,
Only a small one gave she to her daddy
Who would have kissed each curl of his shining baby;
No kiss at all for her brother.

“Old Chucky, Old Chucky!” she cried,
Running across the world upon the grass
To Chucky’s house, and listening. But alas,
Her Chucky had died.

It was a transmogrifying bee
Came droning down on Chucky’s old bald head
And sat and put the poison. It scarcely bled,
But how exceedingly

And purply did the knot
Swell with the venom and communicate
Its rigour! Now the poor comb stood up straight
But Chucky did not.

So there was Janet
Kneeling on the wet grass, crying her brown hen
(Translated far beyond the daughters of men)
To rise and walk upon it.

And weeping fast as she had breath
Janet implored us, “Wake her from her sleep!”

And would not be instructed in how deep
Was the forgetful kingdom of death.

Limitations

By Henrietta Cordelia Ray

The subtlest strain a great musician weaves,
Cannot attain in rhythmic harmony
To music in his soul. May it not be
Celestial lyres send hints to him? He grieves
That half the sweetness of the song, he leaves
Unheard in the transition. Thus do we
Yearn to translate the wondrous majesty
Of some rare mood, when the rapt soul receives
A vision exquisite. Yet who can match
The sunset's iridescent hues? Who sing
The skylark's ecstasy so seraph-fine?
We struggle vainly, still we fain would catch
Such rifts amid life's shadows, for they bring
Glimpses ineffable of things divine.

All Thirst Quenched

By Lois Red Elk

for my granddaughter, Wahcawin

I didn't want to scold the sky that year, but
Grandma's words taunted my senses. If there
is a thirst, then you need to pity the flowers

in a loud voice. Ask the frogs why they are
being punished, stomp on the ground and talk
to the dried clay about cracking open the earth.

I know challenging the storm is risky. "Last
but not least, burn cedar and pray the lightning
doesn't strike your town." That night, the stars

disappeared, so did the birds. Perhaps it was
the season for rain or the dance. In the western
distance, we thought we heard cannon blasts,

looking over we watched the horizon fill with
lightning strikes. Rain couldn't pour hard enough

over the thirsty plain. Accompanying clouds,

called to thunder's voice in extreme decimals
requesting all the water heaven could send forth,
to come. Rain and more rain filled empty stream

bottoms. Rivers who had pulled their dry banks
farther and farther from their center begged for
a drink to startle dusty beds with a flooding roar.

Lives in dormant places begin to stir and awaken.
The lives of water beings, those that swim, the
ones that hop, and the ones that fly, begin to stir.

That year all thirst was quenched.

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

The Bad Old Days

By Kenneth Rexroth

The summer of nineteen eighteen
I read *The Jungle* and *The*
Research Magnificent. That fall
My father died and my aunt
Took me to Chicago to live.
The first thing I did was to take
A streetcar to the stockyards.
In the winter afternoon,
Gritty and fetid, I walked
Through the filthy snow, through the
Squalid streets, looking shyly
Into the people's faces,
Those who were home in the daytime.
Debauched and exhausted faces,
Starved and looted brains, faces
Like the faces in the senile
And insane wards of charity
Hospitals. Predatory
Faces of little children.
Then as the soiled twilight darkened,
Under the green gas lamps, and the
Sputtering purple arc lamps,
The faces of the men coming

Home from work, some still alive with
The last pulse of hope or courage,
Some sly and bitter, some smart and
Silly, most of them already
Broken and empty, no life,
Only blinding tiredness, worse
Than any tired animal.
The sour smells of a thousand
Suppers of fried potatoes and
Fried cabbage bled into the street.
I was giddy and sick, and out
Of my misery I felt rising
A terrible anger and out
Of the anger, an absolute vow.
Today the evil is clean
And prosperous, but it is
Everywhere, you don't have to
Take a streetcar to find it,
And it is the same evil.
And the misery, and the
Anger, and the vow are the same.

Discrimination

By Kenneth Rexroth

I don't mind the human race.
I've got pretty used to them
In these past twenty-five years.
I don't mind if they sit next
To me on streetcars, or eat
In the same restaurants, if
It's not at the same table.
However, I don't approve
Of a woman I respect
Dancing with one of them. I've
Tried asking them to my home
Without success. I shouldn't
Care to see my own sister
Marry one. Even if she
Loved him, think of the children.
Their art is interesting,
But certainly barbarous.
I'm sure, if given a chance,
They'd kill us all in our beds.
And you must admit, they smell.

On What Planet

By Kenneth Rexroth

Uniformly over the whole countryside
The warm air flows imperceptibly seaward;
The autumn haze drifts in deep bands
Over the pale water;
White egrets stand in the blue marshes;
Tamalpais, Diablo, St. Helena
Float in the air.
Climbing on the cliffs of Hunter's Hill
We look out over fifty miles of sinuous
Interpenetration of mountains and sea.

Leading up a twisted chimney,
Just as my eyes rise to the level
Of a small cave, two white owls
Fly out, silent, close to my face.
They hover, confused in the sunlight,
And disappear into the recesses of the cliff.

All day I have been watching a new climber,
A young girl with ash blonde hair
And gentle confident eyes.
She climbs slowly, precisely,
With unwasted grace.

While I am coiling the ropes,
Watching the spectacular sunset,
She turns to me and says, quietly,
"It must be very beautiful, the sunset,
On Saturn, with the rings and all the moons."

The Wheel Revolves

By Kenneth Rexroth

You were a girl of satin and gauze
Now you are my mountain and waterfall companion.
Long ago I read those lines of Po Chu I
Written in his middle age.
Young as I was they touched me.
I never thought in my own middle age
I would have a beautiful young dancer
To wander with me by falling crystal waters,
Among mountains of snow and granite,

Least of all that unlike Po's girl
She would be my very daughter.

The earth turns towards the sun.
Summer comes to the mountains.
Blue grouse drum in the red fir woods
All the bright long days.
You put blue jay and flicker feathers
In your hair.
Two and two violet green swallows
Play over the lake.
The blue birds have come back
To nest on the little island.
The swallows sip water on the wing
And play at love and dodge and swoop
Just like the swallows that swirl
Under and over the Ponte Vecchio.
Light rain crosses the lake
Hissing faintly. After the rain
There are giant puffballs with tortoise shell backs
At the edge of the meadow.
Snows of a thousand winters
Melt in the sun of one summer.
Wild cyclamen bloom by the stream.
Trout veer in the transparent current.
In the evening marmots bark in the rocks.
The Scorpion curls over the glimmering ice field.
A white crowned night sparrow sings as the moon sets.
Thunder growls far off.
Our campfire is a single light
Amongst a hundred peaks and waterfalls.
The manifold voices of falling water
Talk all night.
Wrapped in your down bag
Starlight on your cheeks and eyelids
Your breath comes and goes
In a tiny cloud in the frosty night.
Ten thousand birds sing in the sunrise.
Ten thousand years revolve without change.
All this will never be again.

The Days Gone By

By James Whitcomb Riley

O the days gone by! O the days gone by!

The apples in the orchard, and the pathway through the rye;
The chirrup of the robin, and the whistle of the quail
As he piped across the meadows sweet as any nightingale;
When the bloom was on the clover, and the blue was in the sky,
And my happy heart brimmed over in the days gone by.

In the days gone by, when my naked feet were tripped
By the honey-suckle's tangles where the water-lilies dipped,
And the ripples of the river lipped the moss along the brink
Where the placid-eyed and lazy-footed cattle came to drink,
And the tilting snipe stood fearless of the truant's wayward cry
And the splashing of the swimmer, in the days gone by.

O the days gone by! O the days gone by!
The music of the laughing lip, the luster of the eye;
The childish faith in fairies, and Aladdin's magic ring—
The simple, soul-reposing, glad belief in everything,—
When life was like a story, holding neither sob nor sigh,
In the golden olden glory of the days gone by.

The Seekers of Lice

By Arthur Rimbaud
Translated by Wallace Fowlie

When the child's forehead, full of red torments,
Implores the white swarm of indistinct dreams,
There come near his bed two tall charming sisters
With slim fingers that have silvery nails.

They seat the child in front of a wide open
Window where the blue air bathes a mass of flowers
And in his heavy hair where the dew falls
Move their delicate, fearful and enticing fingers.

He listens to the singing of their apprehensive breath.
Which smells of long rosy plant honey
And which at times a hiss interrupts, saliva
Caught on the lip or desire for kisses.

He hears their black eyelashes beating in the perfumed
Silence; and their gentle electric fingers
Make in his half-drunken indolence the death of the little lice
Crackle under their royal nails.

Then the wine of Sloth rises in him,

The sigh of an harmonica which could bring on delirium;
The child feels, according to the slowness of the caresses
Surging in him and dying continuously a desire to cry.

Border Boy

By Alberto Ríos

I grew up on the border and though I left
I have brought it with me wherever I've gone.

Its line guides me, this long, winding thread of memory.
The border wasn't as big as they say—

It fit neatly behind my eyes and between my ears—
It guides me still, I know, but it is not a compass.

It is not a place out there but a place in here.
I catch on its barbed wire in both places.

It is a line I step over and a ledge I duck under.
I have looked underneath its skirts, and it has caught me—

Many times. We're old friends and we play the game well.
When someone says *border*, now, or *frontera*, or *the line*.

La línea, or *the fence*, or whatever else
We name the edge and the end of things—

I hear something missing in the words,
The *what it all used to be*. Its name does not include its childhood.

I grew up liking the border and its great scar,
Its drama always good for a story the way scars always are.

A scar is the place where the hurting used to be.
A scar the heroic signature of the healed.

The border is not a scar. Instead, it is something we keep picking at,
Something that has no name.

The border I knew was something with a history.
But this thing now, it is a stranger even to itself.

Rabbits and Fire

By Alberto Ríos

Everything's been said
But one last thing about the desert,
And it's awful: During brush fires in the Sonoran desert,
Brush fires that happen before the monsoon and in the great,
Deep, wide, and smothering heat of the hottest months,
The longest months,
The hypnotic, immeasurable lulls of August and July—
During these summer fires, jackrabbits—
Jackrabbits and everything else
That lives in the brush of the rolling hills,
But jackrabbits especially—
Jackrabbits can get caught in the flames,
No matter how fast and big and strong and sleek they are.
And when they're caught,
Cornered in and against the thick
Trunks and thin spines of the cactus,
When they can't back up any more,
When they can't move, the flame—
It touches them,
And their fur catches fire.
Of course, they run away from the flame,
Finding movement even when there is none to be found,
Jumping big and high over the wave of fire, or backing
Even harder through the impenetrable
Tangle of hardened saguaro
And prickly pear and cholla and barrel,
But whichever way they find,
What happens is what happens: They catch fire
And then bring the fire with them when they run.
They don't know they're on fire at first,
Running so fast as to make the fire
Shoot like rocket engines and smoke behind them,
But then the rabbits tire
And the fire catches up,
Stuck onto them like the needles of the cactus,
Which at first must be what they think they feel on their skins.
They've felt this before, every rabbit.
But this time the feeling keeps on.
And of course, they ignite the brush and dried weeds
All over again, making more fire, all around them.
I'm sorry for the rabbits.
And I'm sorry for us
To know this.

We Are of a Tribe

By Alberto Ríos

We plant seeds in the ground
And dreams in the sky,

Hoping that, someday, the roots of one
Will meet the upstretched limbs of the other.

It has not happened yet.
We share the sky, all of us, the whole world:

Together, we are a tribe of eyes that look upward,
Even as we stand on uncertain ground.

The earth beneath us moves, quiet and wild,
Its boundaries shifting, its muscles wavering.

The dream of sky is indifferent to all this,
Impervious to borders, fences, reservations.

The sky is our common home, the place we all live.
There we are in the world together.

The dream of sky requires no passport.
Blue will not be fenced. Blue will not be a crime.

Look up. Stay awhile. Let your breathing slow.
Know that you always have a home here.

Dawn of Man

By Max Ritvo

After the cocoon I was in a human body
instead of a butterfly's. All along my back

there was great pain — I groped to my feet
where I felt wings behind me, trying

to tilt me back. They succeeded in doing so
after a day of exertion. I called that time,

overwhelmed with the ghosts of my wings, sleep.
My thoughts remained those of a caterpillar —

I took pleasure in climbing trees. I snuck food
into all my pains. My mouth produced language

which I attempted to spin over myself
and rip through happier and healthier.

I'd do this every few minutes. I'd think to myself
What made me such a failure?

It's all a little touchingly pathetic. To live like this,
a grown creature telling ghost stories,

staring at pictures, paralyzed for hours.
And even over dinner or in bed —

still hearing the stories, seeing the pictures —
an undertow sucking me back into myself.

I'm told to set myself goals. But my mind
doesn't work that way. I, instead, have wishes

for myself. Wishes aren't afraid
to take on their own color and life —

like a boy who takes a razor from a high cabinet
puffs out his cheeks and strips them bloody.

Not Guilty

By David Rivard

The days are dog-eared, the edges torn,
ragged—like those pages
I ripped once out of library books,

for their photos
of Vallejo and bootless Robert Johnson.
A fine needs paying now

it's true, but
not by me.
I am no more guilty

than that thrush is
who sits there stripping moss
off the wet bark of a tree.

A red fleck, like his, glows
at the back of my head—a beauty mark,
left by the brain's after-jets.

I would not wish for the three brains
Robert required
to double-clutch his guitar

and chase those sounds he had to know
led down
and into a troubled dusky river, always.

Three brains did Johnson no earthly good,
neither his nor Vallejo's 4 & 1/2
worked right exactly—O bunglers,

O banged-up pans of disaster!
Crying for days, said Cesar, & singing for months.
How can I be so strong some times,

at others weak? I wish to be free,
but free to do what? To leave myself behind?
To switch channels remotely?

Better to sing.
Not like the bird, but as they sang,
Cesar & Robert—

with the shocked & seeded
sweetness of an apple
split open by a meat cleaver.

Torque

By David Rivard

After his ham & cheese in the drape factory cafeteria,
having slipped by the bald shipping foreman
to ride a rattling elevator to the attic
where doves flicker into the massive eaves
and where piled boxes of out-of-style
cotton and lace won't ever be
decorating anyone's sun parlor windows.
Having dozed off in that hideout he fixed
between five four-by-six cardboard storage cartons

while the rest of us pack Mediterranean Dreams
and Colonial Ruffles and drapes colored like moons,
and he wakes lost—
shot through
into a world of unlocked unlocking light—
suddenly he knows where he is and feels half nuts
and feels like killing some pigeons with a slingshot.

That's all, and that's why he pokes
his calloused fingers into the broken machinery,
hunting for loose nuts a half inch wide—
five greasy cold ones that warm in his pocket—
and yanks back the snag-cut strip of inner tube
with a nut snug at the curve to snap it
at the soft chest of a dopey bird.
Then the noise of pigeons flopping down
to creosoted hardwood, and then a grin
the guy gives me & all his other pals later.
And afternoon tightens down on all
our shoulders, until the shift whistle
blasts, blowing through the plant like air
through lace. As it always has, as it does.
That bright. That stunned.

be careful

By Ed Roberson

i must be careful about such things as these.
the thin-grained oak. the quiet grizzlies scared
into the hills by the constant tracks squeezing
in behind them closer in the snow. the snared
rigidity of the winter lake. deer after deer
crossing on the spines of fish who look up and stare
with their eyes pressed to the ice. in a sleep. hearing
the thin taps leading away to collapse like the bear
in the high quiet. i must be careful not to shake
anything in too wild an elation. not to jar
the fragile mountains against the paper far-
ness. nor avalanche the fog or the eagle from the air.
of the gentle wilderness i must set the precarious
words. like rocks. without one snowcapped mistake.

I Don’t See

By Ed Roberson

I expected something up out of the water
not the shadow in the wave that rose

to fill the wave then splash a breath
off the abutting air then disappear.

I didn't see any of this only
the dark wave. Even the size of a whale

I don't see what I look directly at.
I didn't see the pronghorn antelope,

speed they pointed out equal our car's,
but never having seen distance so large

I couldn't pin in it point to antler
and saw in parallax instead the world

entire a still brown arc of leap so like
a first look at the milky way each stone

a star I saw but could not see.
I didn't see

the Nazca earth drawings looking at a line
like a path the vision on it my not looking up.

& trying to see from on the ground looking
from a plane thousands of feet above

maybe I saw only what the unenlightened
marking out the lines could see from there

because I never saw the figures
until shown from books.

I've told folk half the truth that I was there I was
but embarrassed never told I missed my chance

until I saw: without embarrassment
this country miss its chance looking at color

and not see what it looked directly at,

without embarrassment

act and not see that done
on its own hands not see its own bright blood.

Eros Turannos

By Edwin Arlington Robinson

She fears him, and will always ask
  What fated her to choose him;
She meets in his engaging mask
  All reasons to refuse him;
But what she meets and what she fears
Are less than are the downward years,
Drawn slowly to the foamless weirs
  Of age, were she to lose him.

Between a blurred sagacity
  That once had power to sound him,
And Love, that will not let him be
  The Judas that she found him,
Her pride assuages her almost,
As if it were alone the cost.—
He sees that he will not be lost,
  And waits and looks around him.

A sense of ocean and old trees
  Envelops and allures him;
Tradition, touching all he sees
  Beguiles and reassures him;
And all her doubts of what he says
Are dimmed with what she knows of days—
Till even prejudice delays
  And fades, and she secures him.

The falling leaf inaugurates
  The reign of her confusion;
The pounding wave reverberates
  The dirge of her illusion;
And home, where passion lived and died,
Becomes a place where she can hide,
While all the town and harbor side
  Vibrate with her seclusion.

We tell you, tapping on our brows,

The story as it should be,—
As if the story of a house
Were told, or ever could be;
We'll have no kindly veil between
Her visions and those we have seen,—
As if we guessed what hers have been,
Or what they are or would be.

Meanwhile we do no harm; for they
That with a god have striven,
Not hearing much of what we say,
Take what the god has given;
Though like waves breaking it may be,
Or like a changed familiar tree,
Or like a stairway to the sea
Where down the blind are driven.

Luke Havergal

By Edwin Arlington Robinson

Go to the western gate, Luke Havergal,
There where the vines cling crimson on the wall,
And in the twilight wait for what will come.
The leaves will whisper there of her, and some,
Like flying words, will strike you as they fall;
But go, and if you listen she will call.
Go to the western gate, Luke Havergal—
Luke Havergal.

No, there is not a dawn in eastern skies
To rift the fiery night that's in your eyes;
But there, where western glooms are gathering,
The dark will end the dark, if anything:
God slays Himself with every leaf that flies,
And hell is more than half of paradise.
No, there is not a dawn in eastern skies—
In eastern skies.

Out of a grave I come to tell you this,
Out of a grave I come to quench the kiss
That flames upon your forehead with a glow
That blinds you to the way that you must go.
Yes, there is yet one way to where she is,
Bitter, but one that faith may never miss.
Out of a grave I come to tell you this—

To tell you this.

There is the western gate, Luke Havergal,
There are the crimson leaves upon the wall.
Go, for the winds are tearing them away,—
Nor think to riddle the dead words they say,
Nor any more to feel them as they fall;
But go, and if you trust her she will call.
There is the western gate, Luke Havergal—
Luke Havergal.

Miniver Cheevy

By Edwin Arlington Robinson

Miniver Cheevy, child of scorn,
  Grew lean while he assailed the seasons;
He wept that he was ever born,
  And he had reasons.

Miniver loved the days of old
  When swords were bright and steeds were prancing;
The vision of a warrior bold
  Would set him dancing.

Miniver sighed for what was not,
  And dreamed, and rested from his labors;
He dreamed of Thebes and Camelot,
  And Priam's neighbors.

Miniver mourned the ripe renown
  That made so many a name so fragrant;
He mourned Romance, now on the town,
  And Art, a vagrant.

Miniver loved the Medici,
  Albeit he had never seen one;
He would have sinned incessantly
  Could he have been one.

Miniver cursed the commonplace
  And eyed a khaki suit with loathing;
He missed the mediæval grace
  Of iron clothing.

Miniver scorned the gold he sought,

But sore annoyed was he without it;
Miniver thought, and thought, and thought,
And thought about it.

Miniver Cheevy, born too late,
Scratched his head and kept on thinking;
Miniver coughed, and called it fate,
And kept on drinking.

January, 1795

By Mary Robinson

Pavement slipp'ry, people sneezing,
Lords in ermine, beggars freezing;
Titled gluttons dainties carving,
Genius in a garret starving.

Lofty mansions, warm and spacious;
Courtiers cringing and voracious;
Misers scarce the wretched heeding;
Gallant soldiers fighting, bleeding.

Wives who laugh at passive spouses;
Theatres, and meeting-houses;
Balls, where simp'ring misses languish;
Hospitals, and groans of anguish.

Arts and sciences bewailing;
Commerce drooping, credit failing;
Placemen mocking subjects loyal;
Separations, weddings royal.

Authors who can't earn a dinner;
Many a subtle rogue a winner;
Fugitives for shelter seeking;
Misers hoarding, tradesmen breaking.

Taste and talents quite deserted;
All the laws of truth perverted;
Arrogance o'er merit soaring;
Merit silently deploring.

Ladies gambling night and morning;
Fools the works of genius scorning;
Ancient dames for girls mistaken,

Youthful damsels quite forsaken.

Some in luxury delighting;
More in talking than in fighting;
Lovers old, and beaux decrepid;
Lordlings empty and insipid.

Poets, painters, and musicians;
Lawyers, doctors, politicians:
Pamphlets, newspapers, and odes,
Seeking fame by diff'rent roads.

Gallant souls with empty purses;
Gen'rals only fit for nurses;
School-boys, smit with martial spirit,
Taking place of vet'ran merit.

Honest men who can't get places,
Knaves who shew unblushing faces;
Ruin hasten'd, peace retarded;
Candor spurn'd, and art rewarded.

Undress

By Ruby Robinson

There is an ash tree behind this house. You
can see it from our bedroom window.
If you stare at it for long enough, you'll see
it drop a leaf. Stare at it now, you said,
and notice the moment a leaf strips away
from its branch, giving a twirl. Consider this.

The ash tree unclothes itself Octoberly.
From beside our bed, fingering the curtain,
observe the dark candles at the top of
that tree, naked and alert, tending to the breeze.
A sheet of ice between the rooftops
and this noiseless sky has turned the air

inside out. Black veins of branches
shake against the blue screen on which they
hang. Small mammals are hibernating
in pellets of warm air under ground. But,
in spite of the cold, this ash tree does not shy
from shrugging off its coat, sloping its nude

shoulders to the night. So, you said, undo,
unbutton, unclasp, slowly remove. Let down your
hair, breathe out. Stand stark in this room until
we remember how not to feel the chill.
Stand at the window, lift your arms right up
like a tree. Yes — like that. Watch leaves drop.

I Knew a Woman

By Theodore Roethke

I knew a woman, lovely in her bones,
When small birds sighed, she would sigh back at them;
Ah, when she moved, she moved more ways than one:
The shapes a bright container can contain!
Of her choice virtues only gods should speak,
Or English poets who grew up on Greek
(I'd have them sing in chorus, cheek to cheek).

How well her wishes went! She stroked my chin,
She taught me Turn, and Counter-turn, and Stand;
She taught me Touch, that undulant white skin;
I nibbled meekly from her proffered hand;
She was the sickle; I, poor I, the rake,
Coming behind her for her pretty sake
(But what prodigious mowing we did make).

Love likes a gander, and adores a goose:
Her full lips pursed, the errant note to seize;
She played it quick, she played it light and loose;
My eyes, they dazzled at her flowing knees;
Her several parts could keep a pure repose,
Or one hip quiver with a mobile nose
(She moved in circles, and those circles moved).

Let seed be grass, and grass turn into hay:
I'm martyr to a motion not my own;
What's freedom for? To know eternity.
I swear she cast a shadow white as stone.
But who would count eternity in days?
These old bones live to learn her wanton ways:
(I measure time by how a body sways).

In a Dark Time

By Theodore Roethke

In a dark time, the eye begins to see,
I meet my shadow in the deepening shade;
I hear my echo in the echoing wood—
A lord of nature weeping to a tree.
I live between the heron and the wren,
Beasts of the hill and serpents of the den.

What's madness but nobility of soul
At odds with circumstance? The day's on fire!
I know the purity of pure despair,
My shadow pinned against a sweating wall.
That place among the rocks—is it a cave,
Or winding path? The edge is what I have.

A steady storm of correspondences!
A night flowing with birds, a ragged moon,
And in broad day the midnight come again!
A man goes far to find out what he is—
Death of the self in a long, tearless night,
All natural shapes blazing unnatural light.

Dark, dark my light, and darker my desire.
My soul, like some heat-maddened summer fly,
Keeps buzzing at the sill. Which I is *I?*
A fallen man, I climb out of my fear.
The mind enters itself, and God the mind,
And one is One, free in the tearing wind.

My Papa's Waltz

By Theodore Roethke

The whiskey on your breath
Could make a small boy dizzy;
But I hung on like death:
Such waltzing was not easy.

We romped until the pans
Slid from the kitchen shelf;
My mother's countenance
Could not unfrown itself.

The hand that held my wrist

Was battered on one knuckle;
At every step you missed
My right ear scraped a buckle.

You beat time on my head
With a palm caked hard by dirt,
Then waltzed me off to bed
Still clinging to your shirt.

The Waking

By Theodore Roethke

I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I feel my fate in what I cannot fear.
I learn by going where I have to go.

We think by feeling. What is there to know?
I hear my being dance from ear to ear.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Of those so close beside me, which are you?
God bless the Ground! I shall walk softly there,
And learn by going where I have to go.

Light takes the Tree; but who can tell us how?
The lowly worm climbs up a winding stair;
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Great Nature has another thing to do
To you and me; so take the lively air,
And, lovely, learn by going where to go.

This shaking keeps me steady. I should know.
What falls away is always. And is near.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I learn by going where I have to go.

Watching the Perseids

By Isabel Rogers

The parrot, Einstein of birds, who can count
and reason calmly in our tongue
while outliving us, disdains the ostrich.
For all its sprint records,

the ostrich will be remembered
for hiding from the truth.
You can't outrun stupid.

We the people hold some truths
to be self-evident: our magnificent brain
in a body that can't flee, can't smell fear,
can't hear death, can't see straight.
Even so, our retinas, with rods and cones
as intricate as any telescope array,
evolved to see a predator
slide out of oblique shadow
and give us time to bolt.

We survey our closed dominion
until we look up in August
to find comet dust flaring in the night.

This vastness, this vertiginous awareness
mocking gravity on our speck of now,
wakes us with a recalibrating jolt.

But soon our familiar star will claw toward us
in seven-league boots from the east,
drawing its Valium thread across our planet
as if to cloak a birdcage
to muffle questions that blink through dark matter
and would pour over us
until we drowned, dreaming of amnesia.

Bruce Banner #3

By Kenyatta Rogers

I never missed that $60,
I could spend it easily.
I can take the stairs,
I have fingers and can use buttons.
Before lightning there should be thunder
and if there's not, it's still ok.

It was 2 p.m. and I saw a crane standing in a creek.
It was 3:40 and I saw an owl staring at me.
I rode my bike for 5 hours as I watched a sundial.
When I was fishing
I told every fish sorry,

kissed them on the mouth
and threw them all back.

Think about this:
everything I experience
popped out of my head.

In the afterlife I hope
all of my pets are there.
There is no wrong way to mourn
we're drinking the same water as the dinosaurs.

I'm a superhero,
a green man
who gets angry,
runs through peoples lives
and destroys everything they own,
insurance doesn't cover acts of god.

The Greatest Grandeur

By Pattiann Rogers

Some say it's in the reptilian dance
of the purple-tongued sand goanna,
for there the magnificent translation
of tenacity into bone and grace occurs.

And some declare it to be an expansive
desert—solid rust-orange rock
like dusk captured on earth in stone—
simply for the perfect contrast it provides
to the blue-grey ridge of rain
in the distant hills.

Some claim the harmonics of shifting
electron rings to be most rare and some
the complex motion of seven sandpipers
bisecting the arcs and pitches
of come and retreat over the mounting
hayfield.

Others, for grandeur, choose the terror
of lightning peals on prairies or the tall
collapsing cathedrals of stormy seas,
because there they feel dwarfed

and appropriately helpless; others select
the serenity of that ceiling/cellar
of stars they see at night on placid lakes,
because there they feel assured
and universally magnanimous.

But it is the dark emptiness contained
in every next moment that seems to me
the most singularly glorious gift,
that void which one is free to fill
with processions of men bearing burning
cedar knots or with parades of blue horses,
belled and ribboned and stepping sideways,
with tumbling white-faced mimes or companies
of black-robed choristers; to fill simply
with hammered silver teapots or kiln-dried
crockery, tangerine and almond custards,
polonaises, polkas, whittling sticks, wailing
walls; that space large enough to hold all
invented blasphemies and pieties, 10,000
definitions of god and more, never fully
filled, never.

On the Existence of the Soul

By Pattiann Rogers

How confident I am it is there. Don't I bring it,
As if it were enclosed in a fine leather case,
To particular places solely for its own sake?
Haven't I set it down before the variegated canyon
And the undeviating bald salt dome?
Don't I feed it on ivory calcium and ruffled
Shell bellies, shore boulders, on the sight
Of the petrel motionless over the sea, its splayed
Feet hanging? Don't I make sure it apprehends
The invisibly fine spray more than once?

I have seen that it takes in every detail
I can manage concerning the garden wall and its borders.
I have listed for it the comings and goings
Of one hundred species of insects explicitly described.
I have named the chartreuse stripe
And the fimbriated antenna, the bulbed thorax
And the multiple eye. I have sketched
The brilliant wings of the trumpet vine and invented

New vocabularies describing the interchanges between rocks
And their crevices, between the holly lip
And its concept of itself.

And if not for its sake, why would I go
Out into the night alone and stare deliberately
Straight up into 15 billion years ago and more?

I have cherished it. I have named it.
By my own solicitations
I have proof of its presence.

The Origin of Order

By Pattiann Rogers

Stellar dust has settled.
It is green underwater now in the leaves
Of the yellow crowfoot. Its vacancies are gathered together
Under pine litter as emerging flower of the pink arbutus.
It has gained the power to make itself again
In the bone-filled egg of osprey and teal.

One could say this toothpick grasshopper
Is a cloud of decayed nebula congealed and perching
On his female mating. The tortoise beetle,
Leaving the stripped veins of morning glory vines
Like licked bones, is a straw-colored swirl
Of clever gases.

At this moment there are dead stars seeing
Themselves as marsh and forest in the eyes
Of muskrat and shrew, disintegrated suns
Making songs all night long in the throats
Of crawfish frogs, in the rubbings and gratings
Of the red-legged locust. There are spirits of orbiting
Rock in the shells of pointed winkles
And apple snails, ghosts of extinct comets caught
In the leap of darting hare and bobcat, revolutions
Of rushing stone contained in the sound of these words.

The paths of the Pleiades and Coma clusters
Have been compelled to mathematics by the mind
Contemplating the nature of itself
In the motions of stars. The patterns
Of any starry summer night might be identical

To the summer heavens circling inside the skull.
I can feel time speeding now in all directions
Deeper and deeper into the black oblivion
Of the electrons directly behind my eyes.

Flesh of the sky, child of the sky, the mind
Has been obligated from the beginning
To create an ordered universe
As the only possible proof of its own inheritance.

The Significance of Location

By Pattiann Rogers

The cat has the chance to make the sunlight
Beautiful, to stop it and turn it immediately
Into black fur and motion, to take it
As shifting branch and brown feather
Into the back of the brain forever.

The cardinal has flown the sun in red
Through the oak forest to the lawn.
The finch has caught it in yellow
And taken it among the thorns. By the spider
It has been bound tightly and tied
In an eight-stringed knot.

The sun has been intercepted in its one
Basic state and changed to a million varieties
Of green stick and tassel. It has been broken
Into pieces by glass rings, by mist
Over the river. Its heat
Has been given the board fence for body,
The desert rock for fact. On winter hills
It has been laid down in white like a martyr.

This afternoon we could spread gold scarves
Clear across the field and say in truth,
"Sun you are silk."

Imagine the sun totally isolated,
Its brightness shot in continuous streaks straight out
Into the black, never arrested,
Never once being made light.

Someone should take note

Of how the earth has saved the sun from oblivion.

Free Radical

By Alison C. Rollins

Before Gilgamesh invented
the kaleidoscope and Galileo
the Rubik's cube, before the
scimitar-horned oryx went
missing, before the tamarind
trees went bare, before the
stars' eyelids were wrapped
in tinfoil, before the leaves
could gnaw on water, before
electrons made donations,
before the owl wore a mask,
before the wind had a sound,
before the moon had a name
and the smoke a spine, before
the tulips crossed their legs,
before the tongue was
armored, before the ghosts
rode centaurs to riots, before
cyberspace was culled and
belly buttons sown to wombs,
before the taste had an after,
before intellect became
property and thunder
premeditated, before the
New, New World, before a
stone wished to be more
than a stone, before we had a
change of clothes, before the
grass was color-blind, before
the rivers lost their fingers,
and the rain stopped teething,
before the kings were all
beheaded, the gravedigger
neither young nor old, before
a lion was still a lion, before
the girls were all killed, before
the trapeze gave way. We
hung suspended in time
by the arches of our curved
feet and this tickled the gods,

tickled them to death. & I
think our silence cut us loose,
let us go falling from the doubt,
secretly thrilled at the hems
and ever so eager to break.

Happy Hour

By Lee Ann Roripaugh

I always forget the name,
delphinium,
even though it was the flower

the hummingbirds
loved best. They came in pairs—sleek,
emerald-bright

heads, the clockwork machinery
of their blurred wings
thrumming swift, menacing engines.

They slipped their beaks.
as if they were swizzle sticks, deep
into the blue

throat of delphinium and sucked
dry the nectar-
chilled hearts like goblets full of sweet,

frozen daiquiri.
I liked to sit on the back porch
in the evenings,

watching them and eating Spanish
peanuts, rolling
each nut between thumb and forefinger

to rub away
the red salty skin like brittle
tissue paper,

until the meat emerged gleaming,
yellow like old
ivory, smooth as polished bone.

And late August,
after exclamations of gold
flowers, tiny

and bitter, the caragana
trees let down their
beans to ripen, dry, and rupture—

at first there was
the soft drum of popcorn, slick with oil,
puttering some-

where in between seed, heat, and cloud.
Then sharp cracks like cap
gun or diminutive fireworks,

caragana
peas catapulting skyward like
pellet missiles.

Sometimes a meadowlark would lace
the night air with
its elaborate melody,

rippling and sleek
as a black satin ribbon. Some-
times there would be

a falling star. And because
this happened in
Wyoming, and because this was

my parents' house,
and because I'm never happy
with anything,

at any time, I always wished
that I was some-
where, anywhere else, but here.

Women Like Me

By Wendy Rose

making promises they can't keep.
For you, Grandmother, I said I would pull

each invading burr and thistle from your skin,
cut out the dizzy brittle eucalypt,
take from the ground the dark oily poison–
all to restore you happy and proud,
the whole of you transformed
and bursting into tomorrow.
        But where do I cut first?
Where should I begin to pull?
Should it be the Russian thistle
down the hill where backhoes
have bitten? Or African senecio
or tumbleweed bouncing
above the wind? Or the middle finger
of my right hand? Or my left eye
or the other one? Or a slice
from the small of my back, a slab of fat
from my thigh? I am broken
as much as any native ground,
my roots tap a thousand migrations.
My daughters were never born, I am
as much the invader as the native,
as much the last day of life as the first.
I presumed you to be as bitter as me,
to tremble and rage against alien weight.
Who should blossom? Who should receive pollen?
Who should be rooted, who pruned,
who watered, who picked?
Should I feed the white-faced cattle
who wait for the death train to come
or comb the wild seeds from their tails?
Who should return across the sea
or the Bering Strait or the world before this one
or the Mother Ground? Who should go screaming
to some other planet, burn up or melt
in a distant sun? Who should be healed
and who hurt? Who should dry
under summer's white sky, who should shrivel
at the first sign of drought? Who should be remembered?
Who should be the sterile chimera of earth and of another place,
alien with a native face,
native with an alien face?

Break of Day in the Trenches

By Isaac Rosenberg

The darkness crumbles away.
It is the same old druid Time as ever,
Only a live thing leaps my hand,
A queer sardonic rat,
As I pull the parapet's poppy
To stick behind my ear.
Droll rat, they would shoot you if they knew
Your cosmopolitan sympathies.
Now you have touched this English hand
You will do the same to a German
Soon, no doubt, if it be your pleasure
To cross the sleeping green between.
It seems you inwardly grin as you pass
Strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes,
Less chanced than you for life,
Bonds to the whims of murder,
Sprawled in the bowels of the earth,
The torn fields of France.
What do you see in our eyes
At the shrieking iron and flame
Hurled through still heavens?
What quaver—what heart aghast?
Poppies whose roots are in man's veins
Drop, and are ever dropping;
But mine in my ear is safe—
Just a little white with the dust.

Amor Mundi

By Christina Rossetti

"Oh where are you going with your love-locks flowing
  On the west wind blowing along this valley track?"
"The downhill path is easy, come with me an it please ye,
  We shall escape the uphill by never turning back."

So they two went together in glowing August weather,
  The honey-breathing heather lay to their left and right;
And dear she was to dote on, her swift feet seemed to float on
  The air like soft twin pigeons too sportive to alight.

"Oh what is that in heaven where gray cloud-flakes are seven,
  Where blackest clouds hang riven just at the rainy skirt?"

"Oh that's a meteor sent us, a message dumb, portentous,
An undeciphered solemn signal of help or hurt."

"Oh what is that glides quickly where velvet flowers grow thickly,
Their scent comes rich and sickly?"—"A scaled and hooded worm."
"Oh what's that in the hollow, so pale I quake to follow?"
"Oh that's a thin dead body which waits the eternal term."

"Turn again, O my sweetest,—turn again, false and fleetest:
This beaten way thou beatest I fear is hell's own track."
"Nay, too steep for hill-mounting; nay, too late for cost-counting:
This downhill path is easy, but there's no turning back."

A Birthday

By Christina Rossetti

My heart is like a singing bird
Whose nest is in a water'd shoot;
My heart is like an apple-tree
Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit;
My heart is like a rainbow shell
That paddles in a halcyon sea;
My heart is gladder than all these
Because my love is come to me.

Raise me a dais of silk and down;
Hang it with vair and purple dyes;
Carve it in doves and pomegranates,
And peacocks with a hundred eyes;
Work it in gold and silver grapes,
In leaves and silver fleurs-de-lys;
Because the birthday of my life
Is come, my love is come to me.

Up-Hill

By Christina Rossetti

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?
Yes, to the very end.
Will the day's journey take the whole long day?
From morn to night, my friend.

But is there for the night a resting-place?
A roof for when the slow dark hours begin.

May not the darkness hide it from my face?
  You cannot miss that inn.

Shall I meet other wayfarers at night?
  Those who have gone before.
Then must I knock, or call when just in sight?
  They will not keep you standing at that door.

Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?
  Of labour you shall find the sum.
Will there be beds for me and all who seek?
  Yea, beds for all who come.

Insomnia

By Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Thin are the night-skirts left behind
By daybreak hours that onward creep,
And thin, alas! the shred of sleep
That wavers with the spirit's wind:
But in half-dreams that shift and roll
And still remember and forget,
My soul this hour has drawn your soul
A little nearer yet.

Our lives, most dear, are never near,
Our thoughts are never far apart,
Though all that draws us heart to heart
Seems fainter now and now more clear.
To-night Love claims his full control,
And with desire and with regret
My soul this hour has drawn your soul
A little nearer yet.

Is there a home where heavy earth
Melts to bright air that breathes no pain,
Where water leaves no thirst again
And springing fire is Love's new birth?
If faith long bound to one true goal
May there at length its hope beget,
My soul that hour shall draw your soul
For ever nearer yet.

Poem (I lived in the first century of world wars)

By Muriel Rukeyser

I lived in the first century of world wars.
Most mornings I would be more or less insane,
The newspapers would arrive with their careless stories,
The news would pour out of various devices
Interrupted by attempts to sell products to the unseen.
I would call my friends on other devices;
They would be more or less mad for similar reasons.
Slowly I would get to pen and paper,
Make my poems for others unseen and unborn.
In the day I would be reminded of those men and women,
Brave, setting up signals across vast distances,
Considering a nameless way of living, of almost unimagined values.
As the lights darkened, as the lights of night brightened,
We would try to imagine them, try to find each other,
To construct peace, to make love, to reconcile
Waking with sleeping, ourselves with each other,
Ourselves with ourselves. We would try by any means
To reach the limits of ourselves, to reach beyond ourselves,
To let go the means, to wake.

I lived in the first century of these wars.

The Speaking Tree

By Muriel Rukeyser

for Robert Payne

Great Alexander sailing was from his true course turned
By a young wind from a cloud in Asia moving
Like a most recognizable most silvery woman;
Tall Alexander to the island came.
The small breeze blew behind his turning head.
He walked the foam of ripples into this scene.

The trunk of the speaking tree looks like a tree-trunk
Until you look again. Then people and animals
Are ripening on the branches; the broad leaves
Are leaves; pale horses, sharp fine foxes
Blossom; the red rabbit falls
Ready and running. The trunk coils, turns,
Snakes, fishes. Now the ripe people fall and run,
Three of them in their shore-dance, flames that stand

Where reeds are creatures and the foam is flame.

Stiff Alexander stands. He cannot turn.
But he is free to turn : this is the speaking tree,
It calls your name. It tells us what we mean.

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

"Where did the handsome beloved go?"

By Jalal al-Din Rumi
Translated by Brad Gooch and Maryam Mortaz

Where did the handsome beloved go?
I wonder, where did that tall, shapely cypress tree go?

He spread his light among us like a candle.
Where did he go? So strange, where did he go without me?

All day long my heart trembles like a leaf.
All alone at midnight, where did that beloved go?

Go to the road, and ask any passing traveler —
That soul-stirring companion, where did he go?

Go to the garden, and ask the gardener —
That tall, shapely rose stem, where did he go?

Go to the rooftop, and ask the watchman —
That unique sultan, where did he go?

Like a madman, I search in the meadows!
That deer in the meadows, where did he go?

My tearful eyes overflow like a river —
That pearl in the vast sea, where did he go?

All night long, I implore both moon and Venus —
That lovely face, like a moon, where did he go?

If he is mine, why is he with others?
Since he's not here, to what "there" did he go?

If his heart and soul are joined with God,
And he left this realm of earth and water, where did he go?

Tell me clearly, Shams of Tabriz,
Of whom it is said, “The sun never dies” — where did he go?

A Certain Kind of Eden

By Kay Ryan

It seems like you could, but you can’t go back and pull
the roots and runners and replant.
It’s all too deep for that.
You’ve overprized intention,
have mistaken any bent you’re given
for control. You thought you chose
the bean and chose the soil.
You even thought you abandoned
one or two gardens. But those things
keep growing where we put them—
if we put them at all.
A certain kind of Eden holds us thrall.
Even the one vine that tendrils out alone
in time turns on its own impulse,
twisting back down its upward course
a strong and then a stronger rope,
the greenest saddest strongest
kind of hope.

Sharks’ Teeth

By Kay Ryan

Everything contains some
silence. Noise gets
its zest from the
small shark's-tooth
shaped fragments
of rest angled
in it. An hour
of city holds maybe
a minute of these
remnants of a time
when silence reigned,
compact and dangerous
as a shark. Sometimes
a bit of a tail
or fin can still

be sensed in parks.

Surfaces

By Kay Ryan

Surfaces serve
their own purposes,
strive to remain
constant (all lives
want that). There is
a skin, not just on
peaches but on oceans
(note the telltale
slough of foam on beaches).
Sometimes it's loose,
as in the case
of cats: you feel how a
second life slides
under it. Sometimes it
fits. Take glass.
Sometimes it outlasts
its underside. Take reefs.

The private lives of surfaces
are innocent, not devious.
Take the one-dimensional
belief of enamel in itself,
the furious autonomy
of luster (crush a pearl—
it's powder), the whole
curious seamlessness
of how we're each surrounded
and what it doesn't teach.

Larkinesque

By Michael Ryan

Reading in the paper a summary
of a five-year psychological study
that shows those perceived as most beautiful
are treated differently,

I think *they could have just asked me,*
remembering a kind of pudgy kid

and late puberty, the bloody noses
and wisecracks because I wore glasses,

though we all know by now how awful it is
for the busty starlet no one takes seriously,
the loveliest women I've lunched with
lamenting the opacity of the body,

they can never trust a man's interest
even when he seems not just out for sex
(eyes focus on me above rim of wineglass),
and who *would* want to live like this?

And what does beauty do to a man?—
Don Juan, Casanova, Lord Byron—
those fiery eyes and steel jawlines
can front a furnace of self-loathing,

all those breathless women rushing to him
while hubby's at the office or ball game,
primed to be consumed by his beauty
while he stands next to it, watching.

So maybe the looks we're dealt are best.
It's only common sense that happiness
depends on some bearable deprivation
or defect, and who knows what conflicts

great beauty could have caused,
what cruelties one might have suffered
from those now friends, what unmanageable
possibilities smiling at every small turn?

So if I get up to draw a tumbler
of ordinary tap water and think *what if this were*
nectar dripping from delicious burning fingers,
will all I've missed knock me senseless?

No. Of course not. It won't.

Self-Help

By Michael Ryan

What kind of delusion are you under?
The life he hid just knocked you flat.

You see the lightning but not the thunder.

What God hath joined let no man put asunder.
Did God know you'd marry a rat?
What kind of delusion are you under?

His online persona simply stunned her
as it did you when you started to chat.
You see the lightning but not the thunder.

To the victors go the plunder:
you should crown them with a baseball bat.
What kind of delusion are you under?

The kind that causes blunder after blunder.
Is there any other kind than that?
You see the lightning but not the thunder,

and for one second the world's a wonder.
Just keep it thrilling under your hat.
What kind of delusion are you under?
You see the lightning but not the thunder.

A Thank-You Note

By Michael Ryan

For John Skoyles

My daughter made drawings with the pens you sent,
line drawings that suggest the things they represent,
different from any drawings she — at ten — had done,
closer to real art, implying what the mind fills in.
For her mother she made a flower fragile on its stem;
for me, a lion, calm, contained, but not a handsome one.
She drew a lion for me once before, on a get-well card,
and wrote I must be brave even when it's hard.

Such love is healing — as you know, my friend,
especially when it comes unbidden from our children
despite the flaws they see so vividly in us.
Who can love you as your child does?
Your son so ill, the brutal chemo, his looming loss
owning you now — yet you would be this generous
to think of my child. With the pens you sent
she has made I hope a healing instrument.

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

To the Desert

By Benjamin Alire Sáenz

I came to you one rainless August night.
You taught me how to live without the rain.
You are thirst and thirst is all I know.
You are sand, wind, sun, and burning sky,
The hottest blue. You blow a breeze and brand
Your breath into my mouth. You reach—then *bend*
Your force, to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
You wrap your name tight around my ribs
And keep me warm. I was born for you.
Above, below, by you, by you surrounded.
I wake to you at dawn. Never break your
Knot. Reach, rise, blow, *Sálvame, mi dios*,
Trágame, mi tierra. Salva, traga, Break me,
I am bread. I will be the water for your thirst.

Evolution of My Block

By Jacob Saenz

As a boy I bicycled the block
w/a brown mop top falling
into a tail bleached blond,

gold-like under golden light,
like colors of Noble Knights
’banging on corners, unconcerned

w/the colors I bore—a shorty
too small to war with, too brown
to be down for the block.

White Knights became brown
Kings still showing black & gold
on corners now crowned,

the block a branch branded
w/la corona graffitied on
garage doors by the pawns.

As a teen, I could’ve beamed

the crown, walked in w/out
the beat down custom,

warred w/my cousin
who claimed Two-Six,
the set on the next block

decked in black & beige.
But I preferred games to gangs,
books to crooks wearing hats

crooked to the left or right
fighting for a plot, a block
to spot & mark w/blood

of boys who knew no better
way to grow up than throw up
the crown & be down for whatever.

Holding Court

By Jacob Saenz

Today I became King
of the Court w/out a diamond-
encrusted crown thrust upon
my sweaty head. Instead
my markings of royalty
were the t-shirt draping
my body like a robe soaked
in champagne & the pain
in my right knee — a sign
of a battle endured, my will
tested & bested by none
as the ball flew off my hands
as swift as an arrow toward
the heart of a target — my fingers
ringless yet feeling like gold.

Alive

By Natasha Sajé

You and me, of course, and the animals
we feed and then slaughter. The boxelder
bug with its dot of red, yeast in the air

making bread and wine, bacteria
in yogurt, carrots, the apple tree,
each white blossom. And rock, which lives
so slowly it's hard to imagine it
as sand then glass. A sea called dead is one that
will not mirror us. We think as human
beings we deserve every last thing. Say
the element copper. Incandescence
glowing bright and soft like Venus.
Ductile as a shewolf's eyes pigmented red
or green, exposed to acid in the air.
Copper primes your liver, its mines leach lead
and arsenic. Smelting is to melting
the way smite is to mite. A violence
of extraction. What's lost when a language
dies? When its tropes oppose our own?
In the at-risk language Aymara
the past stretches out in front, the future
lags behind. Imagine being led
by knowing, imagine the end as clear.

Muzzle

By Julia Salem

In a bleary part of town,
I traverse the blackboard silence of snow.

Through the slats of the cypresses
Flounce paper-white feathers of snow.

On the red leaves of my palms
Distend melted messages of snow.

The road is iron anvil
Stinging with sparks of snow.

My nocturnal heart thrums
In white wasp whir of snow.

Moonlight purls like nectar
Sweetening the blandness of snow.

Glaucous berries hang from the rowans
Like frostbitten pearls of snow.

Mice hide in the lee of alders,
Shirking the cold tusks of snow.

Shadows vine like crewelwork
On linen twill of snow.

Around your black spade pupil
Lurks an avalanche of snow.

I wish you'd toss your cards
Like fireworks against cumuli of snow.

Instead, my name catches in your throat,
Congealed in its amnion of snow.

Mi Casa

By Luis Daniel Salgado

When I was a boy
I was either a child eating bugs
or a child being eaten by bugs, but
now that I am older am I a man
who devours the world or am I a man
being devoured by the world?

Someone once told me that mothers
come from a different planet. And if she was correct
then my mother was a warrior from that planet.
And now that my mother is older the history
that is her face is starting to look like a worn map.
The hills that once were her cheeks now have roads
carved into them that tell her secrets.
The roots of her hair are starting to shimmer with silver
that she colors once she sees ten or more.

She no longer cares for long hair.
She says pelo largo is a young woman's game.
In a few years she will be older than my grandmother
ever was.

John Lennon

By Mary Jo Salter

The music was already turning sad,

those fresh-faced voices singing in a round
the lie that time could set its needle back

and play from the beginning. Had you lived
to eighty, as you'd wished, who knows?—you might
have broken from the circle of that past

more ours than yours. Never even sure
which was the truest color for your hair
(it changed with each photographer), we claimed

you for ourselves; called you John and named
the day you left us (spun out like a reel—
the last broadcast to prove you'd lived at all)

an end to hope itself. It isn't true,
and worse, does you no justice if we call
your death the death of anything but you.

II

It put you in the headlines once again:
years after you'd left the band, you joined
another—of those whose lives, in breaking, link

all memory with their end. The studio
of history can tamper with you now,
as if there'd always been a single track

chance traveled on, and your discordant voice
had led us to the final violence.
Yet like the times when I, a star-crossed fan,

had catalogued your favorite foods, your views
on monarchy and war, and gaily clipped
your quips and daily antics from the news,

I keep a loving record of your death.
All the evidence is in—of what,
and to what end, it's hard to figure out,

riddles you might have beat into a song.
A younger face of yours, a cover shot,
peered from all the newsstands as if proof

of some noteworthy thing you'd newly done.

Video Blues

By Mary Jo Salter

My husband has a crush on Myrna Loy,
and likes to rent her movies, for a treat.
It makes some evenings harder to enjoy.

The list of actresses who might employ
him as their slave is too long to repeat.
(My husband has a crush on Myrna Loy,

Carole Lombard, Paulette Goddard, coy
Jean Arthur with that voice as dry as wheat ...)
It makes some evenings harder to enjoy.

Does he confess all this just to annoy
a loyal spouse? I know I can't compete.
My husband has a crush on Myrna Loy.

And can't a woman have her dreamboats? Boy,
I wouldn't say my life is incomplete,
but some evening I could certainly enjoy

two hours with Cary Grant as *my* own toy.
I guess, though, we were destined not to meet.
My husband has a crush on Myrna Loy,
which makes some evenings harder to enjoy.

Plaint in a Major Key

By Jorge Sánchez

Without even leaving one's door,
One can know the whole world.
—Laozi

The rumble of the night sounds
even in the bright daylight
of morning. Life blooms amid
the Ten Thousand Things, but
does not bloom amid the Ten
Thousand Things. Shrivel-eyed
I wake up and tend to the One

here and now, clamoring to be
let out. Down with the gate,
out with the boy, to the rooms
of life's necessities, first
to void and next to fill.
The Order is only order which
is disorder, the only Disorder
is the disorder that is order.
We usher ourselves, each in our
own way, back down the way
for various brushings, combings,
other groomings. Each in our
own way we urge the other
toward some kind of growth:
one to assume, the other
to renounce; one to grow larger,
the other to grow smaller,
thereby growing larger. Words
do not work, and when they do not,
other words might. This makes
more sense than it seems, works
more often than it doesn't,
except when it really doesn't,
and then that disorder creeps
back in. In five minutes,
a different challenge. In five
hours, a different One. Six
more hours, the One is rubbing
eyes, untangled like a dragon,
shucked and undone like an oyster.
The night slowly rolls abed
and the words form stories form
sleep, the sleep of the Ten
Thousand Things, the sleep
that will echo the next day
in the night's rumbling sounds,
in the bright light of morning.

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

Haiku and Tanka for Harriet Tubman

By Sonia Sanchez

1

Picture a woman
riding thunder on
the legs of slavery ...

2

Picture her kissing
our spines saying *no* to
the eyes of slavery ...

3

Picture her rotating
the earth into a shape
of lives becoming ...

4

Picture her leaning
into the eyes of our
birth clouds ...

5

Picture this woman
saying *no* to the constant
yes of slavery ...

6

Picture a woman
jumping rivers her
legs inhaling moons ...

7

Picture her ripe
with seasons of
legs ... running ...

8

Picture her tasting
the secret corners
of woods ...

9

Picture her saying:
You have within you the strength,
the patience, and the passion
to reach for the stars,
to change the world ...

10

Imagine her words:
Every great dream begins
with a dreamer ...

11

Imagine her saying:
I freed a thousand slaves,
could have freed
a thousand more if they
only knew they were slaves ...

12

Imagine her humming:
How many days we got
fore we taste freedom ...

13

Imagine a woman
asking: *How many workers*
for this freedom quilt ...

14

Picture her saying:
A live runaway could do
great harm by going back
but a dead runaway
could tell no secrets ...

15

Picture the daylight
bringing her to woods
full of birth moons ...

16

Picture John Brown
shaking her hands three times saying:
General Tubman. General Tubman. General Tubman.

17

Picture her words:
There's two things I got a
right to: death or liberty ...

18

Picture her saying *no*
to a play called *Uncle Tom's Cabin*:
I am the real thing ...

19

Picture a Black woman:
could not read or write
trailing freedom refrains ...

20

Picture her face
turning southward walking
down a Southern road ...

21

Picture this woman
freedom bound ... tasting a
people's preserved breath ...

22

Picture this woman
of royalty ... wearing a crown
of morning air ...

23

Picture her walking,
running, reviving
a country's breath ...

24

Picture black voices
leaving behind
lost tongues ...

This Is Not A Small Voice

By Sonia Sanchez

This is not a small voice
you hear this is a large
voice coming out of these cities.
This is the voice of LaTanya.
Kadesha. Shaniqua. This
is the voice of Antoine.
Darryl. Shaquille.
Running over waters

navigating the hallways
of our schools spilling out
on the corners of our cities and
no epitaphs spill out of their river
mouths.

This is not a small love
you hear this is a large
love, a passion for kissing learning
on its face.
This is a love that crowns the feet
with hands
that nourishes, conceives, feels the
water sails
mends the children,
folds them inside our history
where they
toast more than the flesh
where they suck the bones of the
alphabet
and spit out closed vowels.
This is a love colored with iron
and lace.
This is a love initialed Black
Genius.

This is not a small voice
you hear.

Cool Tombs

By Carl Sandburg

When Abraham Lincoln was shoveled into the tombs, he forgot the copperheads and the assassin ... in the dust, in the cool tombs.

And Ulysses Grant lost all thought of con men and Wall Street, cash and collateral turned ashes ... in the dust, in the cool tombs.

Pocahontas' body, lovely as a poplar, sweet as a red haw in November or a pawpaw in May, did she wonder? does she remember? ... in the dust, in the cool tombs?

Take any streetful of people buying clothes and groceries, cheering a hero or throwing confetti and blowing tin horns ... tell me if the lovers are losers ... tell me if any get more than the lovers ... in the dust ... in the cool tombs.

I Am the People, the Mob

By Carl Sandburg

I am the people—the mob—the crowd—the mass.
Do you know that all the great work of the world is done through me?
I am the workingman, the inventor, the maker of the world's food and clothes.
I am the audience that witnesses history. The Napoleons come from me and the Lincolns. They die. And then I send forth more Napoleons and Lincolns.
I am the seed ground. I am a prairie that will stand for much plowing. Terrible storms pass over me. I forget. The best of me is sucked out and wasted. I forget. Everything but Death comes to me and makes me work and give up what I have. And I forget.
Sometimes I growl, shake myself and spatter a few red drops for history to remember. Then—I forget.
When I, the People, learn to remember, when I, the People, use the lessons of yesterday and no longer forget who robbed me last year, who played me for a fool—then there will be no speaker in all the world say the name: "The People," with any fleck of a sneer in his voice or any far-off smile of derision.
The mob—the crowd—the mass—will arrive then.

Knucks

By Carl Sandburg

In Abraham Lincoln's city,
Where they remember his lawyer's shingle,
The place where they brought him
Wrapped in battle flags,
Wrapped in the smoke of memories
From Tallahassee to the Yukon,
The place now where the shaft of his tomb
Points white against the blue prairie dome,
In Abraham Lincoln's city ... I saw knucks
In the window of Mister Fischman's second-hand store
On Second Street.

I went in and asked, "How much?"
"Thirty cents apiece," answered Mister Fischman.
And taking a box of new ones off a shelf
He filled anew the box in the showcase
And said incidentally, most casually
And incidentally:
"I sell a carload a month of these."

I slipped my fingers into a set of knucks,
Cast-iron knucks molded in a foundry pattern,
And there came to me a set of thoughts like these:

Mister Fischman is for Abe and the “malice to none” stuff,
And the street car strikers and the strike-breakers,
And the sluggers, gunmen, detectives, policemen,
Judges, utility heads, newspapers, priests, lawyers,
They are all for Abe and the “malice to none” stuff.

I started for the door.
“Maybe you want a lighter pair,”
Came Mister Fischman’s voice.
I opened the door ... and the voice again:
“You are a funny customer.”

Wrapped in battle flags,
Wrapped in the smoke of memories,
This is the place they brought him,
This is Abraham Lincoln's home town.

from The People, Yes

By Carl Sandburg

Lincoln?
He was a mystery in smoke and flags
Saying yes to the smoke, yes to the flags,
Yes to the paradoxes of democracy,
Yes to the hopes of government
Of the people by the people for the people,
No to debauchery of the public mind,
No to personal malice nursed and fed,
Yes to the Constitution when a help,
No to the Constitution when a hindrance
Yes to man as a struggler amid illusions,
Each man fated to answer for himself:
Which of the faiths and illusions of mankind
Must I choose for my own sustaining light
To bring me beyond the present wilderness?

Lincoln? Was he a poet?
And did he write verses?
“I have not willingly planted a thorn
in any man’s bosom.”
I shall do nothing through malice: what
I deal with is too vast for malice.”

Death was in the air.
So was birth.

Gulf Memo

By Stephen Sandy

Tell me the way to the wedding
Tell me the way to the war,
Tell me the needle you're threading
I won't raise my voice anymore.

And tell me what axe you are grinding
Where the boy on the bivouac believes,
What reel you are unwinding
For the girl in her bed who grieves.

While behind a derrick's girder
He watches the sinking sun,
He asks what he'll do for murder
And what he will do for fun.

Will you read him the ways of war
His Miranda rights in sin,
Will you tell him what to ignore
When he studies your discipline?

He dozes off—but he shakes
In a dream that he is the one
Death finds abed and wakes
Just as the night is done.

Tell me what boats go ashore
Riding the oil-dimmed tide,
Red streamers and black in store
For the boy with a pain in his side.

And tell me where they are heading
Tonight; now tell me the score.
Tell me the way to their wedding
I won't raise my own voice anymore.

One Girl

By Sappho
Translated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti

I

Like the sweet apple which reddens upon the topmost bough,

Atop on the topmost twig, — which the pluckers forgot, somehow, —
Forget it not, nay; but got it not, for none could get it till now.

II

Like the wild hyacinth flower which on the hills is found,
Which the passing feet of the shepherds for ever tear and wound,
Until the purple blossom is trodden in the ground

A Country Incident

By May Sarton

Absorbed in planting bulbs, that work of hope,
I was startled by a loud human voice,
“Do go on working while I talk. Don’t stop!”
And I was caught upon the difficult choice—
To yield the last half hour of precious light,
Or to stay on my knees, absurd and rude;
I willed her to be gone with all my might,
This kindly neighbor who destroyed a mood;
I could not think of next spring any more,
I had to re-assess the way I live.
Long after I went in and closed the door,
I pondered on the crude imperative.

What it is to be caught up in each day
Like a child fighting imaginary wars,
Converting work into this passionate play,
A rounded whole made up of different chores
Which one might name haphazard meditation.
And yet an unexpected call destroys
Or puts to rout my primitive elation:
Why be so serious about mere joys?
Is this where some outmoded madness lies,
Poet as recluse? No, what comes to me
Is how my father looked out of his eyes,
And how he fought for his own passionate play.

He could tear up unread and throw away
Communications from officialdom,
And, courteous in every other way,
Would not brook anything that kept him from
Those lively dialogues with man’s whole past
That were his intimate and fruitful pleasure.
Impetuous, impatient to the last,
“Be adamant, keep clear, strike for your treasure!”

I hear the youthful ardor in his voice
(And so I must forgive a self in labor).
I feel his unrepentant smiling choice,
(And so I ask forgiveness of my neighbor).

Dreamers

By Siegfried Sassoon

Soldiers are citizens of death's grey land,
Drawing no dividend from time's to-morrows.
In the great hour of destiny they stand,
Each with his feuds, and jealousies, and sorrows.
Soldiers are sworn to action; they must win
Some flaming, fatal climax with their lives.
Soldiers are dreamers; when the guns begin
They think of firelit homes, clean beds and wives.

I see them in foul dug-outs, gnawed by rats,
And in the ruined trenches, lashed with rain,
Dreaming of things they did with balls and bats,
And mocked by hopeless longing to regain
Bank-holidays, and picture shows, and spats,
And going to the office in the train.

The Poet As Hero

By Siegfried Sassoon

You've heard me, scornful, harsh, and discontented,
  Mocking and loathing War: you've asked me why
Of my old, silly sweetness I've repented—
  My ecstasies changed to an ugly cry.

You are aware that once I sought the Grail,
  Riding in armour bright, serene and strong;
And it was told that through my infant wail
  There rose immortal semblances of song.

But now I've said good-bye to Galahad,
  And am no more the knight of dreams and show:
For lust and senseless hatred make me glad,
  And my killed friends are with me where I go.
Wound for red wound I burn to smite their wrongs;
And there is absolution in my songs.

The Redeemer

By Siegfried Sassoon

Darkness: the rain sluiced down; the mire was deep;
It was past twelve on a mid-winter night,
When peaceful folk in beds lay snug asleep;
There, with much work to do before the light,
We lugged our clay-sucked boots as best we might
Along the trench; sometimes a bullet sang,
And droning shells burst with a hollow bang;
We were soaked, chilled and wretched, every one;
Darkness; the distant wink of a huge gun.

I turned in the black ditch, loathing the storm;
A rocket fizzed and burned with blanching flare,
And lit the face of what had been a form
Floundering in mirk. He stood before me there;
I say that He was Christ; stiff in the glare,
And leaning forward from His burdening task,
Both arms supporting it; His eyes on mine
Stared from the woeful head that seemed a mask
Of mortal pain in Hell's unholy shine.

No thorny crown, only a woollen cap
He wore—an English soldier, white and strong,
Who loved his time like any simple chap,
Good days of work and sport and homely song;
Now he has learned that nights are very long,
And dawn a watching of the windowed sky.
But to the end, unjudging, he'll endure
Horror and pain, not uncontent to die
That Lancaster on Lune may stand secure.

He faced me, reeling in his weariness,
Shouldering his load of planks, so hard to bear.
I say that He was Christ, who wrought to bless
All groping things with freedom bright as air,
And with His mercy washed and made them fair.
Then the flame sank, and all grew black as pitch,
While we began to struggle along the ditch;
And someone flung his burden in the muck,
Mumbling: 'O Christ Almighty, now I'm stuck!'

Carousel

By Jaya Savige

Dense night is a needs thing.

You were lured
in a luminous canoe
said to have once ruled
a lunar ocean.

The 2 am soda pour
of stars is all but silent;
only listen —

sedater than a sauropod
in the bone epics
it spills all the moon spice,

releasing a sap odour
that laces
us to a vaster scale
of road opus.

A carousel of oral cues,
these spinning sonic coins.

A slide show of old wishes.

Ixmiquilpan, Hidalgo, México

By Natalie Scenters-Zapico

1
Part of the simulation is not knowing
your coyote's real name. Part of the simulation
is knowing your group could leave you
behind. Part of the simulation is knowing
that if you are left behind, a pickup truck
will take you back to your hotel.

2
Through caves, through brush, through needles
we form a line by holding on
to a stranger's backpack. In the dark live
rounds are fired. I duck, people laugh.

3
The desert here is no desert at all & I think of how
I could cut a thick barrel cactus open
& eat it. In Chihuahua I've never seen
thick barrel cactus, only the thin long threads
of ocotillo that don't carry much water.

4
The chairos pay 250 pesos to walk
all night in the desert in the middle of México
to simulate a border crossing. They bring jugs
filled with water & pose for selfies.

5
When you wade across the river you only have to worry
about swimming if a current pulls you under, not the red
glare of night-vision goggles, floodlights & guns.

6
In the simulation, only two people make it
to *the other side* without getting stopped by actors
portraying la migra or narcos. All are brought back
for cups of atole. *It's three in the morning,* a girl laughs.

7
I walk back to my room, turn on the light
& the flying ants won't stop swarming. It is so dark
& have so much water left in my jug.
My teeth full of grit from the atole.

Dyed Carnations

By Robyn Schiff

There's blue, and then there's blue.
A number, not a hue, this blue
is not the undertone of any one
but there it is, primary.
I held the bouquet
in shock and cut the stems at a deadly angle.
I opened the toxic sachet of flower food
with my canine and rinsed my mouth.
I used to wash my hands and daydream.
I dreamed of myself and washed
my hands of everything. Easy math.
Now I can't get their procedure

at the florist off my mind.
The white flowers arrived! They overnighted
in a chemical bath
and now they have a fake laugh
that catches like a match
that starts the kind of kitchen fire
that is fanned by water.
They won't even look at me.
Happy Anniversary.

American Solitude

By Grace Schulman

"The cure for loneliness is solitude."
—Marianne Moore

Hopper never painted this, but here
on a snaky path his vision lingers:

three white tombs, robots with glassed-in faces
and meters for eyes, grim mouths, flat noses,

lean forward on a platform, like strangers
with identical frowns scanning a blur,

far off, that might be their train.
Gas tanks broken for decades face Parson's

smithy, planked shut now. Both relics must stay.
The pumps have roots in gas pools, and the smithy

stores memories of hammers forging scythes
to cut spartina grass for dry salt hay.

The tanks have the remove of local clammers
who sink buckets and stand, never in pairs,

but one and one and one, blank-eyed, alone,
more serene than lonely. Today a woman

rakes in the shallows, then bends to receive
last rays in shimmering water, her long shadow

knifing the bay. She slides into her truck
to watch the sky flame over sand flats, a hawk's

wind arabesque, an island risen, brown
Atlantis, at low tide; she probes the shoreline

and beyond grassy dunes for where the land
might slope off into night. Hers is no common

emptiness, but a vaster silence filled
with terns' cries, an abundant solitude.

Nearby, the three dry gas pumps, worn
survivors of clam-digging generations,

are luminous, and have an exile's grandeur
that says: In perfect solitude, there's fire.

One day I approached the vessels
and wanted to drive on, the road ablaze

with dogwood in full bloom, but the contraptions
outdazzled the road's white, even outshone

a bleached shirt flapping alone
on a laundry line, arms pointed down.

High noon. Three urns, ironic in their outcast
dignity—as though, like some pine chests,

they might be prized in disuse—cast rays,
spun leaf—covered numbers, clanked, then wheezed

and stopped again. Shadows cut the road
before I drove off into the dark woods.

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

Greed

By Philip Schultz

My ocean town struggles
to pick up leaves,
offer summer school,
and keep our library open.
Every day now

more men stand
at the railroad station,
waiting to be chosen for work.
Because it's thought
the Hispanics will work for less
they get picked first,
while the whites and blacks
avoid the terror
in one another's eyes.
Our handyman, Santos,
who expects only
what his hands earn,
is proud of his half acre in Guatemala,
where he plans to retire.
His desire to proceed with dignity
is admirable, but he knows
that now no one retires,
everyone works harder.
My father imagined a life
more satisfying than the one
he managed to lead.
He didn't see himself as uneducated,
thwarted, or bitter,
but soon-to-be rich.
Being rich was his right, he believed.
Happiness, I used to think,
was a necessary illusion.
Now I think it's just
precious moments of relief,
like dreams of Guatemala.
Sometimes, at night,
in winter, surrounded by
the significant silence
of empty mansions,
which once were cottages,
where people lived their lives,
and now are owned by banks
and the absent rich,
I like to stand at my window,
looking for a tv's futile flickering,
always surprised to see
instead
the quaint, porous face
of my reflection,
immersed
in its one abundance.

Object Lesson

By Claire Schwartz

You learn to recognize beauty by its frame.
In the gilded hall, in the gilded frame, her milky neck

extended as she peers over the drawn bath. A target,
a study, a lesson: she requires you

to be beautiful. You should save her, no matter the price.
No matter the price, the Collector will take it. His collection makes him

good, when he lends the woman's image
to the museum, where schoolchildren stand

before it, anointed with lessons in color and feeling. *Pay*
attention, the teacher scolds the fidgeter in back. *Bad*,

the child whose movement calls to her own beauty, the child
whose wails insist his mother is most beautiful of all. *Eyes this way*,

the teacher syrups. All that grows, rots. Good little stillnesses,
guardians-to-be. If you are good, one day

an embossed invitation will arrive at the door of the house
you own. You will sit next to the Collector, light

chattering along the chandeliers, your napkin shaped like a swan.
To protect your silk, you snap its neck with flourish. The blood, beautiful,

reddening your cheeks as you slip into the chair drawn just for you. *Sit*, the chair says
to the patron. *Stand*, to the guard. The guard shifts on blistered feet. *She loves you*,

she loves you not. The children pluck the daisy bald,
discard their little suns in the gutter.

Calmly We Walk through This April's Day

By Delmore Schwartz

Calmly we walk through this April's day,
Metropolitan poetry here and there,
In the park sit pauper and *rentier*,
The screaming children, the motor-car

Fugitive about us, running away,
Between the worker and the millionaire
Number provides all distances,
It is Nineteen Thirty-Seven now,
Many great dears are taken away,
What will become of you and me
(This is the school in which we learn ...)
Besides the photo and the memory?
(... that time is the fire in which we burn.)

(This is the school in which we learn ...)
What is the self amid this blaze?
What am I now that I was then
Which I shall suffer and act again,
The theodicy I wrote in my high school days
Restored all life from infancy,
The children shouting are bright as they run
(This is the school in which they learn ...)
Ravished entirely in their passing play!
(... that time is the fire in which they burn.)

Avid its rush, that reeling blaze!
Where is my father and Eleanor?
Not where are they now, dead seven years,
But what they were then?
No more? No more?
From Nineteen-Fourteen to the present day,
Bert Spira and Rhoda consume, consume
Not where they are now (where are they now?)
But what they were then, both beautiful;

Each minute bursts in the burning room,
The great globe reels in the solar fire,
Spinning the trivial and unique away.
(How all things flash! How all things flare!)
What am I now that I was then?
May memory restore again and again
The smallest color of the smallest day:
Time is the school in which we learn,
Time is the fire in which we burn.

The True-Blue American

By Delmore Schwartz

Jeremiah Dickson was a true-blue American,

For he was a little boy who understood America, for he felt that he must
Think about *everything*; because that's *all* there is to think about,
Knowing immediately the intimacy of truth and comedy,
Knowing intuitively how a sense of humor was a necessity
For one and for all who live in America. Thus, natively, and
Naturally when on an April Sunday in an ice cream parlor Jeremiah
Was requested to choose between a chocolate sundae and a banana split
He answered unhesitatingly, having no need to think of it
Being a true-blue American, determined to continue as he began:
Rejecting the either-or of Kierkegaard, and many another European;
Refusing to accept alternatives, refusing to believe the choice of between;
Rejecting selection; denying dilemma; electing absolute affirmation: knowing
in his breast
The infinite and the gold
Of the endless frontier, the deathless West.

"Both: I will have them both!" declared this true-blue American
In Cambridge, Massachusetts, on an April Sunday, instructed
By the great department stores, by the Five-and-Ten,
Taught by Christmas, by the circus, by the vulgarity and grandeur of
Niagara Falls and the Grand Canyon,
Tutored by the grandeur, vulgarity, and infinite appetite gratified and
Shining in the darkness, of the light
On Saturdays at the double bills of the moon pictures,
The consummation of the advertisements of the imagination of the light
Which is as it was—the infinite belief in infinite hope—of Columbus,
Barnum, Edison, and Jeremiah Dickson.

Across the Street

By Austin Segrest

I ran across the street, I didn't know any better.
Ran out in the street, I didn't know no better.
I just knew a woman was there, though I'd never met her.

She sat me in her parlor, distracted me with trinkets,
milky glass birds and fish, distracting trinkets.
She said my mother would be fine, but did she think it?

The world was a blur of crystal wings and fins.
My tears were casked in crystal, wings and fins.
She was the first of many lady-friends.

The tree shadows shortened, she brought me a drink of water.
Morning matured, she brought me a glass of water.

I drank it so fast, she went and brought another.

I kept looking out the window, she didn't ask me what for.
I watched out that window, she didn't ask what for.
The seconds broke off and lay there on the floor.

I imagined my mother's route, as far as I could.
Her long morning walk, followed as far as I could.
Nothing I could do would do any good.

Suffer the little children, and forbid them not.
Christ said suffer the little children, and forbid them not.
Said love thy neighbor, sometimes she's all you got.

Blade, Unplugged

By Tim Seibles

It's true: I almost never
smile, but that doesn't mean

I'm not *in love:* my heart
is that black violin
played slowly. You know that

moment late in the solo
when the voice
is so pure you feel
the blood in it: the wound

between rage
and complete surrender. That's
where I'm smiling. You just
can't see it—the sound

bleeding perfectly
inside me. The first time
I killed a vampire I was

sad: I mean
we were almost
family.

But that's
so many lives
ago. I believe

in the cry that cuts
into the melody, the strings
calling back the forgotten world.

When I think of the madness
that has made me and the midnight
I walk inside—all day long:

when I think of that
one note that breaks
what's left of what's
human in me, man,

I love everything

Bright Copper Kettles

By Vijay Seshadri

Dead friends coming back to life, dead family,
speaking languages living and dead, their minds retentive,
their five senses intact, their footprints like a butterfly's,
mercy shining from their comprehensive faces—
this is one of my favorite things.
I like it so much I sleep all the time.
Moon by day and sun by night find me dispersed
deep in the dreams where they appear.
In fields of goldenrod, in the city of five pyramids,
before the empress with the melting face, under
the towering plane tree, they just show up.
"It's all right," they seem to say. "It always was."
They are diffident and polite.
(Who knew the dead were so polite?)
They don't want to scare me; their heads don't spin like weather vanes.
They don't want to steal my body
and possess the earth and wreak vengeance.
They're dead, you understand, they don't exist. And, besides,
why would they care? They're subatomic, horizontal. Think about it.
One of them shyly offers me a pencil.
The eyes under the eyelids dart faster and faster.
Through the intercom of the house where for so long there was no music,
the right Reverend Al Green is singing,
"I could never see tomorrow.
I was never told about the sorrow."

Sonnet 84: While one sere leaf, that parting Autumn yields

By Anna Seward

While one sere leaf, that parting Autumn yields,
  Trembles upon the thin, and naked spray,
  November, dragging on this sunless day,
  Lours, cold and sullen, on the watery fields;
And Nature to the waste dominion yields,
  Stripped her last robes, with gold and purple gay —
  So droops my life, of your soft beams despoiled,
  Youth, Health, and Hope, that long exulting smiled;
And the wild carols, and the bloomy hues
  Of merry Spring-time, spruce on every plain
  Her half-blown bushes, moist with sunny rain,
More pensive thoughts in my sunk heart infuse
  Than Winter's grey, and desolate domain
  Faded like my lost Youth, that no bright Spring renews.

Sonnet 91: On the fleet streams, the Sun, that late arose

By Anna Seward

On the fleet streams, the Sun, that late arose,
  In amber radiance plays; the tall young grass
  No foot hath bruised; clear morning, as I pass,
  Breathes the pure gale, that on the blossom blows;
And, as with gold yon green hill's summit glows,
  The lake inlays the vale with molten glass:
  Now is the year's soft youth, yet one, alas!
  Cheers not as it was wont; impending woes
Weigh on my heart; the joys, that once were mine,
  Spring leads not back; and those that yet remain
  Fade while she blooms. Each hour more lovely shine
Her crystal beams, and feed her floral train,
  But oh with pale, and warring fires, decline
  Those eyes, whose light my filial hopes sustain.

Song: "Blow, blow, thou winter wind"

By William Shakespeare

Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
  Thou art not so unkind
    As man's ingratitude;
  Thy tooth is not so keen,
Because thou art not seen,

Although thy breath be rude.
Heigh-ho! sing, heigh-ho! unto the green holly:
Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly:
Then, heigh-ho, the holly!
This life is most jolly.

Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,
That dost not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot:
Though thou the waters warp,
Thy sting is not so sharp
As friend remembered not.
Heigh-ho! sing, heigh-ho! unto the green holly...

Sonnet 15: When I consider everything that grows

By William Shakespeare

When I consider everything that grows
Holds in perfection but a little moment,
That this huge stage presenteth nought but shows
Whereon the stars in secret influence comment;
When I perceive that men as plants increase,
Cheered and check'd even by the selfsame sky,
Vaunt in their youthful sap, at height decrease,
And wear their brave state out of memory;
Then the conceit of this inconstant stay
Sets you most rich in youth before my sight,
Where wasteful Time debateth with Decay
To change your day of youth to sullied night;
And all in war with Time for love of you,
As he takes from you, I engraft you new.

Sonnet 18: Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?

By William Shakespeare

Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer’s lease hath all too short a date;
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature’s changing course untrimm'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,

Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:
  So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
  So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Sonnet 29: When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes

By William Shakespeare

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
(Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's gate;
    For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
    That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

Sonnet 55: Not marble nor the gilded monuments

By William Shakespeare

Not marble nor the gilded monuments
Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme,
But you shall shine more bright in these contents
Than unswept stone besmeared with sluttish time.
When wasteful war shall statues overturn,
And broils root out the work of masonry,
Nor Mars his sword nor war's quick fire shall burn
The living record of your memory.
'Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity
Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room
Even in the eyes of all posterity
That wear this world out to the ending doom.
  So, till the Judgement that yourself arise,
  You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.

Trace Evidence

By Charif Shanahan

When I say *But mother, Black or not Black,*
Of course you are polyethnic, your look does not change
Though it does harden, a drying clay bust
Abandoned or deliberately incomplete,
All the features carved in
Except the eyes. *What I'm trying—*
I mean—You are an Arab, yes,
By culture, by language, and in part by blood; by blood
You are also Black African—and when, then, I say
And also probably a fair amount of European, too—the lights,
Though we're standing at the corner of 195th and Jerome,

Turn up somehow

Tracing an outline of you onto the armory's sharp red brick, the El
Barreling up from the tunnel like a surge of magma reaching
For air and as I wait for it to pass so that you can
Hear me again, so that I can hear myself at last
Say *But here, for me, that doesn't exactly matter. Don't you see—?*
Your face hangs on the *fair* of *fair amount*—heavy drops
Of oil, or old rain, falling onto us from the tracks—almost willing away
The layer of long-dead men flattened onto it, and the desperate
Rest of you, until I say with my looking
Through the unbearable human noise, *My darling sweet mother, it is*
Fine, it is fine. For us here now I will be the first of our line.

Contraction

By Ravi Shankar

Honest self-scrutiny too easily mutinies,
  mutates into false memories
Which find language a receptive host,
Boosted by boastful embellishments.

Self-esteem is raised on wobbly beams,
  seeming seen as stuff enough
To fund the hedge of personality,
Though personally, I cannot forget

Whom I have met and somehow wronged,
  wrung for a jot of fugitive juice,
Trading some ruse for a blot or two,

Labored to braid from transparent diction

Fiction, quick fix, quixotic fixation.
As the pulse of impulses
Drained through my veins, I tried to live
Twenty lives at once. Now one is plenty.

Not Horses

By Natalie Shapero

What I adore is not horses, with their modern
domestic life span of 25 years. What I adore
is a bug that lives only one day, especially if
it's a terrible day, a day of train derailment or
chemical lake or cop admits to cover-up, a day
when no one thinks of anything else, least of all
that bug. I know how it feels, born as I've been
into these rotting times, as into sin. Everybody's
busy, so distraught they forget to kill me,
and even that won't keep me alive. I share
my home not with horses, but with a little dog
who sees poorly at dusk and menaces stumps,
makes her muscle known to every statue.
I wish she could have a single day of language,
so that I might reassure her *don't be afraid —*
our whole world is dead and so can do you no harm.

Sunshower

By Natalie Shapero

Some people say the devil is beating
his wife. Some people say the devil
is pawing his wife. Some people say
the devil is doubling down on an overall
attitude of entitlement toward
the body of his wife. Some people
say the devil won't need to be sorry,
as the devil believes that nothing
comes after this life. Some people say
that in spite of the devil's public,
long-standing, and meticulously
logged disdain for the health
and wholeness of his wife, the devil
spends all day, every day, insisting

grandly and gleefully on his general
pro-woman ethos, that the devil truly
considers himself to be an unswayed
crusader: effortlessly magnetic,
scrupulous, gracious, and, in spite of
the devil's several advanced degrees,
a luminous autodidact. Some people
say calm down; this is commonplace.
Some people say calm down;
this is very rare. Some people say
the sun is washing her face. Some
people say in Hell, they're having a fair.

Buick

By Karl Shapiro

As a sloop with a sweep of immaculate wing on her delicate spine
And a keel as steel as a root that holds in the sea as she leans,
Leaning and laughing, my warm-hearted beauty, you ride, you ride,
You tack on the curves with parabola speed and a kiss of goodbye,
Like a thoroughbred sloop, my new high-spirited spirit, my kiss.

As my foot suggests that you leap in the air with your hips of a girl,
My finger that praises your wheel and announces your voices of song,
Flouncing your skirts, you blueness of joy, you flirt of politeness,
You leap, you intelligence, essence of wheelness with silvery nose,
And your platinum clocks of excitement stir like the hairs of a fern.

But how alien you are from the booming belts of your birth and the smoke
Where you turned on the stinging lathes of Detroit and Lansing at night
And shrieked at the torch in your secret parts and the amorous tests,
But now with your eyes that enter the future of roads you forget;
You are all instinct with your phosphorous glow and your streaking hair.

And now when we stop it is not as the bird from the shell that I leave
Or the leathery pilot who steps from his bird with a sneer of delight,
And not as the ignorant beast do you squat and watch me depart,
But with exquisite breathing you smile, with satisfaction of love,
And I touch you again as you tick in the silence and settle in sleep.

Stanzas ["Oh, come to me in dreams, my love!"]

By Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley

Oh, come to me in dreams, my love!

I will not ask a dearer bliss;
Come with the starry beams, my love,
And press mine eyelids with thy kiss.

’Twas thus, as ancient fables tell,
Love visited a Grecian maid,
Till she disturbed the sacred spell,
And woke to find her hopes betrayed.

But gentle sleep shall veil my sight,
And Psyche’s lamp shall darkling be,
When, in the visions of the night,
Thou dost renew thy vows to me.

Then come to me in dreams, my love,
I will not ask a dearer bliss;
Come with the starry beams, my love,
And press mine eyelids with thy kiss.

England in 1819

By Percy Bysshe Shelley

An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying King;
Princes, the dregs of their dull race, who flow
Through public scorn,—mud from a muddy spring;
Rulers who neither see nor feel nor know,
But leechlike to their fainting country cling
Till they drop, blind in blood, without a blow.
A people starved and stabbed in th' untilled field;
An army, whom liberticide and prey
Makes as a two-edged sword to all who wield;
Golden and sanguine laws which tempt and slay;
Religion Christless, Godless—a book sealed;
A senate, Time’s worst statute, unrepealed—
Are graves from which a glorious Phantom may
Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day.

Love’s Philosophy

By Percy Bysshe Shelley

The fountains mingle with the river
  And the rivers with the ocean,
The winds of heaven mix for ever
  With a sweet emotion;

Nothing in the world is single;
  All things by a law divine
In one spirit meet and mingle.
  Why not I with thine?—

See the mountains kiss high heaven
  And the waves clasp one another;
No sister-flower would be forgiven
  If it disdained its brother;
And the sunlight clasps the earth
  And the moonbeams kiss the sea:
What is all this sweet work worth
  If thou kiss not me?

Ozymandias

By Percy Bysshe Shelley

I met a traveller from an antique land,
Who said—"Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal, these words appear:
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

Living Ancients

By Matthew Shenoda

For those of us young
healthy
we will face the mourning of our elders.
Bury them beneath
the earth.
And for those of us
who believe the living
ever-live
we will stand by the graves of our teachers

and know that we
like those we've buried
are living ancients.

Hesitation Theory

By Reginald Shepherd

I drift into the sound of wind,
how small my life must be
to fit into his palm like that, holly
leaf, bluejay feather, milkweed fluff,
pin straw or sycamore pod, resembling
scraps of light. The world
slips through these fingers
so easily, there's so much
to miss: the sociable bones
linked up in supple rows, mineral
seams just under the skin. I hold
my palm against the sun and don't see
palm or sun, don't hold anything
in either hand. I look up, look
away (*what's that?*), I trip
and stumble (fall
again), find myself face down
in duff, a foam of fallen live oak
leaves, with only
this life, mine at times.

The World in the Evening

By Rachel Sherwood

As this suburban summer wanders toward dark
cats watch from their driveways — they are bored
and await miracles. The houses show, through windows
flashes of knife and fork, the blue light
of televisions, inconsequential fights
between wife and husband in the guest bathroom

voices sound like echoes in these streets

the chattering of awful boys as they plot
behind the juniper and ivy, miniature guerillas
that mimic the ancient news of the world
and shout threats, piped high across mock fences

to girls riding by in the last pieces of light

the color of the sky makes brilliant reflection
in the water and oil along the curb
deepened aqua and the sharp pure rose of the clouds
there is no sun or moon, few stars wheel
above the domestic scene — this half-lit world
still, quiet calming the dogs worried by distant alarms

there — a woman in a window washes a glass

a man across the street laughs through an open door
utterly alien, alone. There is a time, seconds between
the last light and the dark stretch ahead, when color
is lost — the girl on her swing becomes a swift
apparition, black and white flowing suddenly into night.

The Glories of Our Blood and State

By James Shirley

The glories of our blood and state
    Are shadows, not substantial things;
There is no armour against Fate;
    Death lays his icy hand on kings:
            Sceptre and Crown
            Must tumble down,
And in the dust be equal made
With the poor crooked scythe and spade.

Some men with swords may reap the field,
    And plant fresh laurels where they kill:
But their strong nerves at last must yield;
    They tame but one another still:
            Early or late
            They stoop to fate,
And must give up their murmuring breath
When they, pale captives, creep to death.

The garlands wither on your brow;
    Then boast no more your mighty deeds!
Upon Death's purple altar now
     See where the victor-victim bleeds.
            Your heads must come
            To the cold tomb:
Only the actions of the just

Smell sweet and blossom in their dust.

on new year's eve

By Evie Shockley

we make midnight a maquette of the year:
frostlight glinting off snow to solemnize
the vows we offer to ourselves in near
silence: the competition shimmerwise

of champagne and chandeliers to attract
laughter and cheers: the glow from the fireplace
reflecting the burning intra-red pact
between beloveds: we cosset the space

of a fey hour, anxious gods molding our
hoped-for adams with this temporal clay:
each of us edacious for shining or
rash enough to think sacrifice will stay

this fugacious time: while stillness suspends
vitality in balance, as passions
struggle with passions for sway, the mind wends
towards what's to come: a callithump of fashions,

ersatz smiles, crowded days: a bloodless cut
that severs soul from bone: a long aching
quiet in which we will hear nothing but
the clean crack of our promises breaking.

the way we live now ::

By Evie Shockley

when the cultivators of corpses are busy seeding
plague across vast acres of the land, choking schools
and churches in the motley toxins of grief, breeding
virile shoots of violence so soon verdant even fools
fear to tread in their wake :: when all known tools
of resistance are clutched in the hands of the vile
like a wilting bouquet, cut from their roots, while

the disempowered slice smiles across their own faces
and hide the wet knives in writhing thickets of hair
for future use :: when breathing in the ashen traces

of dreams deferred, the detonator's ticking a queer
echo that amplifies instead of fading :: when there-
you-are is where-you-were and the sunset groans
into the atlantic, setting blue fire to dark white bones.

Least Concern

By John Shoptaw

Chimerical, the rhinoceros egret,
its keratin dehorned in South Africa
and container-shipped to Vietnam or China
where it's ground by aphrodisiasts
and snorted by affluent boneheads,

metamorphs into the hippopotamus egret,
the elephant, Cape buffalo, zebra, giraffe,
the ostrich, and the camel egret,
the deep-domed tortoise, and in the Americas
the cow heron or cattle egret.

Ranging like wildfire over the last century,
a migration prodded by the transmutation
of forests into ranches, the cattle egret
writhes and champs and tilts and plods
and darts in cursive at grasshoppers.

And where its livestock gets concentrated,
decapitated, tenderized, charred, whatever,
the *Bubulcus ibis* or cattleman wader,
capitalizing on a field without cattle,
reinvents itself as the tractor egret

though the unattached bird is emblem enough
of the other end of extinction, ignition,
when not just its shaggy breeding crest
and breast plumage go up in flame
but its legs, beak, lores, and irises catch color.

Pilgrims

By Jacob Shores-Argüello

Costa Rica

The bus arrives in the orchid heat,

in the place where coffee grows
like rubies in the valley's black soil.
We disembark, walk in twos so we
don't slip on the genesis mud.
The woman next to me carries
three cellphones as gifts for cousins
and a bucket of chicken to share.
How is it that I have come this far
with nothing, that I am empty-
handed in this country of blessings?
A procession of rust-colored macaws
glides above us. Their ashy shadows
draw crosses onto all of our heads.

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

The Gentle Art of Shabby Dressing

By Spencer Short

There's nothing dandier than threadbare threads
worn by a discerning shabby dresser.
A collar's fret or subtle fray is not *lesser*
because it's worn away but models instead

the bespoke tailoring of time itself.
Done poorly—the gentleman farmer's
piecemeal pastoral, that NoHo charmer's
duct-taped boots—it's like an unread bookshelf

of secondhand prose: a too-studied pose.
Done well, it draws you in to draw you near,
reveals the intricate pattern in the years'
inexorable ravel. Between *decompose*

and *deconstruct*, what seemed a foppish quirk
grows wise. Design undone. We wear time's work.

Sonnet 1

By Sir Philip Sidney

Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show,
That she, dear she, might take some pleasure of my pain,
Pleasure might cause her read, reading might make her know,

Knowledge might pity win, and pity grace obtain,—
I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,
Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain,
Oft turning others' leaves, to see if thence would flow
Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sunburned brain.
But words came halting forth, wanting Invention's stay:
Invention, Nature's child, fled step-dame Study's blows,
And others' feet still seemed but strangers in my way.
Thus great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes,
Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite:
"Fool," said my Muse to me, "look in thy heart and write."

Poetry

By Lydia Huntley Sigourney

Morn on her rosy couch awoke,
  Enchantment led the hour,
And mirth and music drank the dews
  That freshen'd Beauty's flower,
Then from her bower of deep delight,
  I heard a young girl sing,
'Oh, speak no ill of poetry,
  For 'tis a holy thing.'

The Sun in noon-day heat rose high,
  And on the heaving breast,
I saw a weary pilgrim toil
  Unpitied and unblest,
Yet still in trembling measures flow'd
  Forth from a broken string,
'Oh, speak no ill of poetry,
  For 'tis a holy thing.'

'Twas night, and Death the curtains drew,
  'Mid agony severe,
While there a willing spirit went
  Home to a glorious sphere,
Yet still it sigh'd, even when was spread
  The waiting Angel's wing,
'Oh, speak no ill of poetry,
  For 'tis a holy thing.'

Song of Weights and Measurements

By Martha Silano

For there is a dram.
For there is a farthing.
A bushel for your thoughts.
A hand for your withered heights.

For I have jouled along attempting
to quire and wisp.

For I have sized up a mountain's meters,
come down jiffy by shake to the tune
of leagues and stones.

For once I was your peckish darling.

For once there was the measure
of what an ox could plow
in a single morning.

For once the fother, the reed, the palm.

For one megalithic year I fixed my gaze
on the smiling meniscus, against the gray wall
of graduated cylinder.

For once I measured ten out of ten
on the scale of pain.

For I knew that soon I'd kiss good-bye
the bovate, the hide and hundredweight.

For in each pinch of salt, a whisper of doubt,
for in each medieval moment, emotion,

like an unruly cough syrup bottle,
uncapped. For though I dutifully swallowed

my banana doses, ascended, from welcome
to lanthorn, three barleycorns at a time,

I could not tackle the trudging, trenchant cart.

For now I am forty rods from your chain and bolt.
For now I am my six-sacked self.

Past-Lives Therapy

By Charles Simic

They explained to me the bloody bandages
On the floor in the maternity ward in Rochester, N.Y.,
Cured the backache I acquired bowing to my old master,
Made me stop putting thumbtacks round my bed.

They showed me an officer on horseback,
Waving a saber next to a burning farmhouse
And a barefoot woman in a nightgown,
Throwing stones after him and calling him Lucifer.

I was a straw-headed boy in patched overalls.
Come dark a chicken would roost in my hair.
Some even laid eggs as I played my ukulele
And my mother and father crossed themselves.

Next, I saw myself inside an abandoned gas station
Constructing a spaceship out of a coffin,
Red traffic cone, cement mixer and ear warmers,
When a church lady fainted seeing me in my underwear.

Some days, however, they opened door after door,
Always to a different room, and could not find me.
There'd be only a small squeak now and then,
As if a miner's canary got caught in a mousetrap.

The Wooden Toy

By Charles Simic

1

The brightly-painted horse
Had a boy's face,
And four small wheels
Under his feet,

Plus a long string
To pull him by this way and that
Across the floor,
Should you care to.

A string in-waiting
That slipped away

In many wiles
From each and every try.

2

Knock and they'll answer,
Mother told me.

So I climbed four flights of stairs
And went in unannounced.

And found a small wooden toy
For the taking

In the ensuing emptiness
And the fading daylight

That still gives me a shudder
As if I held the key to mysteries in my hand.

3

Where's the Lost and Found Department,
And the quiet entry,
The undeveloped film
Of the few clear moments
Of our blurred lives?

Where's the drop of blood
And the teeny nail
That pricked my finger
As I bent down to touch the toy

And caught its eye?

4

Evening light,

Make me a Sunday
Go-to meeting shadow
For my toy.

My dearest memories are
Steep stair-wells
In dusty buildings

On dead-end streets,

Where I talk to the walls
And closed doors
As if they understood me.

5

The wooden toy sitting pretty.

No, quieter than that.

Like the sound of eyebrows
Raised by a villain
In a silent movie.

Psst, someone said behind my back.

In the Woods

By Kathryn Simmonds

The baby sleeps.
Sunlight plays upon my lap, through doily leaves a black lab comes,
a scotty goes, the day wears on, the baby wakes.

The good birds sing,
invisible or seldom seen, in hidden kingdoms, grateful for the in-
between. The baby sleeps. Elsewhere the Queen rolls by

on gusts of cheer —
ladies wave and bless her reign. The baby frets. The baby feeds.
The end of lunch, a daytime moon. The leaves

are lightly tinkered with.
It's spring? No, autumn? Afternoon? We've sat so long, we've walked
so far. The woods in shade, the woods in sun, the singing birds,

the noble trees.
The child is grown. The child is gone. The black lab comes,
his circuit done. His mistress coils his scarlet lead.

Russell Market

By Maurya Simon

What I want most is what I deeply fear:
loss of self; yet here I stand, a "memsahib,"
all decked out in wonder, and still a stranger
amid the harvest, old gaffar at my side.

Here's a pandit preaching in the flower stall:
he turns funeral wreaths into wheels of rapture.
I must shrug off my notion of knowing anything
of substance about the world, about the spirit.

Sparrows dart between the columns like music.
Huge pupae, bananas split their golden skins;
flies moisten their hands in bands of dew.
Lepers limp by on crutches, in slow motion.

Where is there order in the world? None,
none, I think—no order, only spirals of power.
The pyramids of onion, guava, melon—all defy
my reason: they shine like galaxy-driven planets.

A balancing scale becomes a barge of plenty,
a cornucopia endlessly filling up and emptying.
The wages of sin are more sin: virtue's wages,
more virtue—and all such earnings, weightless.

I've forgotten my errand; I float now through
myself like a howl through a phantom mouth—
the world's an illusory marketplace where I
must bargain hardest for what I hope I'm worth.

On the Lawn at the Villa

By Louis Simpson

On the lawn at the villa—
That's the way to start, eh, reader?
We know where we stand—somewhere expensive—
You and I *imperturbes*, as Walt would say,
Before the diversions of wealth, you and I *engagés*.

On the lawn at the villa
Sat a manufacturer of explosives,
His wife from Paris,

And a young man named Bruno,

And myself, being American,
Willing to talk to these malefactors,
The manufacturer of explosives, and so on,
But somehow superior. By that I mean democratic.
It's complicated, being an American,
Having the money and the bad conscience, both at the same time.
Perhaps, after all, this is not the right subject for a poem.

We were all sitting there paralyzed
In the hot Tuscan afternoon,
And the bodies of the machine-gun crew were draped over the balcony.
So we sat there all afternoon.

To the Western World

By Louis Simpson

A siren sang, and Europe turned away
From the high castle and the shepherd's crook.
Three caravels went sailing to Cathay
On the strange ocean, and the captains shook
Their banners out across the Mexique Bay.

And in our early days we did the same.
Remembering our fathers in their wreck
We crossed the sea from Palos where they came
And saw, enormous to the little deck,
A shore in silence waiting for a name.

The treasures of Cathay were never found.
In this America, this wilderness
Where the axe echoes with a lonely sound,
The generations labor to possess
And grave by grave we civilize the ground.

The Ragged and the Beautiful

By Safia Sinclair

Doubt is a storming bull, crashing through
the blue-wide windows of myself. Here in the heart
of my heart where it never stops raining,

I am an outsider looking in. But in the garden

of my good days, no body is wrong. Here every
flower grows ragged and sideways and always

beautiful. We bloom with the outcasts,
our soon-to-be sunlit, we dreamers. We are strange
and unbelonging. Yes. We are just enough

of ourselves to catch the wind in our feathers,
and fly so perfectly away.

The Bookshelf of the God of Infinite Space

By Jeffrey Skinner

You would expect an uncountable number,
Acres and acres of books in rows
Like wheat or gold bullion. Or that the words just
Appear in the mind, like banner headlines.
In fact there is one shelf
Holding a modest number, ten or twelve volumes.
No dust jackets, because — no dust.
Covers made of gold or skin
Or golden skin, or creosote or rain-
Soaked macadam, or some
Mix of salt & glass. You turn a page
& mountains rise, clouds drawn by children
Bubble in the sky, you are twenty
Again, trying to read a map
Dissolving in your hands. I say *You* & mean
Me, say *God* & mean *Librarian* — who after long research
Offers you a glass of water and an apple —
You, grateful to discover your name,
A footnote in that book.

Epistle to Mrs. Tyler

By Christopher Smart

It ever was allow'd, dear Madam,
Ev'n from the days of father Adam,
Of all perfection flesh is heir to,
Fair patience is the gentlest virtue;
This is a truth our grandames teach,
Our poets sing, and parsons preach;
Yet after all, dear Moll, the fact is
We seldom put it into practice;

I'll warrant (if one knew the truth)
You've call'd me many an idle youth,
And styled me rude ungrateful bear,
Enough to make a parson swear.

I shall not make a long oration
In order for my vindication,
For what the plague can I say more
Than lazy dogs have done before;
Such stuff is nought but mere tautology,
And so take that for my apology.

First then for custards, my dear Mary,
The produce of your dainty dairy,
For stew'd, for bak'd, for boil'd, for roast,
And all the teas and all the toast;
With thankful tongue and bowing attitude,
I here present you with my gratitude:
Next for you apples, pears and plums
Acknowledgment in order comes;
For wine, for ale, for fowl, for fish—for
Ev'n all one's appetite can wish for:
But O ye pens, and O ye pencils,
And all ye scribbling utensils,
Say in what words and in what metre,
Shall unfeign'd admiration greet her,
For that rich banquet so refin'd
Her conversation gave the mind;
The solid meal of sense and worth,
Set off by the desert of mirth;
Wit's fruit and pleasure's genial bowl,
And all the joyous flow of soul;
For these, and every kind ingredient
That form'd your love—your most obedient.

Oh, Hope! Thou soother sweet of human woes

By Charlotte Smith

Oh, Hope! thou soother sweet of human woes!
How shall I lure thee to my haunts forlorn!
For me wilt thou renew the withered rose,
And clear my painful path of pointed thorn?
Ah come, sweet nymph! in smiles and softness drest,
Like the young hours that lead the tender year
Enchantress come! and charm my cares to rest:

Alas! the flatterer flies, and will not hear!
A prey to fear, anxiety, and pain,
Must I a sad existence still deplore?
Lo! the flowers fade, but all the thorns remain,
'For me the vernal garland blooms no more.'
Come then, 'pale Misery's love!' be thou my cure,
And I will bless thee, who though slow art sure.

Sonnet: On Being Cautioned Against Walking on an Headland Overlooking the Sea, Because It Was Frequented by a Lunatic

By Charlotte Smith

Is there a solitary wretch who hies
To the tall cliff, with starting pace or slow,
And, measuring, views with wild and hollow eyes
Its distance from the waves that chide below;
Who, as the sea-born gale with frequent sighs
Chills his cold bed upon the mountain turf,
With hoarse, half-uttered lamentation, lies
Murmuring responses to the dashing surf?
In moody sadness, on the giddy brink,
I see him more with envy than with fear;
He has no *nice felicities* that shrink
From giant horrors; wildly wandering here,
He seems (uncursed with reason) not to know
The depth or the duration of his woe.

alternate names for black boys

By Danez Smith

1. smoke above the burning bush
2. archnemesis of summer night
3. first son of soil
4. coal awaiting spark & wind
5. guilty until proven dead
6. oil heavy starlight
7. monster until proven ghost
8. gone
9. phoenix who forgets to un-ash
10. going, going, gone
11. gods of shovels & black veils
12. what once passed for kindling

13. fireworks at dawn
14. brilliant, shadow hued coral
15. (I thought to leave this blank
    but who am I to name us nothing?)
16. prayer who learned to bite & sprint
17. a mother's joy & clutched breath

How Dark the Beginning

By Maggie Smith

All we ever talk of is light—
let there be light, there was light then,

good light—but what I consider
dawn is darker than all that.

So many hours between the day
receding and what we recognize

as morning, the sun cresting
like a wave that won't break

over us—as if light were protective,
as if no hearts were flayed,

no bodies broken on a day
like today. In any film,

the sunrise tells us everything
will be all right. Danger wouldn't

dare show up now, dragging
its shadow across the screen.

We talk so much of light, please
let me speak on behalf

of the good dark. Let us
talk more of how dark

the beginning of a day is.

Threshold

By Maggie Smith

You want a door you can be
on both sides of at once.

You want to be
on both sides of here

and there, now and then,
together and—(what

did we call the life
we would wish back?

The old life? The before?)
alone. But any open

space may be
a threshold, an arch

of entering and leaving.
Crossing a field, wading

through nothing
but timothy grass,

imagine yourself passing from
and into. Passing through

doorway after
doorway after doorway.

Hip-Hop Ghazal

By Patricia Smith

Gotta love us brown girls, munching on fat, swinging blue hips,
decked out in shells and splashes, Lawdie, bringing them woo hips.

As the jukebox teases, watch my sistas throat the heartbreak,
inhaling bassline, cracking backbone and singing thru hips.

Like something boneless, we glide silent, seeping 'tween floorboards,
wrapping around the hims, and *ooh wee*, clinging like glue hips.

Engines grinding, rotating, smokin', gotta pull back some.
Natural minds are lost at the mere sight of ringing true hips.

Gotta love us girls, just struttin' down Manhattan streets
killing the menfolk with a dose of that stinging view. Hips.

Crying 'bout getting old—Patricia, you need to get up off
what God gave you. Say a prayer and start slinging. Cue hips.

Katrina

By Patricia Smith

I was birthed restless and elsewhere

gut dragging and bulging with ball lightning, slush,
broke through with branches, steel

I was bitch-monikered, hipped, I hefted
a whip rain, a swirling sheet of grit.

Scraping toward the first of you, hungering for wood, walls,
unturned skin. With shifting and frantic mouth, I loudly loved
the slow bones

of elders, fools, and willows.

Siblings

By Patricia Smith

Hurricanes, 2005

Arlene learned to dance backwards in heels that were too high.
Bret prayed for a shaggy mustache made of mud and hair.
Cindy just couldn’t keep her windy legs together.
Dennis never learned to swim.
Emily whispered her gusts into a thousand skins.
Franklin, farsighted and anxious, bumbled villages.
Gert spat her matronly name against a city’s flat face.
Harvey hurled a wailing child high.
Irene, the baby girl, threw pounding tantrums.
José liked the whip sound of slapping.
Lee just craved the whip.
Maria’s thunder skirts flew high when she danced.
Nate was mannered and practical. He stormed precisely.

Ophelia nibbled weirdly on the tips of depressions.
Philippe slept too late, flailing on a wronged ocean.
Rita was a vicious flirt. She woke Philippe with rumors.
Stan was born business, a gobbler of steel.
Tammy crooned country, getting the words all wrong.
Vince died before anyone could remember his name.
Wilma opened her maw wide, flashing rot.

None of them talked about Katrina.
She was their odd sister,
the blood dazzler.

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

Do Not!

By Stevie Smith

Do not despair of man, and do not scold him,
Who are you that you should so lightly hold him?
Are you not also a man, and in your heart
Are there not warlike thoughts and fear and smart?
Are you not also afraid and in fear cruel,
Do you not think of yourself as usual,
Faint for ambition, desire to be loved,
Prick at a virtuous thought by beauty moved?
You love your wife, you hold your children dear,
Then say not that Man is vile, but say they are.
But they are not. So is your judgement shown
Presumptuous, false, quite vain, merely your own
Sadness for failed ambition set outside,
Made a philosophy of, prinked, beautified
In noble dress and into the world sent out
To run with the ill it most pretends to rout.
Oh know your own heart, that heart's not wholly evil,
And from the particular judge the general,
If judge you must, but with compassion see life,
Or else, of yourself despairing, flee strife.

The Heavenly City

By Stevie Smith

I sigh for the heavenly country,
Where the heavenly people pass,

And the sea is as quiet as a mirror
Of beautiful beautiful glass.

I walk in the heavenly field,
With lilies and poppies bright,
I am dressed in a heavenly coat
Of polished white.

When I walk in the heavenly parkland
My feet on the pasture are bare,
Tall waves the grass, but no harmful
Creature is there.

At night I fly over the housetops,
And stand on the bright moony beams;
Gold are all heaven's rivers,
And silver her streams.

Not Waving but Drowning

By Stevie Smith

Nobody heard him, the dead man,
But still he lay moaning:
I was much further out than you thought
And not waving but drowning.

Poor chap, he always loved larking
And now he's dead
It must have been too cold for him his heart gave way,
They said.

Oh, no no no, it was too cold always
(Still the dead one lay moaning)
I was much too far out all my life
And not waving but drowning.

Declaration

By Tracy K. Smith

He has

sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people

He has plundered our—

ravaged our—

destroyed the lives of our—

taking away our—

abolishing our most valuable—

and altering fundamentally the Forms of our—

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for
Redress in the most humble terms:

Our repeated
Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury.

We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration
and settlement here.

—taken Captive

on the high Seas

to bear—

Sci-Fi

By Tracy K. Smith

There will be no edges, but curves.
Clean lines pointing only forward.

History, with its hard spine & dog-eared
Corners, will be replaced with nuance,

Just like the dinosaurs gave way
To mounds and mounds of ice.

Women will still be women, but
The distinction will be empty. Sex,

Having outlived every threat, will gratify
Only the mind, which is where it will exist.

For kicks, we'll dance for ourselves
Before mirrors studded with golden bulbs.

The oldest among us will recognize that glow—
But the word *sun* will have been re-assigned

To the Standard Uranium-Neutralizing device
Found in households and nursing homes.

And yes, we'll live to be much older, thanks
To popular consensus. Weightless, unhinged,

Eons from even our own moon, we'll drift
In the haze of space, which will be, once

And for all, scrutable and safe.

Semi-Splendid

By Tracy K. Smith

You flinch. Something flickers, not fleeing your face. My
Heart hammers at the ceiling, telling my tongue
To turn it down. Too late. The something climbs, leaps, is
Falling now across us like the prank of an icy, brainy
Lord. I chose the wrong word. I am wrong for not choosing
Merely to smile, to pull you toward me and away from
What you think of as that other me, who wanders lost among ...
Among whom? The many? The rare? I wish you didn't care.

I watch you watching her. Her very shadow is a rage
That trashes the rooms of your eyes. Do you claim surprise
At what she wants, the poor girl, pelted with despair,
Who flits from grief to grief? Isn't it you she seeks? And
If you blame her, know that she blames you for choosing
Not her, but me. Love is never fair. But do we — should we — care?

The Universe as Primal Scream

By Tracy K. Smith

5pm on the nose. They open their mouths
And it rolls out: high, shrill and metallic.
First the boy, then his sister. Occasionally,
They both let loose at once, and I think
Of putting on my shoes to go up and see

Whether it is merely an experiment
Their parents have been conducting
Upon the good crystal, which must surely
Lie shattered to dust on the floor.

Maybe the mother is still proud
Of the four pink lungs she nursed
To such might. Perhaps, if they hit
The magic decibel, the whole building
Will lift-off, and we'll ride to glory
Like Elijah. If this is it—if this is what
Their cries are cocked toward—let the sky
Pass from blue, to red, to molten gold,
To black. Let the heaven we inherit approach.

Whether it is our dead in Old Testament robes,
Or a door opening onto the roiling infinity of space.
Whether it will bend down to greet us like a father,
Or swallow us like a furnace. I'm ready
To meet what refuses to let us keep anything
For long. What teases us with blessings,
Bends us with grief. Wizard, thief, the great
Wind rushing to knock our mirrors to the floor,
To sweep our short lives clean. How mean

Our racket seems beside it. My stereo on shuffle.
The neighbor chopping onions through a wall.
All of it just a hiccough against what may never
Come for us. And the kids upstairs still at it,
Screaming like the Dawn of Man, as if something
They have no name for has begun to insist
Upon being born.

Wade in the Water

By Tracy K. Smith

for the Geechee Gullah Ring Shouters

One of the women greeted me.
I love you, she said. She didn't
Know me, but I believed her,
And a terrible new ache
Rolled over in my chest,
Like in a room where the drapes
Have been swept back. I love you,

I love you, as she continued
Down the hall past other strangers,
Each feeling pierced suddenly
By pillars of heavy light.
I love you, throughout
The performance, in every
Handclap, every stomp.
I love you in the rusted iron
Chains someone was made
To drag until love let them be
Unclasped and left empty
In the center of the ring.
I love you in the water
Where they pretended to wade,
Singing that old blood-deep song
That dragged us to those banks
And cast us in. I love you,
The angles of it scraping at
Each throat, shouldering past
The swirling dust motes
In those beams of light
That whatever we now knew
We could let ourselves feel, knew
To climb. O Woods—O Dogs—
O Tree—O Gun—O *Girl, run*—
O Miraculous Many Gone—
O Lord—O Lord—O Lord—
Is this love the trouble you promised?

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

Heart Butte, Montana

By M. L. Smoker

The unsympathetic wind, how she has evaded me for years now,
leaving a guileless shell and no way to navigate. Once when I stood
on a plateau of earth just at the moment before the dangerous,
jutting peaks converged upon the lilting sway of grasslands, I almost
found a way back. There, the sky, quite possibly all the elements,
caused the rock and soil and vegetation to congregate. Their prayer
was not new and so faint I could hardly discern. Simple remembrances,
like a tiny, syncopated chorus calling everyone home: across
a thousand eastward miles, and what little wind was left at my back.
But I could not move. And then the music was gone.

All that was left were the spring time faces of mountains, gazing down,
their last patches of snow, luminous. I dreamed of becoming snow melt,
gliding down the slope and in to the valley. With the promise,
an assurance, that there is always a way to become bird, tree, water again.

The Campus on the Hill

By W. D. Snodgrass

Up the reputable walks of old established trees
They stalk, children of the *nouveaux riches;* chimes
Of the tall Clock Tower drench their heads in blessing:
"I don't wanna play at your house;
I don't like you any more."
My house stands opposite, on the other hill,
Among meadows, with the orchard fences down and falling;
Deer come almost to the door.
You cannot see it, even in this clearest morning.
White birds hang in the air between
Over the garbage landfill and those homes thereto adjacent,
Hovering slowly, turning, settling down
Like the flakes sifting imperceptibly onto the little town
In a waterball of glass.
And yet, this morning, beyond this quiet scene,
The floating birds, the backyards of the poor,
Beyond the shopping plaza, the dead canal, the hillside lying tilted in the air,

Tomorrow has broken out today:
Riot in Algeria, in Cyprus, in Alabama;
Aged in wrong, the empires are declining,
And China gathers, soundlessly, like evidence.
What shall I say to the young on such a morning?—
Mind is the one salvation?—also grammar?—
No; my little ones lean not toward revolt. They
Are the Whites, the vaguely furiously driven, who resist
Their souls with such passivity
As would make Quakers swear. All day, dear Lord, all day
They wear their godhead lightly.
They look out from their hill and say,
To themselves, "We have nowhere to go but down;
The great destination is to stay."
Surely the nations will be reasonable;
They look at the world—don't they?—the world's way?
The clock just now has nothing more to say.

A Locked House

By W. D. Snodgrass

As we drove back, crossing the hill,
The house still
Hidden in the trees, I always thought—
A fool's fear—that it might have caught
Fire, someone could have broken in.
As if things must have been
Too good here. Still, we always found
It locked tight, safe and sound.

I mentioned that, once, as a joke;
No doubt we spoke
Of the absurdity
To fear some dour god's jealousy
Of our good fortune. From the farm
Next door, our neighbors saw no harm
Came to the things we cared for here.
What did we have to fear?

Maybe I should have thought: all
Such things rot, fall—
Barns, houses, furniture.
We two are stronger than we were
Apart; we've grown
Together. Everything we own
Can burn; we know what counts—some such
Idea. We said as much.

We'd watched friends driven to betray;
Felt that love drained away
Some self they need.
We'd said love, like a growth, can feed
On hate we turn in and disguise;
We warned ourselves. That you might despise
Me—hate all we both loved best—
None of us ever guessed.

The house still stands, locked, as it stood
Untouched a good
Two years after you went.
Some things passed in the settlement;
Some things slipped away. Enough's left
That I come back sometimes. The theft
And vandalism were our own.

Maybe we should have known.

Piute Creek

By Gary Snyder

One granite ridge
A tree, would be enough
Or even a rock, a small creek,
A bark shred in a pool.
Hill beyond hill, folded and twisted
Tough trees crammed
In thin stone fractures
A huge moon on it all, is too much.
The mind wanders. A million
Summers, night air still and the rocks
Warm. Sky over endless mountains.
All the junk that goes with being human
Drops away, hard rock wavers
Even the heavy present seems to fail
This bubble of a heart.
Words and books
Like a small creek off a high ledge
Gone in the dry air.

A clear, attentive mind
Has no meaning but that
Which sees is truly seen.
No one loves rock, yet we are here.
Night chills. A flick
In the moonlight
Slips into Juniper shadow:
Back there unseen
Cold proud eyes
Of Cougar or Coyote
Watch me rise and go.

Ikebana

By Cathy Song

To prepare the body,
aim for the translucent perfection
you find in the sliced shavings
of a pickled turnip.
In order for this to happen,

you must avoid the sun,
protect the face
under a paper parasol
until it is bruised white
like the skin of lilies.
Use white soap
from a blue porcelain
dish for this.

Restrict yourself.
Eat the whites of things:
tender bamboo shoots,
the veins of the young iris,
the clouded eye of a fish.

Then wrap the body,
as if it were a perfumed gift,
in pieces of silk
held together with invisible threads
like a kite, weighing no more
than a handful of crushed chrysanthemums.
Light enough to float in the wind.
You want the effect
of koi moving through water.

When the light leaves
the room, twist lilacs
into the lacquered hair
piled high like a complicated shrine.
There should be tiny bells
inserted somewhere
in the web of hair
to imitate crickets
singing in a hidden grove.

Reveal the nape of the neck,
your beauty spot.
Hold the arrangement.
If your spine slacks
and you feel faint,
remember the hand-picked flower
set in the front alcove,
which, just this morning,
you so skillfully wired into place.
How poised it is!
Petal and leaf

curving like a fan,
the stem snipped and wedged
into the metal base—
to appear like a spontaneous accident.

Self-Inquiry before the Job Interview

By Gary Soto

Did you sneeze?
Yes, I rid myself of the imposter inside me.

Did you iron your shirt?
Yes, I used the steam of mother's hate.

Did you wash your hands?
Yes, I learned my hygiene from a raccoon.

I prayed on my knees, and my knees answered with pain.
I gargled. I polished my shoes until I saw who I was.
I inflated my résumé by employing my middle name.

I walked to my interview, early,
The sun like a ring on an electric stove.
I patted my hair when I entered the wind of a revolving door.
The guard said, For a guy like you, it's the 19th floor.

The economy was up. Flags whipped in every city plaza
In America. This I saw for myself as I rode the elevator,
Empty because everyone had a job but me.

Did you clean your ears?
Yes, I heard my fate in the drinking fountain's idiotic drivel.

Did you slice a banana into your daily mush?
I added a pinch of salt, two raisins to sweeten my breath.

Did you remember your pen?
I remembered my fingers when the elevator opened.

I shook hands that dripped like a dirty sea.
I found a chair and desk. My name tag said my name.
Through the glass ceiling, I saw the heavy rumps of CEOs.
Outside my window, the sun was a burning stove,
All of us pushing papers
To keep it going.

At the Carnival

By Anne Spencer

Gay little Girl-of-the-Diving-Tank,
I desire a name for you,
Nice, as a right glove fits;
For you—who amid the malodorous
Mechanics of this unlovely thing,
Are darling of spirit and form.
I know you—a glance, and what you are
Sits-by-the-fire in my heart.
My Limousine-Lady knows you, or
Why does the slant-envy of her eye mark
Your straight air and radiant inclusive smile?
Guilt pins a fig-leaf; Innocence is its own adorning.
The bull-necked man knows you—this first time
His itching flesh sees form divine and vibrant health
And thinks not of his avocation.
I came incuriously—
Set on no diversion save that my mind
Might safely nurse its brood of misdeeds
In the presence of a blind crowd.
The color of life was gray.
Everywhere the setting seemed right
For my mood. Here the sausage and garlic booth
Sent unholy incense skyward;
There a quivering female-thing
Gestured assignations, and lied
To call it dancing;
There, too, were games of chance
With chances for none;
But oh! Girl-of-the-Tank, at last!
Gleaming Girl, how intimately pure and free
The gaze you send the crowd,
As though you know the dearth of beauty
In its sordid life.
We need you—my Limousine-Lady,
The bull-necked man and I.
Seeing you here brave and water-clean,
Leaven for the heavy ones of earth,
I am swift to feel that what makes
The plodder glad is good; and
Whatever is good is God.
The wonder is that you are here;
I have seen the queer in queer places,
But never before a heaven-fed

Naiad of the Carnival-Tank!
Little Diver, Destiny for you,
Like as for me, is shod in silence;
Years may seep into your soul
The bacilli of the usual and the expedient;
I implore Neptune to claim his child to-day!

[‘Joy of my life, full oft for loving you’]

By Edmund Spenser

Joy of my life, full oft for loving you
  I bless my lot, that was so lucky placed:
  But then the more your own mishap I rue,
  That are so much by so mean love embased.
For had the equal heavens so much you graced
  In this as in the rest, ye might invent
  Some heavenly wit, whose verse could have enchased
  Your glorious name in golden monument.
But since ye deign’d so goodly to relent
  To me your thrall, in whom is little worth,
  That little that I am shall all be spent
  In setting your immortal praises forth;
Whose lofty argument uplifting me
  Shall lift you up unto an high degree.

Pome

By Elizabeth Spires

From flowering gnarled trees
they come, weighing down
the branches, dropping
with a soft sound onto
the loamy ground. Falling
and fallen. That’s a pome.

Common as an apple. Or
more rare. A quince or pear.
A knife paring away soft skin
exposes tart sweet flesh.
And deeper in, five seeds in a core
are there to make more pomes.

Look how it fits in my hand.
What to do? What to do?

I could give it to you.
Or leave it on the table
with a note both true and untrue:
Ceci n'est pas un poème.

I could paint it as a still life,
a small window of light
in the top right corner
(only a dab of the whitest white),
a place to peer in and watch it
change and darken as pomes will do.

O I remember days....
Climbing the branches of a tree
ripe and heavy with pomes.
Taking whatever I wanted.
There were always enough then.
Always enough.

What Women Are Made Of

By Bianca Lynne Spriggs

> *There are many kinds of open.*
> *— Audre Lorde*

We are all ventricle, spine, lung, larynx, and gut.
Clavicle and nape, what lies forked in an open palm;

we are follicle and temple. We are ankle, arch,
sole. Pore and rib, pelvis and root

and tongue. We are wishbone and gland and molar
and lobe. We are hippocampus and exposed nerve

and cornea. Areola, pigment, melanin, and nails.
Varicose. Cellulite. Divining rod. Sinew and tissue,

saliva and silt. We are blood and salt, clay and aquifer.
We are breath and flame and stratosphere. Palimpsest

and bibelot and cloisonné fine lines. Marigold, hydrangea,
and dimple. Nightlight, satellite, and stubble. We are

pinnacle, plummet, dark circles, and dark matter.
A constellation of freckles and specters and miracles

and lashes. Both bent and erect, we are all give
and give back. We are volta and girder. Make an incision

in our nectary and Painted Ladies sail forth, riding the back
of a warm wind, plumed with love and things like love.

Crack us down to the marrow, and you may find us full
of cicada husks and sand dollars and salted maple taffy

weary of welding together our daydreams. All sweet tea,
razor blades, carbon, and patchwork quilts of *Good God!*

and *Lord have mercy!* Our hands remember how to turn
the earth before we do. Our intestinal fortitude? Cumulonimbus

streaked with saffron light. Our foundation? Not in our limbs
or hips; this comes first as an amen, a hallelujah, a suckling,

swaddled psalm sung at the cosmos's breast. You want to
know what women are made of? Open wide and find out.

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

Hush

By David St. John

for my son

The way a tired Chippewa woman
Who's lost a child gathers up black feathers,
Black quills & leaves
That she wraps & swaddles in a little bale, a shag
Cocoon she carries with her & speaks to always
As if it were the child,
Until she knows the soul has grown fat & clever,
That the child can find its own way at last;
Well, I go everywhere
Picking the dust out of the dust, scraping the breezes
Up off the floor, & gather them into a doll
Of you, to touch at the nape of the neck, to slip
Under my shirt like a rag—the way
Another man's wallet rides above his heart. As you
Cry out, as if calling to a father you conjure

In the paling light, the voice rises, instead, in me.
Nothing stops it, the crying. Not the clove of moon,
Not the woman raking my back with her words. Our letters
Close. Sometimes, you ask
About the world; sometimes, I answer back. Nights
Return you to me for a while, as sleep returns sleep
To a landscape ravaged
& familiar. The dark watermark of your absence, a hush.

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

Traveling through the Dark

By William E. Stafford

Traveling through the dark I found a deer
dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.
It is usually best to roll them into the canyon:
that road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead.

By glow of the tail-light I stumbled back of the car
and stood by the heap, a doe, a recent killing;
she had stiffened already, almost cold.
I dragged her off; she was large in the belly.

My fingers touching her side brought me the reason—
her side was warm; her fawn lay there waiting,
alive, still, never to be born.
Beside that mountain road I hesitated.

The car aimed ahead its lowered parking lights;
under the hood purred the steady engine.
I stood in the glare of the warm exhaust turning red;
around our group I could hear the wilderness listen.

I thought hard for us all—my only swerving—,
then pushed her over the edge into the river.

The Well Rising

By William E. Stafford

The well rising without sound,
the spring on a hillside,
the plowshare brimming through deep ground

everywhere in the field—

The sharp swallows in their swerve
flaring and hesitating
hunting for the final curve
coming closer and closer—

The swallow heart from wingbeat to wingbeat
counseling decision, decision:
thunderous examples. I place my feet
with care in such a world.

Actaeon

By A. E. Stallings

The hounds, you know them all by name.
You fostered them from purblind whelps
At their dam's teats, and you have come
To know the music of their yelps:

High-strung Anthee, the brindled bitch,
The blue-tick coated Philomel,
And freckled Chloe, who would fetch
A pretty price if you would sell—

All fleet of foot, and swift to scent,
Inexorable once on the track,
Like angry words you might have meant,
But do not mean, and can't take back.

There was a time when you would brag
How they would bay and rend apart
The hopeless belling from a stag.
You falter now for the foundered hart.

Desires you nursed of a winter night—
Did you know then why you bred them—
Whose needling milk-teeth used to bite
The master's hand that leashed and fed them?

The Barnacle

By A. E. Stallings

The barnacle is rather odd —

It’s not related to the clam
Or limpet. It’s an arthropod,
Though one that doesn’t give a damn.

Cousin to the crab and shrimp,
When larval, it can twitch and swim,
And make decisions — tiny imp
That flits according to its whim.

Once grown, with nothing more to prove
It hunkers down, and will remain
Stuck fast. And once it does not move,
Has no more purpose for a brain.

Its one boast is, it will not budge,
Cemented where it chanced to sink,
Sclerotic, stubborn as a grudge.
Settled, it does not need to think.

Fairy-tale Logic

By A. E. Stallings

Fairy tales are full of impossible tasks:
Gather the chin hairs of a man-eating goat,
Or cross a sulphuric lake in a leaky boat,
Select the prince from a row of identical masks,
Tiptoe up to a dragon where it basks
And snatch its bone; count dust specks, mote by mote,
Or learn the phone directory by rote.
Always it’s impossible what someone asks—

You have to fight magic with magic. You have to believe
That you have something impossible up your sleeve,
The language of snakes, perhaps, an invisible cloak,
An army of ants at your beck, or a lethal joke,
The will to do whatever must be done:
Marry a monster. Hand over your firstborn son.

Fishing

By A. E. Stallings

The two of them stood in the middle water,
The current slipping away, quick and cold,
The sun slow at his zenith, sweating gold,

Once, in some sullen summer of father and daughter.
Maybe he regretted he had brought her—
She'd rather have been elsewhere, her look told—
Perhaps a year ago, but now too old.
Still, she remembered lessons he had taught her:
To cast towards shadows, where the sunlight fails
And fishes shelter in the undergrowth.
And when the unseen strikes, how all else pales
Beside the bright-dark struggle, the rainbow wroth,
Life and death weighed in the shining scales,
The invisible line pulled taut that links them both.

The Pull Toy

By A. E. Stallings

You squeezed its leash in your fist,
It followed where you led:
Tick, tock, tick, tock,
Nodding its wooden head.

Wagging a tail on a spring,
Its wheels gearing lackety-clack,
Dogging your heels the length of the house,
Though you seldom glanced back.

It didn’t mind being dragged
When it toppled on its side
Scraping its coat of primary colors:
Love has no pride.

But now that you run and climb
And leap, it has no hope
Of keeping up, so it sits, hunched
At the end of its short rope

And dreams of a rummage sale
Where it’s snapped up for a song,
And of somebody—somebody just like you—
Stringing it along.

Sestina: Like

By A. E. Stallings

With a nod to Jonah Winter

Now we're all "friends," there is no love but Like,
A semi-demi goddess, something like
A reality-TV star look-alike,
Named Simile or Me Two. So we like
In order to be liked. It isn't like
There's Love or Hate now. Even plain "dislike"

Is frowned on: there's no button for it. Like
Is something you can quantify: each "like"
You gather's almost something money-like,
Token of virtual support. "Please like
This page to stamp out hunger." And you'd *like*
To end hunger and climate change alike,

But it's unlikely Like does diddly. Like
Just twiddles its unopposing thumbs-ups, like-
Wise props up scarecrow silences. "*I'm like,*
So OVER him," I overhear. "But, like,
He doesn't get it. Like, you know? He's like
It's all OK. Like I don't even LIKE

Him anymore. Whatever. I'm all like ... "
Take "like" out of our chat, we'd all alike
Flounder, agape, gesticulating like
A foreign film sans subtitles, fall like
Dumb phones to mooted desuetude. Unlike
With other crutches, um, when we use "like,"

We're not just buying time on credit: Like
Displaces other words; crowds, cuckoo-like,
Endangered hatchlings from the nest. (Click "like"
If you're against extinction!) Like is like
Invasive zebra mussels, or it's like
Those nutria-things, or kudzu, or belike

Redundant fast food franchises, each like
(More like) the next. Those poets who dislike
Inversions, archaisms, who just like
Plain English as she's spoke — why isn't "like"
Their (literally) every other word? I'd like
Us just to admit that's what real speech is like.

But as you like, my friend. Yes, we're alike,
How we pronounce, say, lichen, and dislike
Cancer and war. So like this page. Click *Like*.

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

The Light the Dead See

By Frank Stanford

There are many people who come back
After the doctor has smoothed the sheet
Around their body
And left the room to make his call.

They die but they live.

They are called the dead who lived through their deaths,
And among my people
They are considered wise and honest.

They float out of their bodies
And light on the ceiling like a moth,
Watching the efforts of everyone around them.

The voices and the images of the living
Fade away.

A roar sucks them under
The wheels of a darkness without pain.
Off in the distance
There is someone
Like a signalman swinging a lantern.

The light grows, a white flower.
It becomes very intense, like music.

They see the faces of those they loved,
The truly dead who speak kindly.

They see their father sitting in a field.
The harvest is over and his cane chair is mended.
There is a towel around his neck,
The odor of bay rum.
Then they see their mother
Standing behind him with a pair of shears.
The wind is blowing.
She is cutting his hair.

The dead have told these stories
To the living.

Fable for Blackboard

By George Starbuck

Here is the grackle, people.
Here is the fox, folks.
The grackle sits in the bracken. The fox
  hopes.

Here are the fronds, friends,
that cover the fox.
The fronds get in a frenzy. The grackle
  looks.

Here are the ticks, tykes,
that live in the leaves, loves.
The fox is confounded,
and God is above.

Sign

By George Starbuck

Virgin, sappy, gorgeous, the right-now
Flutters its huge prosthetics at us, flung
To the spotlights, frozen in motion, center-ice.

And the first rows, shaken with an afterslice
That's bowled them into their seats like a big wet ciao.
O daffy panoply O rare device

O flashing leg-iron at a whopping price
Whipping us into ecstasies and how,
The whole galumphing Garden swung and swung,

A rescue helicopter's bottom rung
Glinting and spinning off, a scud of fluff,
A slash of petals up against the bough,

A juggler's avalanche of silken stuff
Gushing in white-hot verticals among
Camels and axels and pyramids, oh wow,

Bewilderment is parachute enough.
We jolt. A sidewise stutterstep in chorus.
The other billboards flicker by before us.

Gone! with a budded petulance that stung.
So talented! So targeted! So young!
Such concentration on the bottom line!

We vanish down the IRT. A shine.
A glimmer. Something. Nothing. To think twice
Was to have lost the trick of paradise.

Translations from the English

By George Starbuck

for Arthur Freeman

Pigfoot (with Aces Under) Passes

The heat's on the hooker.
Drop's on the lam.
Cops got Booker.
Who give a damn?

The Kid's been had
But not me yet.
Dad's in his pad.
No sweat.

Margaret Are You Drug

Cool it Mag.
Sure it's a drag
With all that green flaked out.
Next thing you know they'll be changing the color of bread.

But look, Chick,
Why panic?
Sevennyeighty years, we'll *all* be dead.

Roll with it, Kid.
I did.
Give it the old benefit of the doubt.

I mean leaves
Schmeaves.
You sure you aint just feeling sorry for yourself?

Lamb

Lamb, what makes you tick?
You got a wind-up, a Battery-Powered,
A flywheel, a plug-in, or what?
You made out of real Reelfur?
You fall out the window you bust?
You shrink? Turn into a No-No?
Zip open and have pups?

I bet you better than that.
I bet you put out by some other outfit.
I bet you don't do nothin.
I bet you somethin to eat.

Daddy Gander's New Found Runes

Rain, rain, grow the hay.
Grow the weeds another day.
If I die before I wake,
Skip it.

Little Boy Blue come blow.
  Can't Man; learning a new instrument.
What's with the old one? Where'd you get the new one?
  Found it in a haystack Man.

Old Mother Hubbard,
Decently covered,
Went to her final reward.

She had to laugh.
Manger was half
Empty and half kennel.

Ol' Shep. At it
Again. Livin' on
Principal.

I fired a missile up.

It came down maybe.
Maybe it stayed up.
Things aint much like they used to be.

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

from Stanzas in Meditation: Stanza 83

By Gertrude Stein

Why am I if I am uncertain reasons may inclose.
Remain remain propose repose chose.
I call carelessly that the door is open
Which if they may refuse to open
No one can rush to close.
Let them be mine therefor.
Everybody knows that I chose.
Therefor if therefore before I close.
I will therefore offer therefore I offer this.
Which if I refuse to miss may be miss is mine.
I will be well welcome when I come.
Because I am coming.
Certainly I come having come.
These stanzas are done.

Susie Asado

By Gertrude Stein

Sweet sweet sweet sweet sweet tea.
Susie Asado.
Sweet sweet sweet sweet sweet tea.
Susie Asado.
Susie Asado which is a told tray sure.
A lean on the shoe this means slips slips hers.
When the ancient light grey is clean it is yellow, it is a silver seller.
This is a please this is a please there are the saids to jelly. These are the wets these say the sets to leave a crown to Incy.
Incy is short for incubus.
A pot. A pot is a beginning of a rare bit of trees. Trees tremble, the old vats are in bobbles, bobbles which shade and shove and render clean, render clean must.
Drink pups.
Drink pups drink pups lease a sash hold, see it shine and a bobolink has pins. It shows a nail.
What is a nail. A nail is unison.
Sweet sweet sweet sweet sweet tea.

Waving Goodbye

By Gerald Stern

I wanted to know what it was like before we
had voices and before we had bare fingers and before we
had minds to move us through our actions
and tears to help us over our feelings,
so I drove my daughter through the snow to meet her friend
and filled her car with suitcases and hugged her
as an animal would, pressing my forehead against her,
walking in circles, moaning, touching her cheek,
and turned my head after them as an animal would,
watching helplessly as they drove over the ruts,
her smiling face and her small hand just visible
over the giant pillows and coat hangers
as they made their turn into the empty highway.

Anecdote of the Jar

By Wallace Stevens

I placed a jar in Tennessee,
And round it was, upon a hill.
It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around, no longer wild.
The jar was round upon the ground
And tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion everywhere.
The jar was gray and bare.
It did not give of bird or bush,
Like nothing else in Tennessee.

The Emperor of Ice-Cream

By Wallace Stevens

Call the roller of big cigars,
The muscular one, and bid him whip
In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.
Let the wenches dawdle in such dress
As they are used to wear, and let the boys
Bring flowers in last month's newspapers.

Let be be finale of seem.
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

Take from the dresser of deal,
Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet
On which she embroidered fantails once
And spread it so as to cover her face.
If her horny feet protrude, they come
To show how cold she is, and dumb.
Let the lamp affix its beam.
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

The Snow Man

By Wallace Stevens

One must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

And have been cold a long time
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
The spruces rough in the distant glitter

Of the January sun; and not to think
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,
In the sound of a few leaves,

Which is the sound of the land
Full of the same wind
That is blowing in the same bare place

For the listener, who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird

By Wallace Stevens

I
Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.

II

I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.

III
The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.
It was a small part of the pantomime.

IV
A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one.

V
I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.

VI
Icicles filled the long window
With barbaric glass.
The shadow of the blackbird
Crossed it, to and fro.
The mood
Traced in the shadow
An indecipherable cause.

VII
O thin men of Haddam,
Why do you imagine golden birds?
Do you not see how the blackbird
Walks around the feet
Of the women about you?

VIII
I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved
In what I know.

IX
When the blackbird flew out of sight,

It marked the edge
Of one of many circles.

X
At the sight of blackbirds
Flying in a green light,
Even the bawds of euphony
Would cry out sharply.

XI
He rode over Connecticut
In a glass coach.
Once, a fear pierced him,
In that he mistook
The shadow of his equipage
For blackbirds.

XII
The river is moving.
The blackbird must be flying.

XIII
It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
The blackbird sat
In the cedar-limbs.

The Enigma

By Anne Stevenson

Falling to sleep last night in a deep crevasse
between one rough dream and another, I seemed,
still awake, to be stranded on a stony path,
and there the familiar enigma presented itself
in the shape of a little trembling lamb.
It was lying like a pearl in the trough between
one Welsh slab and another, and it was crying.

I looked around, as anyone would, for its mother.
Nothing was there. What did I know about lambs?
Should I pick it up? Carry it . . . where?
What would I do if it were dying? The hand
of my conscience fought with the claw of my fear.
It wasn't so easy to imitate the Good Shepherd

in that faded, framed Sunday School picture
filtering now through the dream's daguerreotype.

With the wind fallen and the moon swollen to the full,
small, white doubles of the creature at my feet
flared like candles in the creases of the night
until it looked to be alive with newborn lambs.
Where could they all have come from?
A second look, and the bleating lambs were birds—
kittiwakes nesting, clustered on a cliff face,
fixing on me their dark accusing eyes.

There was a kind of imperative not to touch them,
yet to be *of* them, whatever they were—
now lambs, now birds, now floating points of light—
fireflies signaling how many lost New England summers?
One form, now another; one configuration, now another.
Like fossils locked deep in the folds of my brain,
outliving a time by telling its story. Like stars.

The Spirit Is Too Blunt an Instrument

By Anne Stevenson

The spirit is too blunt an instrument
to have made this baby.
Nothing so unskilful as human passions
could have managed the intricate
exacting particulars: the tiny
blind bones with their manipulating tendons,
the knee and the knucklebones, the resilient
fine meshings of ganglia and vertebrae,
the chain of the difficult spine.

Observe the distinct eyelashes and sharp crescent
fingernails, the shell-like complexity
of the ear, with its firm involutions
concentric in miniature to minute
ossicles. Imagine the
infinitesimal capillaries, the flawless connections
of the lungs, the invisible neural filaments
through which the completed body
already answers to the brain.

Then name any passion or sentiment
possessed of the simplest accuracy.

No, no desire or affection could have done
with practice what habit
has done perfectly, indifferently,
through the body's ignorant precision.
It is left to the vagaries of the mind to invent
love and despair and anxiety
and their pain.

In the Past

By Trumbull Stickney

There lies a somnolent lake
Under a noiseless sky,
Where never the mornings break
Nor the evenings die.

Mad flakes of colour
Whirl on its even face
Iridescent and streaked with pallour;
And, warding the silent place,

The rocks rise sheer and gray
From the sedgeless brink to the sky
Dull-lit with the light of pale half-day
Thro’ a void space and dry.

And the hours lag dead in the air
With a sense of coming eternity
To the heart of the lonely boatman there:
That boatman am I,

I, in my lonely boat,
A waif on the somnolent lake,
Watching the colours creep and float
With the sinuous track of a snake.

Now I lean o’er the side
And lazy shades in the water see,
Lapped in the sweep of a sluggish tide
Crawled in from the living sea;

And next I fix mine eyes,
So long that the heart declines,
On the changeless face of the open skies
Where no star shines;

And now to the rocks I turn,
To the rocks, around
That lie like walls of a circling sun
Wherein lie bound

The waters that feel my powerless strength
And meet my homeless oar
Labouring over their ashen length
Never to find a shore.

But the gleam still skims
At times on the somnolent lake,
And a light there is that swims
With the whirl of a snake;

And tho' dead be the hours i' the air,
And dayless the sky,
The heart is alive of the boatman there:
That boatman am I.

every single day

By John Straley

(After Raymond Carver's *Hummingbird*)

Suppose I said the word "springtime"
and I wrote the words "king salmon"
on a piece of paper
and mailed it to you.
When you opened it
would you remember that afternoon we spent
together in the yellow boat
when the early whales were feeding
and we caught our first fish of the year?

Or would you remember that time off Cape Flattery
when you were a little girl:
your father smoking, telling stories as he ran the boat,
then the tug and zing of that very first fish
spooling off into the gray-green world;
you laughing and brushing back your hair
before setting the hook?

I know I am hard to understand sometimes

particularly when you are standing
at the post office with only a piece of paper
saying “king salmon” on it
but just think of it as a promissary note
and that electric tug, that thrill
pulling your mind into deep water
is how I feel about you every,
single day.

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

Eating Poetry

By Mark Strand

Ink runs from the corners of my mouth.
There is no happiness like mine.
I have been eating poetry.

The librarian does not believe what she sees.
Her eyes are sad
and she walks with her hands in her dress.

The poems are gone.
The light is dim.
The dogs are on the basement stairs and coming up.

Their eyeballs roll,
their blond legs burn like brush.
The poor librarian begins to stamp her feet and weep.

She does not understand.
When I get on my knees and lick her hand,
she screams.

I am a new man.
I snarl at her and bark.
I romp with joy in the bookish dark.

After the Dinner Party

By Adrienne Su

Dropping napkins, corks, and non-compostables
into the trash, I see that friends have mistaken

my everyday chopsticks for disposables,

helpfully discarding them alongside inedibles:
pork bones, shrimp shells, bitter melon.
Among napkins and corks, they do look compostable:

off-white, wooden, warped from continual
washing — no lacquer, no ornament. But anyone
who thinks these chopsticks are disposable

doesn't live with chopsticks in the comfortable
way of a favorite robe, oversized, a bit broken.
Thin paper napkins, plastic forks, and non-compostable

takeout boxes constitute the chopstick's natural
habitat to many I hold dear. With family or alone,
I'll maintain that chopsticks aren't disposable,

but if I can make peace with the loss of utensils
when breaking *bao* with guests, I'll be one of them,
not digging in the napkins and corks. Compostable
chopsticks are the answer: everyday *and* disposable.

Filter

By Suma Subramaniam

I come from a country so far away
that you may have visited only in your dreams.
My face does not bear the pale color of my palms.
I don't speak your language at home.
I don't even sound like you.
If you come to my house, you'll see my family:
my mother in a sari,
my father wearing a sacred thread around his body,
and me, eating a plate of spicy biryani
instead of a burger or pizza
at the dinner table.
If you, for a moment, shed your filter,
you will also see my pockets filled with Tootsie Rolls,
waiting to be shared with you.

Maui's Mission

By Robert Sullivan

In the warmth of night I put feet to my plan: waited
for my brothers to sleep. They'd spent the day
sharpening their hooks, repairing the great net,
filling gourds with fresh water. They'd bundled
taro wrapped in leaves sitting below the cross seats.
The bundles and the net would cover me,
especially if I said the chant to slow my movement
and my breathing. The moon became brighter
like a big fish eye as the chant hooked me.

I was holding my grandmother's hook so tightly
a little cut welled red between my closed knuckles.
"Goodmorning, brothers," I called and they cussed
and moaned until the next chant took us a further hundred
miles and then another until my chanting made them gasp
as we settled on a patch of ocean black with fish.
They forgave me, not that it matters. I took the bloody hook
and said my business to the ocean. It worked.
The fish rose and our descent was secured.

Analysis of Baseball

By May Swenson

It's about
the ball,
the bat,
and the mitt.
Ball hits
bat, or it
hits mitt.
Bat doesn't
hit ball,
bat meets it.
Ball bounces
off bat, flies
air, or thuds
ground (dud)
or it
fits mitt.

Bat waits
for ball
Ball fits
mitt, but
not all
the time.
Sometimes
ball gets hit
(pow) when bat
meets it,
and sails
to a place
where mitt
has to quit
in disgrace.
That's about
the bases
loaded,
about 40,000
fans exploded.

to mate.
Ball hates
to take bat's
bait. Ball
flirts, bat's
late, don't
keep the date.
Ball goes in
(thwack) to mitt,
and goes out
(thwack) back
to mitt.

It's about
the ball,
the bat,
the mitt,
the bases
and the fans.
It's done
on a diamond,
and for fun.
It's about
home, and it's
about run.

Question

By May Swenson

Body my house
my horse my hound
what will I do
when you are fallen

Where will I sleep
How will I ride
What will I hunt

Where can I go
without my mount
all eager and quick
How will I know
in thicket ahead
is danger or treasure
when Body my good
bright dog is dead

How will it be
to lie in the sky
without roof or door
and wind for an eye

With cloud for shift
how will I hide?

April Midnight

By Arthur Symons

Side by side through the streets at midnight,
Roaming together,
Through the tumultuous night of London,
In the miraculous April weather.

Roaming together under the gaslight,
Day's work over,
How the Spring calls to us, here in the city,
Calls to the heart from the heart of a lover!

Cool to the wind blows, fresh in our faces,
Cleansing, entrancing,
After the heat and the fumes and the footlights,
Where you dance and I watch your dancing.

Good it is to be here together,
Good to be roaming,
Even in London, even at midnight,
Lover-like in a lover's gloaming.

You the dancer and I the dreamer,
Children together,
Wandering lost in the night of London,
In the miraculous April weather.

Queens

By J. M. Synge

Seven dog-days we let pass
Naming Queens in Glenmacnass,
All the rare and royal names
Wormy sheepskin yet retains,
Etain, Helen, Maeve, and Fand,
Golden Deirdre's tender hand,
Bert, the big-foot, sung by Villon,
Cassandra, Ronsard found in Lyon.
Queens of Sheba, Meath and Connaught,
Coifed with crown, or gaudy bonnet,
Queens whose finger once did stir men,
Queens were eaten of fleas and vermin,
Queens men drew like Monna Lisa,
Or slew with drugs in Rome and Pisa,

We named Lucrezia Crivelli,
And Titian's lady with amber belly,
Queens acquainted in learned sin,
Jane of Jewry's slender shin:
Queens who cut the bogs of Glanna,
Judith of Scripture, and Gloriana,
Queens who wasted the East by proxy,
Or drove the ass-cart, a tinker's doxy,
Yet these are rotten — I ask their pardon —
And we've the sun on rock and garden,
These are rotten, so you're the Queen
Of all the living, or have been.

Happy Ideas

By Mary Szybist

I had the happy idea to fasten a bicycle wheel

to a kitchen stool and watch it turn.

—DUCHAMP

I had the happy idea to suspend some blue globes in the air

and watch them pop.

I had the happy idea to put my little copper horse on the shelf so we could stare at each other all evening.

I had the happy idea to create a void in myself.

Then to call it natural.

Then to call it supernatural.

I had the happy idea to wrap a blue scarf around my head and spin.

I had the happy idea that somewhere a child was being born who was nothing like Helen or Jesus except in the sense of changing everything.

I had the happy idea that someday I would find both pleasure and punishment, that I would know them and feel them,

and that, until I did, it would be almost as good to pretend.

I had the happy idea to call myself happy.

I had the happy idea that the dog digging a hole in the yard in the twilight had his nose deep in
mold-life.

I had the happy idea that what I do not understand is more real than what I do,

and then the happier idea to buckle myself

into two blue velvet shoes.

I had the happy idea to polish the reflecting glass and say

hello to my own blue soul. *Hello, blue soul. Hello.*

It was my happiest idea.

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

Caminito

By Carmen Tafolla

The pathways of my thoughts are cobbled with
mesquite blocks
and narrow-winding,
long and aged like the streets of
san fernando de bexar
y la villa real de san antonio

pensive
y callados
cada uno con su chiste
idiosyncracy
crazy turns
that are because they are,
centuries magic

cada uno hecho así,
y with a careful
capricho touch,
así.

They curl slowly into ripples,
earthy and cool like the Río Medina
under the trees
silently singing, standing still,
and flowing, becoming,
became
and always as always
still fertile, laughing, loving,
alivianada
Río Medina
under the trees,
celebrating life.

They end up in the monte, chaparral,
llenos de burrs, spurs
pero libres
Running through the hills freefoot
con aire azul
blue breaths peacefully taken
between each lope
remembering venado
remembering conejos
remembering
where
we came from

Gitanjali 35

By Rabindranath Tagore

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;
Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

All Hallows' Eve

By Dorothea Tanning

Be perfect, make it otherwise.
Yesterday is torn in shreds.

Lightning's thousand sulfur eyes
Rip apart the breathing beds.
Hear bones crack and pulverize.
Doom creeps in on rubber treads.
Countless overwrought housewives,
Minds unraveling like threads,
Try lipstick shades to tranquilize
Fears of age and general dreads.
Sit tight, be perfect, swat the spies,
Don't take faucets for fountainheads.
Drink tasty antidotes. Otherwise
You and the werewolf: newlyweds.

The Blue Booby

By James Tate

The blue booby lives
on the bare rocks
of Galápagos
and fears nothing.
It is a simple life:
they live on fish,
and there are few predators.
Also, the males do not
make fools of themselves
chasing after the young
ladies. Rather,
they gather the blue
objects of the world
and construct from them

a nest—an occasional
Gaulois package,
a string of beads,
a piece of cloth from
a sailor's suit. This
replaces the need for
dazzling plumage;
in fact, in the past
fifty million years
the male has grown
considerably duller,
nor can he sing well.
The female, though,

asks little of him—
the blue satisfies her
completely, has
a magical effect
on her. When she returns
from her day of
gossip and shopping,
she sees he has found her
a new shred of blue foil:
for this she rewards him
with her dark body,
the stars turn slowly
in the blue foil beside them
like the eyes of a mild savior.

The Star

By Ann Taylor & Jane Taylor

TWINKLE, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are !
Up above the world so high,
Like a diamond in the sky.

When the blazing sun is gone,
When he nothing shines upon,
Then you show your little light,
Twinkle, twinkle, all the night.

Then the trav'ller in the dark,
Thanks you for your tiny spark,
He could not see which way to go,
If you did not twinkle so.

In the dark blue sky you keep,
And often thro' my curtains peep,
For you never shut your eye,
Till the sun is in the sky.

'Tis your bright and tiny spark,
Lights the trav'ller in the dark :
Tho' I know not what you are,
Twinkle, twinkle, little star.

Note to Poetry Out Loud students: *In introducing "The Star," contestant may say "'The Star' by Anne Taylor and Jane Taylor" or "'The Star' by Anne Taylor, Jane Taylor." Adding the word "and" between the authors' names will not affect the accuracy score.*

Kitchen Fable

By Eleanor Ross Taylor

The fork lived with the knife
    and found it hard — for years
took nicks and scratches,
    not to mention cuts.

She who took tedium by the ears:
    nonforthcoming pickles,
defiant stretched-out lettuce,
    sauce-gooed particles.

He who came down whack.
His conversation, even, edged.

Lying beside him in the drawer
    she formed a crazy patina.
The seasons stacked —
    melons, succeeded by cured pork.

He dulled; he was a dull knife,
while she was, after all, a fork.

Barter

By Sara Teasdale

Life has loveliness to sell,
    All beautiful and splendid things,
Blue waves whitened on a cliff,
    Soaring fire that sways and sings,
And children's faces looking up
Holding wonder like a cup.

Life has loveliness to sell,
    Music like a curve of gold,
Scent of pine trees in the rain,
    Eyes that love you, arms that hold,
And for your spirit's still delight,
Holy thoughts that star the night.

Spend all you have for loveliness,
    Buy it and never count the cost;
For one white singing hour of peace
    Count many a year of strife well lost,

And for a breath of ecstasy
Give all you have been, or could be.

Let It Be Forgotten

By Sara Teasdale

Let it be forgotten, as a flower is forgotten,
Forgotten as a fire that once was singing gold,
Let it be forgotten for ever and ever,
Time is a kind friend, he will make us old.

If anyone asks, say it was forgotten
Long and long ago,
As a flower, as a fire, as a hushed footfall
In a long forgotten snow.

Over the Roofs

By Sara Teasdale

I

Oh chimes set high on the sunny tower
  Ring on, ring on unendingly,
Make all the hours a single hour,
For when the dusk begins to flower,
  The man I love will come to me! ...

But no, go slowly as you will,
  I should not bid you hasten so,
For while I wait for love to come,
Some other girl is standing dumb,
  Fearing her love will go.

II

Oh white steam over the roofs, blow high!
  Oh chimes in the tower ring clear and free!
Oh sun awake in the covered sky,
  For the man I love, loves me! ...

Oh drifting steam disperse and die,
  Oh tower stand shrouded toward the south,—
Fate heard afar my happy cry,

And laid her finger on my mouth.

III

The dusk was blue with blowing mist,
The lights were spangles in a veil,
And from the clamor far below
Floated faint music like a wail.

It voiced what I shall never speak,
My heart was breaking all night long,
But when the dawn was hard and gray,
My tears distilled into a song.

IV

I said, “I have shut my heart
As one shuts an open door,
That Love may starve therein
And trouble me no more.”

But over the roofs there came
The wet new wind of May,
And a tune blew up from the curb
Where the street-pianos play.

My room was white with the sun
And Love cried out to me,
“I am strong, I will break your heart
Unless you set me free.”

Since There Is No Escape

By Sara Teasdale

Since there is no escape, since at the end
My body will be utterly destroyed,
This hand I love as I have loved a friend,
This body I tended, wept with and enjoyed;
Since there is no escape even for me
Who love life with a love too sharp to bear:
The scent of orchards in the rain, the sea
And hours alone too still and sure for prayer—
Since darkness waits for me, then all the more

Let me go down as waves sweep to the shore
In pride, and let me sing with my last breath;
In these few hours of light I lift my head;
Life is my lover—I shall leave the dead
If there is any way to baffle death.

Break, Break, Break

By Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Break, break, break,
On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.

O, well for the fisherman's boy,
That he shouts with his sister at play!
O, well for the sailor lad,
That he sings in his boat on the bay!

And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill;
But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still!

Break, break, break
At the foot of thy crags, O Sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.

The Charge of the Light Brigade

By Alfred, Lord Tennyson

I
Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.
“Forward, the Light Brigade!
Charge for the guns!” he said.
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

II
“Forward, the Light Brigade!”

Was there a man dismayed?
Not though the soldier knew
  Someone had blundered.
  Theirs not to make reply,
  Theirs not to reason why,
  Theirs but to do and die.
  Into the valley of Death
  Rode the six hundred.

III

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
  Volleyed and thundered;
Stormed at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of hell
  Rode the six hundred.

IV

Flashed all their sabres bare,
Flashed as they turned in air
Sabring the gunners there,
Charging an army, while
  All the world wondered.
Plunged in the battery-smoke
Right through the line they broke;
Cossack and Russian
Reeled from the sabre stroke
  Shattered and sundered.
Then they rode back, but not
  Not the six hundred.

V

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon behind them
  Volleyed and thundered;
Stormed at with shot and shell,
While horse and hero fell.
They that had fought so well
Came through the jaws of Death,
Back from the mouth of hell,
All that was left of them,
  Left of six hundred.

VI
When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
  All the world wondered.
Honour the charge they made!
Honour the Light Brigade,
  Noble six hundred!

Crossing the Bar

By Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Sunset and evening star,
    And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
    When I put out to sea,

  But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
    Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
    Turns again home.

  Twilight and evening bell,
    And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
    When I embark;

  For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
    The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
    When I have crost the bar.

from The Princess: Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal

By Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Now sleeps the crimson petal, now the white;
Nor waves the cypress in the palace walk;
Nor winks the gold fin in the porphyry font.
The firefly wakens; waken thou with me.

  Now droops the milk-white peacock like a ghost,
And like a ghost she glimmers on to me.

  Now lies the Earth all Danaë to the stars,

And all thy heart lies open unto me.

Now slides the silent meteor on, and leaves
A shining furrow, as thy thoughts in me.

Now folds the lily all her sweetness up,
And slips into the bosom of the lake.
So fold thyself, my dearest, thou, and slip
Into my bosom and be lost in me.

Adlestrop

By Edward Thomas

Yes. I remember Adlestrop—
The name, because one afternoon
Of heat the express-train drew up there
Unwontedly. It was late June.

The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.
No one left and no one came
On the bare platform. What I saw
Was Adlestrop—only the name

And willows, willow-herb, and grass,
And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,
No whit less still and lonely fair
Than the high cloudlets in the sky.

And for that minute a blackbird sang
Close by, and round him, mistier,
Farther and farther, all the birds
Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

The Brook

By Edward Thomas

Seated once by a brook, watching a child
Chiefly that paddled, I was thus beguiled.
Mellow the blackbird sang and sharp the thrush
Not far off in the oak and hazel brush,
Unseen. There was a scent like honeycomb
From mugwort dull. And down upon the dome
Of the stone the cart-horse kicks against so oft
A butterfly alighted. From aloft

He took the heat of the sun, and from below.
On the hot stone he perched contented so,
As if never a cart would pass again
That way; as if I were the last of men
And he the first of insects to have earth
And sun together and to know their worth.
I was divided between him and the gleam,
The motion, and the voices, of the stream,
The waters running frizzled over gravel,
That never vanish and for ever travel.
A grey flycatcher silent on a fence
And I sat as if we had been there since
The horseman and the horse lying beneath
The fir-tree-covered barrow on the heath,
The horseman and the horse with silver shoes,
Galloped the downs last. All that I could lose
I lost. And then the child's voice raised the dead.
"No one's been here before" was what she said
And what I felt, yet never should have found
A word for, while I gathered sight and sound.

The Owl

By Edward Thomas

Downhill I came, hungry, and yet not starved;
Cold, yet had heat within me that was proof
Against the North wind; tired, yet so that rest
Had seemed the sweetest thing under a roof.

Then at the inn I had food, fire, and rest,
Knowing how hungry, cold, and tired was I.
All of the night was quite barred out except
An owl's cry, a most melancholy cry

Shaken out long and clear upon the hill,
No merry note, nor cause of merriment,
But one telling me plain what I escaped
And others could not, that night, as in I went.

And salted was my food, and my repose,
Salted and sobered, too, by the bird's voice
Speaking for all who lay under the stars,
Soldiers and poor, unable to rejoice.

The Sorrow of True Love

By Edward Thomas

The sorrow of true love is a great sorrow
And true love parting blackens a bright morrow:
Yet almost they equal joys, since their despair
Is but hope blinded by its tears, and clear
Above the storm the heavens wait to be seen.
But greater sorrow from less love has been
That can mistake lack of despair for hope
And knows not tempest and the perfect scope
Of summer, but a frozen drizzle perpetual
Of drops that from remorse and pity fall
And cannot ever shine in the sun or thaw,
Removed eternally from the sun's law.

The moon now rises to her absolute rule

By Henry David Thoreau

The moon now rises to her absolute rule,
And the husbandman and hunter
Acknowledge her for their mistress.
Asters and golden reign in the fields
And the life everlasting withers not.
The fields are reaped and shorn of their pride
But an inward verdure still crowns them;
The thistle scatters its down on the pool
And yellow leaves clothe the river—
And nought disturbs the serious life of men.
But behind the sheaves and under the sod
There lurks a ripe fruit which the reapers have not gathered,
The true harvest of the year—the boreal fruit
Which it bears forever,
With fondness annually watering and maturing it.
But man never severs the stalk
Which bears this palatable fruit.

Tall Ambrosia

By Henry David Thoreau

Among the signs of autumn I perceive
The Roman wormwood (called by learned men
Ambrosia elatior, food for gods,—
For to impartial science the humblest weed

Is as immortal once as the proudest flower—)
Sprinkles its yellow dust over my shoes
As I cross the now neglected garden.
—We trample under foot the food of gods
And spill their nectar in each drop of dew—
My honest shoes, fast friends that never stray
Far from my couch, thus powdered, countryfied,
Bearing many a mile the marks of their adventure,
At the post-house disgrace the Gallic gloss
Of those well dressed ones who no morning dew
Nor Roman wormwood ever have been through,
Who never walk but are *transported* rather—
For what old crime of theirs I do not gather.

[My prime of youth is but a frost of cares]

By Chidiock Tichborne

My prime of youth is but a frost of cares,
My feast of joy is but a dish of pain,
My crop of corn is but a field of tares,
And all my good is but vain hope of gain.
The day is gone and yet I saw no sun,
And now I live, and now my life is done.

The spring is past, and yet it hath not sprung,
The fruit is dead, and yet the leaves are green,
My youth is gone, and yet I am but young,
I saw the world, and yet I was not seen,
My thread is cut, and yet it was not spun,
And now I live, and now my life is done.

I sought my death and found it in my womb,
I lookt for life and saw it was a shade,
I trode the earth and knew it was my tomb,
And now I die, and now I am but made.
The glass is full, and now the glass is run,
And now I live, and now my life is done.

Beg Approval

By TC Tolbert

Because the only view we have is the one
that looks down on the knees. Praise perspective.
Praise shared disdain. Praise space made by connective

tissue; the synaptic cleft; elbowroom
at the dinner table; polite conversation;
lies you push through your teeth. Because dissecting
a dog's heart won't change the way it thinks. Praise redirected
traffic. Praise the gnarled lip that defends
the gentle bones. Because your mother was
a seahorse. And to think of her thin is
to empty all the ice from the tea glasses;
to strain the soup by driving it through your hand.
Praise tablecloths; sway-back chairs; the plastic
folds that protect slice after slice of cheese.

Peach

By Jennifer Tonge

Come here's
a peach he said
and held it out just far
enough to reach beyond his lap
and off-

ered me
a room the one
room left he said in all
of Thessaloniki that night
packed with

traders
The peach was lush
I hadn't slept for days
it was like velvet lips a lamp
he smiled

patted
the bed for me
I knew it was in fact
the only room the only bed
The peach

trembled
and he said Come
nodding to make me
agree I wanted the peach and
the bed

he said
to take it see
how nice it was and I
thought how I could take it ginger-
ly my

finger-
tips only touch-
ing only it Not in
or out I stayed in the doorway
watching

a fly
He stroked the peach
and asked where I was from
I said the States he smiled and asked
how long

I'd stay
The fly had found
the peach I said I'd leave
for Turkey in the morning I
wanted

so much
to sleep and on
a bed I thought of all
the ways to say that word
and that

they must
have gradient
meanings He asked me did
I want the peach and I said sure
and took

it from
his hand He asked
then if I'd take the room
It costs too much I said and turned
to go

He said
to stay a while
and we could talk The sun
was going down I said no thanks

I'd head

out on
the late train but
could I still have the peach
and what else could he say to that
but yes

November Cotton Flower

By Jean Toomer

Boll-weevil's coming, and the winter's cold,
Made cotton-stalks look rusty, seasons old,
And cotton, scarce as any southern snow,
Was vanishing; the branch, so pinched and slow,
Failed in its function as the autumn rake;
Drouth fighting soil had caused the soil to take
All water from the streams; dead birds were found
In wells a hundred feet below the ground—
Such was the season when the flower bloomed.
Old folks were startled, and it soon assumed
Significance. Superstition saw
Something it had never seen before:
Brown eyes that loved without a trace of fear,
Beauty so sudden for that time of year.

If You Go to Bed Hungry

By Angela Narciso Torres

If you go to bed hungry, your soul will get up and steal cold rice from the pot.
Stop playing with fire before the moon rises or you'll pee in your sleep.

Sweeping the floor after dark sweeps wealth and good fortune out the door.
Fork dropped: a gentleman will visit. Spoon: a bashful lady.

Bathing after you've cooked over a hot stove makes the veins swell.
For safe passage to the guest who leaves mid-meal: turn your plate.

The adage goes: coffee stunts growth. Twelve grapes on New Year's: the opposite.
Advice from the learned: hide a book under your pillow. Never step on. Never drop.

Every rice grain that remains on your plate you'll meet again on the footpath
to heaven. You'll have to stoop to pick each one of them up.

The Salutation

By Thomas Traherne

These little limbs,
  These eyes and hands which here I find,
These rosy cheeks wherewith my life begins,
  Where have ye been? behind
What curtain were ye from me hid so long?
Where was, in what abyss, my speaking tongue?

    When silent I
  So many thousand, thousand years
Beneath the dust did in a chaos lie,
  How could I smiles or tears,
Or lips or hands or eyes or ears perceive?
Welcome ye treasures which I now receive.

    I that so long
  Was nothing from eternity,
Did little think such joys as ear or tongue
  To celebrate or see:
Such sounds to hear, such hands to feel, such feet,
Beneath the skies on such a ground to meet.

    New burnished joys,
  Which yellow gold and pearls excel!
Such sacred treasures are the limbs in boys,
  In which a soul doth dwell;
Their organizèd joints and azure veins
More wealth include than all the world contains.

    From dust I rise,
  And out of nothing now awake;
These brighter regions which salute mine eyes,
  A gift from God I take.
The earth, the seas, the light, the day, the skies,
The sun and stars are mine if those I prize.

    Long time before
  I in my mother's womb was born,
A God, preparing, did this glorious store,
  The world, for me adorn.
Into this Eden so divine and fair,
So wide and bright, I come His son and heir.

    A stranger here

Strange things doth meet, strange glories see;
Strange treasures lodged in this fair world appear,
Strange all and new to me;
But that they mine should be, who nothing was,
That strangest is of all, yet brought to pass.

The Cave

By Paul Tran

Someone standing at the mouth had
the idea to enter. To go further

than light or language could
go. As they followed
the idea, light and language followed

like two wolves—panting, hearing themselves
panting. A shapeless scent
in the damp air ...

Keep going, the idea said.

Someone kept going. Deeper and deeper, they saw
others had been there. Others had left

objects that couldn't have found their way
there alone. Ocher-stained shells. Bird bones. Grounded
hematite. On the walls,

as if stepping into history, someone saw
their purpose: cows. Bulls. Bison. Deer. Horses—
some pregnant, some slaughtered.

The wild-
life seemed wild and alive, moving

when someone moved, casting their shadows
on the shadows stretching
in every direction. *Keep going*,

the idea said again. *Go* ...

Someone continued. They followed the idea so far inside that
outside was another idea.

Flounder

By Natasha Trethewey

Here, she said, *put this on your head.*
She handed me a hat.
You 'bout as white as your dad,
and you gone stay like that.

Aunt Sugar rolled her nylons down
around each bony ankle,
and I rolled down my white knee socks
letting my thin legs dangle,

circling them just above water
and silver backs of minnows
flitting here then there between
the sun spots and the shadows.

This is how you hold the pole
to cast the line out straight.
Now put that worm on your hook,
throw it out and wait.

She sat spitting tobacco juice
into a coffee cup.
Hunkered down when she felt the bite,
jerked the pole straight up

reeling and tugging hard at the fish
that wriggled and tried to fight back.
A flounder, she said, and *you can tell*
'cause one of its sides is black.

The other side is white, she said.
It landed with a thump.
I stood there watching that fish flip-flop,
switch sides with every jump.

History Lesson

By Natasha Trethewey

I am four in this photograph, standing
on a wide strip of Mississippi beach,
my hands on the flowered hips

of a bright bikini. My toes dig in,
curl around wet sand. The sun cuts
the rippling Gulf in flashes with each

tidal rush. Minnows dart at my feet
glinting like switchblades. I am alone
except for my grandmother, other side

of the camera, telling me how to pose.
It is 1970, two years after they opened
the rest of this beach to us,

forty years since the photograph
where she stood on a narrow plot
of sand marked *colored*, smiling,

her hands on the flowered hips
of a cotton meal-sack dress.

Battlefield

By Mark Turcotte

Back when I used to be Indian
I am standing outside the
pool hall with my sister.
She strawberry blonde. Stale sweat
and beer through the
open door. A warrior leans on his stick,
fingers blue with chalk.
Another bends to shoot.
His braids brush the green
felt, swinging to the beat
of the jukebox. We move away.
Hank Williams falls again
in the backseat of a Cadillac.
I look back.
A wind off the distant hills lifts my shirt,
brings the scent
of wounded horses.

Flies Buzzing

By Mark Turcotte

somewhere in america, in a certain state of grace . . .
Patti Smith

As a child I danced
to the heartful, savage
rhythm
of the Native, the
American Indian,
in the Turtle Mountains,
in the Round Hall,
in the greasy light of
kerosene lamps.

As a child I danced
among the long, jangle legs of
the men, down
beside the whispering moccasin women,
in close circles
around the Old Ones,
who sat at the drum,
their heads tossed, backs arched
in ancient prayer.

As a child I danced away from the fist,
I danced toward the rhythms of life,
I danced into dreams, into
the sound of flies buzzing.
A deer advancing but clinging to the forest wall,
the old red woman rocking in her tattered shawl,
the young women bent, breasts
drooping to the mouths of their young, the heat
hanging heavy on the tips of our tongues,
until the Sun
burned the sky black, the moon
made us silvery blue and
all of the night sounds, all of the night sounds

folded together with the buzzing
still in our heads,
becoming a chant of ghosts,
of *Crazy Horse* and *Wovoka*
and all the Endless Others,
snaking through the weaving through the trees
like beams of ribbons of light,

singing, *we shall live again we shall live*,

until the Sun and the Sun and the Sun and I
awaken,
still a child, still dancing
toward the rhythm of life.

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

Hunger for Something

By Chase Twichell

Sometimes I long to be the woodpile,
cut-apart trees soon to be smoke,
or even the smoke itself,

sinewy ghost of ash and air, going
wherever I want to, at least for a while.

Neither inside nor out,
neither lost nor home, no longer
a shape or a name, I'd pass through

all the broken windows of the world.
It's not a wish for consciousness to end.

It's not the appetite an army has
for its own emptying heart,
but a hunger to stand now and then

alone on the death-grounds,
where the dogs of the self are feeding.

Self-Portrait

By Chase Twichell

I know I promised to stop
talking about her,
but I was talking to myself.
The truth is, she's a child
who stopped growing,
so I've always allowed her
to tag along, and when she brings

her melancholy close to me
I comfort her. Naturally
you're curious; you want to know
how she became a gnarled branch
veiled in diminutive blooms.
But I've told you all I know.
I was sure she had secrets,
but she had no secrets.
I had to tell her mine.

Alpha Step

By Jack Underwood

A change to my usual sleeping position,
earth holding me close
like I'm something that it loves.
I feel a murmur through the hedgerow,
old gods thawing from the permafrost.
Only a matter of time
before an Empire falls
into the hands of an idiot
and there are more ways of saying things
than things worth saying;
only a matter of love to steer the wind,
which batters us daily, this only life
that climbs beyond unfashionable
beginnings, leaving us leaving it,
breathless software, a bite taken out
of the grand old narrative,
while our ghosts refuel midair.
Deep time. Lovely time.
The human print will not survive.
I mean like, woo, there it was.

Totem Pole

By Jack Underwood

I put an animal on an animal
which I put onto the animal I had already stacked
on top of my first animal and stood back
to appraise my work only
it looked much too short despite the number
of animals I had gathered, and I felt tired and silly
and disappointed, slumping to my knees, rocking

back onto my bum, then lying down to stare
into the hoary sky until my eyeballs softened
and I was forced by the consistent light
to close them and listen to the animals taking
a surprisingly long time to disorganize themselves.

The Luggage

By Constance Urdang

Travel is a vanishing act
Only to those who are left behind.
What the traveler knows
Is that he accompanies himself,
Unwieldy baggage that can't be checked,
Stolen, or lost, or mistaken.
So one took, past outposts of empire,
"Calmly as if in the British Museum,"
Not only her Victorian skirts,
Starched shirtwaists, and umbrella, but her faith
In the civilizing mission of women,
Her backaches and insomnia, her innocent valor;
Another, friend of witch-doctors,
Living on native chop,
Trading tobacco and hooks for fish and fetishes,
Heralded her astonishing arrival
Under shivering stars
By calling, "It's only me!" A third,
Intent on savage customs, and to demonstrate
That a woman could travel as easily as a man,
Carried a handkerchief damp with wifely tears
And only once permitted a tribal chieftain
To stroke her long, golden hair.

Reflections on History in Missouri

By Constance Urdang

This old house lodges no ghosts!
Those swaggering specters who found their way
Across the Atlantic
Were left behind
With their old European grudges
In the farmhouses of New England
And Pennsylvania
Like so much jettisoned baggage

Too heavy
To lug over the Piedmont.

The flatlands are inhospitable
To phantoms. Here
Shadows are sharp and arbitrary
Not mazy, obscure,
Cowering in corners
Behind scary old boots in a cupboard
Or muffled in empty coats, deserted
By long-dead cousins
(Who appear now and then
But only in photographs
Already rusting at the edges)—

Setting out in the creaking wagon
Tight-lipped, alert to move on,
The old settlers had no room
For illusions.
Their dangers were real.
Now in the spare square house
Their great-grandchildren
Tidy away the past
Until the polished surfaces
Reflect not apparitions, pinched,
Parched, craving, unsatisfied,
But only their own faces.

To Live with a Landscape

By Constance Urdang

1
Take your boulevards, your Locust Street,
Your Chestnut, Pine, your Olive,
Take your Forest Park and Shaw's Garden,
Your avenues that lead past street-corner violence,
Past your West End, past your Limit,
To shabby suburban crime,
Vandalism in the parking-lot,
Abductions from the shopping mall—
Like making the same mistake over and over
On the piano or typewriter keys,
Always hitting the wrong note—
How "very alive, very American"
They are, how chockful of metaphysics,

Hellbent to obliterate the wilderness.

2
Learn to live with sycamores,
Their sad, peeling trunks, scabbed all over
With shabby patches, their enormous leaves
In dingy shades of ochre and dun
Rattling like castanets, their roots
Thick as a man's leg, crawling
Like enormous worms out of the broken pavements,
Continually thrusting themselves up
From pools of shade they make,
Sculpturing the street
With dappled dark and light
As glaucoma, a disease of the eye,
Makes the world more beautiful
With its mysterious rainbows.

3
Already in Iowa the monarchs are emerging,
Signaling with their tawny wings;
In regalia of burnt orange and umber
The spangled imperial procession
Meanders along the democratic roadsides,
Across straight state lines,
Over rivers and artificial lakes
And the loneliness of middle America
On the way to Mexico.
The tiny wind of their passing
Is not even recorded
As a disturbance in the atmosphere.

4
Driving back into the American past,
Homesick for forests, flowers without names, vast savannahs,
Lowlands or mountains teeming with game,
Bluffs crowned with cottonwoods, mudbanks
Where crocodiles might sun themselves;
Finding instead the remains of strange picnics,
Replications of old selves, a cacophony of changes
Like a room crowded with chairs
In which no one can sit, as if history were furniture
Grown splintered and shabby;

Studying a picturesque rustic architecture
To master its splendid abstractions,
Shady verandas and porches,
Or the republican simplicity of a cow.

Deliberate

By Amy Uyematsu

So by sixteen we move in packs
learn to strut and slide
in deliberate lowdown rhythm
talk in a syn/co/pa/ted beat
because we want so bad
to be cool, never to be mistaken
for white, even when we leave
these rowdier L.A. streets—
remember how we paint our eyes
like gangsters
flash our legs in nylons
sassy black high heels
or two inch zippered boots
stack them by the door at night
next to Daddy's muddy gardening shoes.

The Rose

By Jean Valentine

a labyrinth,
as if at its center,
god would be there—
but at the center, only rose,
where rose came from,
where rose grows—
& us, inside of the lips & lips:
the likenesses, the eyes, & the hair,
we are born of,
fed by, & marry with,
only flesh itself, only its passage
—out of where? to where?

Then god the mother said to Jim, in a dream,
Never mind you, Jim,
come rest again on the country porch of my knees.

Sanctuary

By Jean Valentine

> *People pray to each other. The way I say "you" to someone else, respectfully, intimately, desperately. The way someone says "you" to me, hopefully, expectantly, intensely ...*
> *—Huub Oosterhuis*

You who I don't know I don't know how to talk to you

—What is it like for you there?

Here ... well, wanting solitude; and talk; friendship—
The uses of solitude. To imagine; to hear.
Learning braille. To imagine other solitudes.
But they will not be mine;
to wait, in the quiet; not to scatter the voices—

What are you afraid of?

What will happen. All this leaving. And meetings, yes. But death.
What happens when you die?

"... not scatter the voices,"

Drown out. Not make a house, out of my own words. To be quiet in another throat; other eyes; listen for what it is like there. What word. What silence. Allowing. Uncertain: to drift, in the restlessness ... Repose. To run like water—

What is it like there, right now?

Listen: the crowding of the street; the room. Everyone hunches in against the crowding; holding their breath: against dread.

What do you dread?

What happens when you die?

What do you dread, in this room, now?

Not listening. Now. Not watching. Safe inside my own skin.
To die, not having listened. Not having asked ... To have scattered life.

Yes I know: the thread you have to keep finding, over again, to

follow it back to life; I know. Impossible, sometimes.

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

For the Nefarious

By Mai Der Vang

From a recessed hollow
Rumble, I unearth as a creature

Conceived to be relentless.
Depend on me to hunt you

Until you find yourself
Counting all the uncorked

Nightmares you digested.
I will let you know the burning

Endorsed by the effort of
Matches. And you will claw

Yourself inward, toward a
Conference of heat as the steam

Within you surrenders, caves
You into a cardboard scar.

Even what will wreck you
Are your mother's chapped lips.

Even to drip your confession
Of empty rooms. I know about

Your recipe of rain, your apiary
Ways. Trust me to be painful.

Monument

By Mai Der Vang

For Pos Moua
What is the name for an antelope
who grazes inside a dream

then vanishes into the
nebula's brush.

What is the face
for refurbishing grammar

at each comma's lip.
Whose identity never

remembers the shape of beige.
What is the word

for how to conjure
the sigh of a line hushed

beneath the flap of a thousand
shifting plumes.

What is the body of a
garden where a crescent

despairs, drifts beneath
the melt of amber.

The season is always growing
out its hooves.

One cradlesong
of your leaving is not larger

than the forest of your arrival.
To make you a noun forever.

A loss of you
cannot be equal to the loss of you.

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

Trying to See Auras at the Airport

By Angela C. Trudell Vasquez

Recycled over and over
people born look like parents,

grandparents, sister or brother,
or perhaps a throwback
from an earlier ancestor,
the hawk nose, a hard ridged forehead,
the cleft in the chin or a blue birthmark
on the arm, the stomach,
the dainty fresh bum of a newborn
each unique like a snowflake never
can you guess what's on their mind
sometimes I can feel what they're feeling
detect it like hairs on the back of my arms,
together we live, talk, walk the same sidewalks,
to die buried in a foreign cemetery
for others to sit upon ponder their
own light, why am I free, what must I do,
does someone love me like I do,
new skin gives way to wrinkles,
hair fades to gray, bones grow strong
then decay, strength seeps every time
one pees, sleeps, ages, loves,
muscles grow then shrink the body
a temporary vessel destination unknown.

April 28, 2002

The Morning-Watch

By Henry Vaughn

O joys! infinite sweetness! with what flow'rs
And shoots of glory my soul breaks and buds!
All the long hours
Of night, and rest,
Through the still shrouds
Of sleep, and clouds,
This dew fell on my breast;
Oh, how it bloods
And spirits all my earth! Hark! In what rings
And hymning circulations the quick world
Awakes and sings;
The rising winds
And falling springs,
Birds, beasts, all things
Adore him in their kinds.
Thus all is hurl'd
In sacred hymns and order, the great chime

And symphony of nature. Prayer is
The world in tune,
A spirit voice,
And vocal joys
Whose echo is heav'n's bliss.
O let me climb
When I lie down! The pious soul by night
Is like a clouded star whose beams, though said
To shed their light
Under some cloud,
Yet are above,
And shine and move
Beyond that misty shroud.
So in my bed,
That curtain'd grave, though sleep, like ashes, hide
My lamp and life, both shall in thee abide.

The Water-fall

By Henry Vaughn

With what deep murmurs through time's silent stealth
Doth thy transparent, cool, and wat'ry wealth
Here flowing fall,
And chide, and call,
As if his liquid, loose retinue stay'd
Ling'ring, and were of this steep place afraid;
The common pass
Where, clear as glass,
All must descend
Not to an end,
But quicken'd by this deep and rocky grave,
Rise to a longer course more bright and brave.

Dear stream! dear bank, where often I
Have sate and pleas'd my pensive eye,
Why, since each drop of thy quick store
Runs thither whence it flow'd before,
Should poor souls fear a shade or night,
Who came, sure, from a sea of light?
Or since those drops are all sent back
So sure to thee, that none doth lack,
Why should frail flesh doubt any more
That what God takes, he'll not restore?

O useful element and clear!

My sacred wash and cleanser here,
My first consigner unto those
Fountains of life where the Lamb goes!
What sublime truths and wholesome themes
Lodge in thy mystical deep streams!
Such as dull man can never find
Unless that Spirit lead his mind
Which first upon thy face did move,
And hatch'd all with his quick'ning love.
As this loud brook's incessant fall
In streaming rings restagnates all,
Which reach by course the bank, and then
Are no more seen, just so pass men.
O my invisible estate,
My glorious liberty, still late!
Thou art the channel my soul seeks,
Not this with cataracts and creeks.

Whenever you see a tree

By Padma Venkatraman

Think
how many long years
this tree waited as a seed
for an animal or bird or wind or rain
to maybe carry it to maybe the right spot
where again it waited months for seasons to change
until time and temperature were fine enough to coax it
to swell and burst its hard shell so it could send slender roots
to clutch at grains of soil and let tender shoots reach toward the sun
Think how many decades or centuries it thickened and climbed and grew
taller and deeper never knowing if it would find enough water or light
or when conditions would be right so it could keep on spreading leaves
adding blossoms and dancing
Next time
you see
a tree
think
how
much
hope
it holds

Emily Dickinson at the Poetry Slam

By Dan Vera

I will tell you why she rarely ventured from her house.
It happened like this:

One day she took the train to Boston,
made her way to the darkened room,
put her name down in cursive script
and waited her turn.

When they read her name aloud
she made her way to the stage
straightened the papers in her hands —
pages and envelopes, the backs of grocery bills,
she closed her eyes for a minute,
took a breath,
and began.

From her mouth perfect words exploded,
intact formulas of light and darkness.
She dared to rhyme with words like cochineal
and described the skies like diadem.
Obscurely worded incantations filled the room
with an alchemy that made the very molecules quake.

The solitary words she handled
in her upstairs room with keen precision
came rumbling out to make the electric lights flicker.

40 members of the audience
were treated for hypertension.
20 year old dark haired beauties found their heads
had turned a Moses White.

Her second poem erased the memory of every cellphone
in the nightclub,
and by the fourth line of the sixth verse
the grandmother in the upstairs apartment
had been cured of her rheumatism.

The papers reported the power outages.
The area hospitals taxed their emergency generators
and sirens were heard to wail through the night.

Quietly she made her way to the exit,

walked to the terminal and rode back to Amherst.

She never left her room again
and never read such syllables aloud.

The Clouded Morning

By Jones Very

The morning comes, and thickening clouds prevail,
   Hanging like curtains all the horizon round,
Or overhead in heavy stillness sail;
   So still is day, it seems like night profound;
Scarce by the city's din the air is stirred,
   And dull and deadened comes its every sound;
The cock's shrill, piercing voice subdued is heard,
   By the thick folds of muffling vapors drowned.
Dissolved in mists the hills and trees appear,
   Their outlines lost and blended with the sky;
And well-known objects, that to all are near,
   No longer seem familiar to the eye,
But with fantastic forms they mock the sight,
As when we grope amid the gloom of night.

You, If No One Else

By Tino Villanueva

Listen, you
who transformed your anguish
into healthy awareness,
put your voice
where your memory is.
You who swallowed
the afternoon dust,
defend everything you understand
with words.
You, if no one else,
will condemn with your tongue
the erosion each disappointment brings.

You, who saw the images
of disgust growing,
will understand how time
devours the destitute;
you, who gave yourself

your own commandments,
know better than anyone
why you turned your back
on your town's toughest limits.

Don't hush,
don't throw away
the most persistent truth,
as our hard-headed brethren
sometimes do.
Remember well
what your life was like: cloudiness,
and slick mud
after a drizzle;
flimsy windows the wind
kept rattling
in winter, and that
unheated slab dwelling
where coldness crawled
up in your clothes.

Tell how you were able to come
to this point, to unbar
History's doors
to see your early years,
your people, the others.
Name the way
rebellion's calm spirit has served you,
and how you came
to unlearn the lessons
of that teacher,
your land's omnipotent defiler.

The Spire

By Ellen Bryant Voigt

In the Bavarian steeple, on the hour,
two figures emerge from their scalloped house
carrying sledges that they clap, in turn,
against the surface of the bell. By legend
they are summer and winter, youth and age,
as though the forces of plenty and of loss
played equally on the human soul, extracted
easily the same low bronze note spreading
upward from the encumbrance of the village,

past alluvial fields to the pocked highland
where cattle shift their massive heads
at this dissonance, this faint redundant
pressure in the ears, in the air.

From the village, the mountain seems
a single stone, a single blank completion.
Seeing the summit pierce the abstract heavens,
we reconstruct the valley on the mountain—
a shepherd propped against his crook, birds
enthralled on a branch, the branch feathering
the edge of the canvas—transposing
such forms as can extend the flawed earth
and embody us, intact, unaltering, among
the soft surprising trees of childhood,
mimosa, honey locust and willow.

Wood in the midst of woods, the village
houses are allied in a formal shape
beside a stream, the streets concluding
at the monument. Again the ravishing moment
of the bell: the townspeople, curious
or accustomed, stop to count the strokes,
odd or even—the confectioner counting out
the lavendar candies for his customer,
the butcher, the greengrocer, the surgeon
and the constable—as the housewife
stands on the stoop, shaking her mop,
and sees the dust briefly veil the air,
an algebra of swirling particles.

[Sleeping sister of a farther sky]

By Karen Volkman

Sleeping sister of a farther sky,
dropped from zenith like a tender tone,
the lucid apex of a scale unknown
whose whitest whisper is an opaque cry

of measureless frequency, the spectral sigh
you breath, bright hydrogen and brighter zone
of fissured carbon, consummated moan
and ceaseless rapture of a brilliant why.

Will nothing wake you from your livid rest?

Essence of ether and astral stone
the stunned polarities your substance weaves

in one bright making, like a dream of leaves
in the tree's mind, summered. Or as a brooding bone
roots constellations in the body's nest.

Toy Boat

By Ocean Vuong

For Tamir Rice

yellow plastic
black sea

eye-shaped shard
on a darkened map

no shores now
to arrive — or
depart
no wind but
this waiting which
moves you

as if the seconds
could be entered
& never left

toy boat — oarless
each wave
a green lamp
outlasted

toy boat
toy leaf dropped
from a toy tree
waiting

waiting
as if the sp-
arrows
thinning above you
are not
already pierced

by their own names

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

Their Bodies

By David Wagoner

To the students of anatomy
at Indiana University

That gaunt old man came first, his hair as white
As your scoured tables. Maybe you'll recollect him
By the scars of steelmill burns on the backs of his hands,
On the nape of his neck, on his arms and sinewy legs,
And her by the enduring innocence
Of her face, as open to all of you in death
As it would have been in life: she would memorize
Your names and ages and pastimes and hometowns
If she could, but she can't now, so remember her.

They believed in doctors, listened to their advice,
And followed it faithfully. You should treat them
One last time as they would have treated you.
They had been kind to others all their lives
And believed in being useful. Remember somewhere
Their son is trying hard to believe you'll learn
As much as possible from them, as *he* did,
And will do your best to learn politely and truly.

They gave away the gift of those useful bodies
Against his wish. (They had their own ways
Of doing everything, always.) If you're not certain
Which ones are theirs, be gentle to everybody.

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

Inside Out

By Diane Wakoski

I walk the purple carpet into your eye
carrying the silver butter server
but a truck rumbles by,
                leaving its black tire prints on my foot

and old images the sound of banging screen doors on hot
afternoons and a fly buzzing over the Kool-Aid spilled on
the sink
flicker, as reflections on the metal surface.

Come in, you said,
inside your paintings, inside the blood factory, inside the
old songs that line your hands, inside
eyes that change like a snowflake every second,
inside spinach leaves holding that one piece of gravel,
inside the whiskers of a cat,
inside your old hat, and most of all inside your mouth where you
grind the pigments with your teeth, painting
with a broken bottle on the floor, and painting
with an ostrich feather on the moon that rolls out of my mouth.

You cannot let me walk inside you too long inside
the veins where my small feet touch
bottom.
You must reach inside and pull me
like a silver bullet
from your arm.

The Season of Phantasmal Peace

By Derek Walcott

Then all the nations of birds lifted together
the huge net of the shadows of this earth
in multitudinous dialects, twittering tongues,
stitching and crossing it. They lifted up
the shadows of long pines down trackless slopes,
the shadows of glass-faced towers down evening streets,
the shadow of a frail plant on a city sill—
the net rising soundless as night, the birds' cries soundless, until
there was no longer dusk, or season, decline, or weather,
only this passage of phantasmal light
that not the narrowest shadow dared to sever.

And men could not see, looking up, what the wild geese drew,
what the ospreys trailed behind them in silvery ropes
that flashed in the icy sunlight; they could not hear
battalions of starlings waging peaceful cries,
bearing the net higher, covering this world
like the vines of an orchard, or a mother drawing
the trembling gauze over the trembling eyes

of a child fluttering to sleep;
                it was the light
that you will see at evening on the side of a hill
in yellow October, and no one hearing knew
what change had brought into the raven's cawing,
the killdeer's screech, the ember-circling chough
such an immense, soundless, and high concern
for the fields and cities where the birds belong,
except it was their seasonal passing, Love,
made seasonless, or, from the high privilege of their birth,
something brighter than pity for the wingless ones
below them who shared dark holes in windows and in houses,
and higher they lifted the net with soundless voices
above all change, betrayals of falling suns,
and this season lasted one moment, like the pause
between dusk and darkness, between fury and peace,
but, for such as our earth is now, it lasted long.

Semblance: Screens

By Liz Waldner

A moth lies open and lies

like an old bleached beech leaf,
a lean-to between window frame and sill.
Its death protects a collection of tinier deaths
and other dirts beneath.
Although the white paint is water-stained,
on it death is dirt, and hapless.

The just-severed tiger lily
is drinking its glass of water, I hope.
This hope is sere.
This hope is severe.
What you ruin ruins you, too
and so you hope for favor.
I mean I do.

The underside of a ladybug
wanders the window. I wander
the continent, my undercarriage not as evident,
so go more perilously, it seems to me.
But I am only me; to you it seems clear
I mean to disappear, and am mean
and project on you some ancient fear.

If I were a bug, I hope I wouldn't be
this giant winged thing, spindly like a crane fly,
skinny-legged like me, kissing the cold ceiling,
fumbling for the face of the other, seeking.
It came in with me last night when I turned on the light.

I lay awake, afraid it would touch my face.

It wants out. I want out, too.
I thought you a way through.

Arms wide for wings,
your suffering mine, twinned.
Screen. Your unbelief drives me in,
doubt for dirt, white sheet for sill—
You don't stay other enough or still
enough to be likened to.

The Lighthouse Keeper

By Mark Waldron

On occasion, when the mood takes him
as it so often does, he will put down

his papers, get up from his kindly old chair,
and leave for a while the sweeping beam

to sow its charitable seed — that seed which,
when falling on the ground

of a helmsman's fertile consciousness,
ought germinate in it a cautious vigilance.

He descends then, the long corkscrew of
the stairs and opens at their base the metal door

so that he may take a closer look at what might
be beyond his tower's environs. There he always

finds the churning world, she laps at him from
every side with no respite, and spatters him

with spray. Thanks to a certain modulation,
a tone which he adopted long ago

when he still wore shorts and buckled shoes,
there is no danger here from neither shark

nor crocodile, not in this sea stuffed as it is
like a dressing-up box with whimsy.

Indeed, were there such creatures hidden
neath the sliver-thin surface of the waves,

they'd have no teeth but only soft gray gums
and goofy grins, and they'd be giggling

knowingly at the whole thing. And so it is
that as he gazes out, he cannot help

but wonder what it is he might be warning of
with the light that turns atop his tower,

because that tower is itself in fact the only
hazard anywhere on which a ship might rip her

wooden skin and haemorrhage her lumpy
blood that's made of all the gasping sailormen.

Childhood

By Margaret Walker

When I was a child I knew red miners
dressed raggedly and wearing carbide lamps.
I saw them come down red hills to their camps
dyed with red dust from old Ishkooda mines.
Night after night I met them on the roads,
or on the streets in town I caught their glance;
the swing of dinner buckets in their hands,
and grumbling undermining all their words.

I also lived in low cotton country
where moonlight hovered over ripe haystacks,
or stumps of trees, and croppers' rotting shacks
with famine, terror, flood, and plague near by;
where sentiment and hatred still held sway
and only bitter land was washed away.

Lineage

By Margaret Walker

My grandmothers were strong.
They followed plows and bent to toil.
They moved through fields sowing seed.
They touched earth and grain grew.
They were full of sturdiness and singing.
My grandmothers were strong.

My grandmothers are full of memories
Smelling of soap and onions and wet clay
With veins rolling roughly over quick hands
They have many clean words to say.
My grandmothers were strong.
Why am I not as they?

Cloud of Feelings

By Nikki Wallschlaeger

I want to hold a cloud but it's made of air
a smog of tweets makes a world go round,

the confusion of clouds predicting a storm
think nothing of it, bombs are natural now,

explosives wrapped in their hollowed brows
exploiting crisis and pushing the inevitable,

bluebirds know it's a new day, they whistle
without confusion, listen, how do we speak

to light at the end of the holographic tunnel,
my first smoking question of a new season

to begrudge feelings we once had, released,
the future reading books and understanding

tweeting, unbreathable air, and the confusion
of so much suffering and sovereign comfort,

exploring the rites of violence, an old feeling
publicized and burning, cyclones, heilstorms

slapping the drafts, think nothing of it, birds—

get out of their way, the powerful are talking,

don’t breathe the confusion, sideswiped in
holographic traffic, a question for bluebirds:

if you, dear birdsong, took away our clouds
of feelings would anyone notice send tweet

American Income

By Afaa Michael Weaver

The survey says all groups can make more money
if they lose weight except black men...men of other colors
and women of all colors have more gold, but black men
are the summary of weight, a lead thick thing on the scales,
meters spinning until they ring off the end of the numbering
of accumulation, how things grow heavy, fish on the
ends of lines that become whales, then prehistoric sea life
beyond all memories, the billion days of human hands
working, doing all the labor one can imagine, hands
now the population of cactus leaves on a papyrus moon
waiting for the fire, the notes from all their singing gone
up into the salt breath of tears of children that dry, rise
up to be the crystalline canopy of promises, the infinite
gone fishing days with the apologies for not being able to love
anymore, gone down inside earth somewhere where
women make no demands, have fewer dreams of forever,
these feet that marched and ran and got cut off, these hearts
torn out of chests by nameless thieves, this thrashing
until the chaff is gone out and black men know the gold
of being the dead center of things, where pain is the gateway
to Jerusalems, Bodhi trees, places for meditation and howling,
keeping the weeping heads of gods in their eyes.

Fate

By Carolyn Wells

Two shall be born the whole world wide apart,
And speak in different tongues, and pay their debts
In different kinds of coin; and give no heed
Each to the other’s being. And know not
That each might suit the other to a T,
If they were but correctly introduced.
And these, unconsciously, shall bend their steps,

Escaping Spaniards and defying war,
Unerringly toward the same trysting-place,
Albeit they know it not. Until at last
They enter the same door, and suddenly
They meet. And ere they've seen each other's face
They fall into each other's arms, upon
The Broadway cable car – and this is Fate!

Stepping Stones

By Albert Wendt

Our islands are Tagaloaalagi's stepping stones across Le Vasa Loloa
small and frail but courageous enough to bear his weight and mana

high enough to keep us above the drowning and learning
how to navigate by the stars currents and the ferocity of storms

Point and sail in any direction as long as you know
how to return home

You have to navigate the space between the borders
of your skin and the intelligence of the tongueless horizon

and learn the language of touch of signs and pain
of what isn't and what may be in the circle of the tides

that will stretch until you understand the permanent silence
at the end of your voyage

and our islands are your anchor and launching site
for the universes that repeat and repeat

like the long waves of our ocean like Tagaloaalagi's
compulsive scrutiny of what is to come and fear

An Autumn Sunset

By Edith Wharton

I

Leaguered in fire
The wild black promontories of the coast extend
Their savage silhouettes;
The sun in universal carnage sets,

And, halting higher,
The motionless storm-clouds mass their sullen threats,
Like an advancing mob in sword-points penned,
That, balked, yet stands at bay.
Mid-zenith hangs the fascinated day
In wind-lustrated hollows crystalline,
A wan Valkyrie whose wide pinions shine
Across the ensanguined ruins of the fray,
And in her hand swings high o'erhead,
Above the waster of war,
The silver torch-light of the evening star
Wherewith to search the faces of the dead.

II

Lagooned in gold,
Seem not those jetty promontories rather
The outposts of some ancient land forlorn,
Uncomforted of morn,
Where old oblivions gather,
The melancholy unconsoling fold
Of all things that go utterly to death
And mix no more, no more
With life's perpetually awakening breath?
Shall Time not ferry me to such a shore,
Over such sailless seas,
To walk with hope's slain importunities
In miserable marriage? Nay, shall not
All things be there forgot,
Save the sea's golden barrier and the black
Close-crouching promontories?
Dead to all shames, forgotten of all glories,
Shall I not wander there, a shadow's shade,
A spectre self-destroyed,
So purged of all remembrance and sucked back
Into the primal void,
That should we on the shore phantasmal meet
I should not know the coming of your feet?

Experience

By Edith Wharton

I

Like Crusoe with the bootless gold we stand
Upon the desert verge of death, and say:
“What shall avail the woes of yesterday
To buy to-morrow’s wisdom, in the land
Whose currency is strange unto our hand?
In life’s small market they had served to pay
Some late-found rapture, could we but delay
Till Time hath matched our means to our demand.”

But otherwise Fate wills it, for, behold,
Our gathered strength of individual pain,
When Time’s long alchemy hath made it gold,
Dies with us—hoarded all these years in vain,
Since those that might be heir to it the mould
Renew, and coin themselves new griefs again.

II

O Death, we come full-handed to thy gate,
Rich with strange burden of the mingled years,
Gains and renunciations, mirth and tears,
And love’s oblivion, and remembering hate,
Nor know we what compulsion laid such freight
Upon our souls—and shall our hopes and fears
Buy nothing of thee, Death? Behold our wares,
And sell us the one joy for which we wait.
Had we lived longer, like had such for sale,
With the last coin of sorrow purchased cheap,
But now we stand before thy shadowy pale,
And all our longings lie within thy keep—
Death, can it be the years shall naught avail?

“Not so,” Death answered, “they shall purchase sleep.”

Life

By Edith Wharton

Life, like a marble block, is given to all,
A blank, inchoate mass of years and days,
Whence one with ardent chisel swift essays
Some shape of strength or symmetry to call;
One shatters it in bits to mend a wall;
One in a craftier hand the chisel lays,
And one, to wake the mirth in Lesbia’s gaze,

Carves it apace in toys fantastical.

But least is he who, with enchanted eyes
Filled with high visions of fair shapes to be,
Muses which god he shall immortalize
In the proud Parian’s perpetuity,
Till twilight warns him from the punctual skies
That the night cometh wherein none shall see.

A Hymn to the Evening

By Phillis Wheatley

Soon as the sun forsook the eastern main
The pealing thunder shook the heav'nly plain;
Majestic grandeur! From the zephyr's wing,
Exhales the incense of the blooming spring.
Soft purl the streams, the birds renew their notes,
And through the air their mingled music floats.
Through all the heav'ns what beauteous dies are spread!
But the west glories in the deepest red:
So may our breasts with ev'ry virtue glow,
The living temples of our God below!
Fill'd with the praise of him who gives the light,
And draws the sable curtains of the night,
Let placid slumbers sooth each weary mind,
At morn to wake more heav'nly, more refin'd;
So shall the labours of the day begin
More pure, more guarded from the snares of sin.
Night's leaden sceptre seals my drowsy eyes,
Then cease, my song, till fair *Aurora* rise.

On Virtue

By Phillis Wheatley

O thou bright jewel in my aim I strive
To comprehend thee. Thine own words declare
Wisdom is higher than a fool can reach.
I cease to wonder, and no more attempt
Thine height t’explore, or fathom thy profound.
But, O my soul, sink not into despair,
Virtue is near thee, and with gentle hand
Would now embrace thee, hovers o’er thine head.
Fain would the heaven-born soul with her converse,
Then seek, then court her for her promised bliss.

Auspicious queen, thine heavenly pinions spread,
And lead celestial *Chastity* along;
Lo! now her sacred retinue descends,
Arrayed in glory from the orbs above.
Attend me, *Virtue*, thro' my youthful years!
O leave me not to the false joys of time!
But guide my steps to endless life and bliss.
Greatness, or *Goodness*, say what I shall call thee,
To give an higher appellation still,
Teach me a better strain, a nobler lay,
O Thou, enthroned with Cherubs in the realms of day!

To S. M. A Young African Painter, On Seeing His Works

By Phillis Wheatley

TO show the lab'ring bosom's deep intent,
And thought in living characters to paint,
When first thy pencil did those beauties give,
And breathing figures learnt from thee to live,
How did those prospects give my soul delight,
A new creation rushing on my sight?
Still, wond'rous youth! each noble path pursue,
On deathless glories fix thine ardent view:
Still may the painter's and the poet's fire
To aid thy pencil, and thy verse conspire!
And may the charms of each seraphic theme
Conduct thy footsteps to immortal fame!
High to the blissful wonders of the skies
Elate thy soul, and raise thy wishful eyes.
Thrice happy, when exalted to survey
That splendid city, crown'd with endless day,
Whose twice six gates on radiant hinges ring:
Celestial Salem blooms in endless spring.
Calm and serene thy moments glide along,
And may the muse inspire each future song!
Still, with the sweets of contemplation bless'd,
May peace with balmy wings your soul invest!
But when these shades of time are chas'd away,
And darkness ends in everlasting day,
On what seraphic pinions shall we move,
And view the landscapes in the realms above?
There shall thy tongue in heav'nly murmurs flow,
And there my muse with heav'nly transport glow:
No more to tell of Damon's tender sighs,

Or rising radiance of Aurora's eyes,
For nobler themes demand a nobler strain,
And purer language on th' ethereal plain.
Cease, gentle muse! the solemn gloom of night
Now seals the fair creation from my sight.

To –

By Sarah Helen Whitman

Vainly my heart had with thy sorceries striven:
It had no refuge from thy love,—no Heaven
But in thy fatal presence;—from afar
It owned thy power and trembled like a star
O'erfraught with light and splendor. Could I deem
How dark a shadow should obscure its beam?—
Could I believe that pain could ever dwell
Where thy bright presence cast its blissful spell?
Thou wert my proud palladium;—could I fear
The avenging Destinies when thou wert near?—
Thou wert my Destiny;—thy song, thy fame,
The wild enchantments clustering round thy name,
Were my soul's heritage, its royal dower;
Its glory and its kingdom and its power!

I Hear America Singing

By Walt Whitman

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand singing on the steamboat deck,
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,
The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the morning, or at noon intermission or at sundown,
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or washing,
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young fellows, robust, friendly,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

A Noiseless Patient Spider

By Walt Whitman

A noiseless patient spider,
I mark'd where on a little promontory it stood isolated,
Mark'd how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,
It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself,
Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.

And you O my soul where you stand,
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them,
Till the bridge you will need be form'd, till the ductile anchor hold,
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul.

When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer

By Walt Whitman

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

In School-days

By John Greenleaf Whittier

Still sits the school-house by the road,
  A ragged beggar sleeping;
Around it still the sumachs grow,
  And blackberry-vines are creeping.

Within, the master's desk is seen,
  Deep scarred by raps official;
The warping floor, the battered seats,
  The jack-knife's carved initial;

The charcoal frescos on its wall;
  Its door's worn sill, betraying
The feet that, creeping slow to school,

Went storming out to playing!

Long years ago a winter sun
Shone over it at setting;
Lit up its western window-panes,
And low eaves' icy fretting.

It touched the tangled golden curls,
And brown eyes full of grieving,
Of one who still her steps delayed
When all the school were leaving.

For near her stood the little boy
Her childish favor singled:
His cap pulled low upon a face
Where pride and shame were mingled.

Pushing with restless feet the snow
To right and left, he lingered;—
As restlessly her tiny hands
The blue-checked apron fingered.

He saw her lift her eyes; he felt
The soft hand's light caressing,
And heard the tremble of her voice,
As if a fault confessing.

"I'm sorry that I spelt the word:
I hate to go above you,
Because,"—the brown eyes lower fell,—
"Because, you see, I love you!"

Still memory to a gray-haired man
That sweet child-face is showing.
Dear girl! the grasses on her grave
Have forty years been growing!

He lives to learn, in life's hard school,
How few who pass above him
Lament their triumph and his loss,
Like her,—because they love him.

Advice to a Prophet

By Richard Wilbur

When you come, as you soon must, to the streets of our city,
Mad-eyed from stating the obvious,
Not proclaiming our fall but begging us
In God's name to have self-pity,

Spare us all word of the weapons, their force and range,
The long numbers that rocket the mind;
Our slow, unreckoning hearts will be left behind,
Unable to fear what is too strange.

Nor shall you scare us with talk of the death of the race.
How should we dream of this place without us?—
The sun mere fire, the leaves untroubled about us,
A stone look on the stone's face?

Speak of the world's own change. Though we cannot conceive
Of an undreamt thing, we know to our cost
How the dreamt cloud crumbles, the vines are blackened by frost,
How the view alters. We could believe,

If you told us so, that the white-tailed deer will slip
Into perfect shade, grown perfectly shy,
The lark avoid the reaches of our eye,
The jack-pine lose its knuckled grip

On the cold ledge, and every torrent burn
As Xanthus once, its gliding trout
Stunned in a twinkling. What should we be without
The dolphin's arc, the dove's return,

These things in which we have seen ourselves and spoken?
Ask us, prophet, how we shall call
Our natures forth when that live tongue is all
Dispelled, that glass obscured or broken

In which we have said the rose of our love and the clean
Horse of our courage, in which beheld
The singing locust of the soul unshelled,
And all we mean or wish to mean.

Ask us, ask us whether with the worldless rose
Our hearts shall fail us; come demanding
Whether there shall be lofty or long standing

When the bronze annals of the oak-tree close.

A Barred Owl

By Richard Wilbur

The warping night air having brought the boom
Of an owl's voice into her darkened room,
We tell the wakened child that all she heard
Was an odd question from a forest bird,
Asking of us, if rightly listened to,
"Who cooks for you?" and then "Who cooks for you?"

Words, which can make our terrors bravely clear,
Can also thus domesticate a fear,
And send a small child back to sleep at night
Not listening for the sound of stealthy flight
Or dreaming of some small thing in a claw
Borne up to some dark branch and eaten raw.

Looking into History

By Richard Wilbur

I.

Five soldiers fixed by Mathew Brady's eye
Stand in a land subdued beyond belief.
Belief might lend them life again. I try
Like orphaned Hamlet working up his grief

To see my spellbound fathers in these men
Who, breathless in their amber atmosphere,
Show but the postures men affected then
And the hermit faces of a finished year.

The guns and gear and all are strange until
Beyond the tents I glimpse a file of trees
Verging a road that struggles up a hill.
They're sycamores.
                The long-abated breeze

Flares in those boughs I know, and hauls the sound
Of guns and a great forest in distress.
Fathers, I know my cause, and we are bound
Beyond that hill to fight at Wilderness.

II.

But trick your eyes with Birnam Wood, or think
How fire-cast shadows of the bankside trees
Rode on the back of Simois to sink
In the wide waters. Reflect how history's

Changes are like the sea's, which mauls and mulls
Its salvage of the world in shifty waves,
Shrouding in evergreen the oldest hulls
And yielding views of its confounded graves

To the new moon, the sun, or any eye
That in its shallow shoreward version sees
The pebbles charging with a deathless cry
And carageen memorials of trees.

III.

Now, old man of the sea,
I start to understand:
The will will find no stillness
Back in a stilled land.

The dead give no command
And shall not find their voice
Till they be mustered by
Some present fatal choice.

Let me now rejoice
In all impostures, take
The shape of lion or leopard,
Boar, or watery snake,

Or like the comber break,
Yet in the end stand fast
And by some fervent fraud
Father the waiting past,

Resembling at the last
The self-established tree
That draws all waters toward
Its live formality.

Love Calls Us to the Things of This World

By Richard Wilbur

The eyes open to a cry of pulleys,
And spirited from sleep, the astounded soul
Hangs for a moment bodiless and simple
As false dawn.
                Outside the open window
The morning air is all awash with angels.

Some are in bed-sheets, some are in blouses,
Some are in smocks: but truly there they are.
Now they are rising together in calm swells
Of halcyon feeling, filling whatever they wear
With the deep joy of their impersonal breathing;

Now they are flying in place, conveying
The terrible speed of their omnipresence, moving
And staying like white water; and now of a sudden
They swoon down into so rapt a quiet
That nobody seems to be there.
                The soul shrinks

From all that it is about to remember,
From the punctual rape of every blessèd day,
And cries,
        "Oh, let there be nothing on earth but laundry,
Nothing but rosy hands in the rising steam
And clear dances done in the sight of heaven."

Yet, as the sun acknowledges
With a warm look the world's hunks and colors,
The soul descends once more in bitter love
To accept the waking body, saying now
In a changed voice as the man yawns and rises,
"Bring them down from their ruddy gallows;
Let there be clean linen for the backs of thieves;
Let lovers go fresh and sweet to be undone,
And the heaviest nuns walk in a pure floating
Of dark habits,
                keeping their difficult balance."

Friendship After Love

By Ella Wheeler Wilcox

After the fierce midsummer all ablaze
Has burned itself to ashes, and expires
In the intensity of its own fires,
There come the mellow, mild, St. Martin days
Crowned with the calm of peace, but sad with haze.
So after Love has led us, till he tires
Of his own throes, and torments, and desires,
Comes large-eyed friendship: with a restful gaze,
He beckons us to follow, and across
Cool verdant vales we wander free from care.
Is it a touch of frost lies in the air?
Why are we haunted with a sense of loss?
We do not wish the pain back, or the heat;
And yet, and yet, these days are incomplete.

Speak

By Phillip B. Williams

A storm and so a gift.
Its swift approach
lifts gravel from the road.
A fence is flattened in
the course of the storm's
worse attempt at language —
thunder's umbrage. A tree
is torn apart,
blown upward through a bedroom
window. A boy winnows
through the pile
of shards for the sharpest parts
from the blown-apart
glass. He has
a bag that holds found edges
jagged as a stag's
horns or smooth as
a single pane smashed into
smaller panes that he sticks
his hand into
to make blood web across
his ache-less skin flexing
like fish gills
O-lipped for a scream

it cannot make.
He wants to feel
what his friends have felt,
the slant of fear on their faces
he could never
recreate, his body configured
without pain. When his skin's
pouting welts
don't rake a whimper
from his mouth, he runs
outside, arms up
for the storm, aluminum
baseball bat held out
to the sky
until lightning with an electric
tongue makes his viscera
luminescent;
the boy's first word for pain
is the light's
new word for home.

Vision in Which the Final Blackbird Disappears

By Phillip B. Williams

A monstrosity in the alley.
A many-bodied movement grouped
for terror, their flights' brief shadows
on the kitchen curtains, on the street's
reliquaries of loose squares and hustle.
Some minds are groomed for defiance. The youngest
calls out his territory with muscular vowels
where street light spills peculiar, his hand
a chorus of heat and recoil. "Could have been
a doctor" say those who knew and did not
know him, though he never wanted to know
what gargles endlessly in a body — wet hives,
planets unspooled from their throbbing shapes.
There are many ways to look at this.
He got what he wished against. He got
wings on his shoes for a sacrifice. The postulate
that stars turn a blind eye to the cobalt corners
of rooms is incorrect. Light only helps or ruins sight.
Daylight does cruel things to a boy's face.

Danse Russe

By William Carlos Williams

If I when my wife is sleeping
and the baby and Kathleen
are sleeping
and the sun is a flame-white disc
in silken mists
above shining trees,—
if I in my north room
dance naked, grotesquely
before my mirror
waving my shirt round my head
and singing softly to myself:
“I am lonely, lonely.
I was born to be lonely,
I am best so!”
If I admire my arms, my face,
my shoulders, flanks, buttocks
against the yellow drawn shades,—

Who shall say I am not
the happy genius of my household?

Queen-Anne’s Lace

By William Carlos Williams

Her body is not so white as
anemony petals nor so smooth—nor
so remote a thing. It is a field
of the wild carrot taking
the field by force; the grass
does not raise above it.
Here is no question of whiteness,
white as can be, with a purple mole
at the center of each flower.
Each flower is a hand’s span
of her whiteness. Wherever
his hand has lain there is
a tiny purple blemish. Each part
is a blossom under his touch
to which the fibres of her being
stem one by one, each to its end,
until the whole field is a
white desire, empty, a single stem,

a cluster, flower by flower,
a pious wish to whiteness gone over—
or nothing.

To Elise

By William Carlos Williams

The pure products of America
go crazy—
mountain folk from Kentucky

or the ribbed north end of
Jersey
with its isolate lakes and

valleys, its deaf-mutes, thieves
old names
and promiscuity between

devil-may-care men who have taken
to railroading
out of sheer lust of adventure—

and young slatterns, bathed
in filth
from Monday to Saturday

to be tricked out that night
with gauds
from imaginations which have no

peasant traditions to give them
character
but flutter and flaunt

sheer rags—succumbing without
emotion
save numbed terror

under some hedge of choke-cherry
or viburnum—
which they cannot express—

Unless it be that marriage
perhaps

with a dash of Indian blood

will throw up a girl so desolate
so hemmed round
with disease or murder

that she'll be rescued by an
agent—
reared by the state and

sent out at fifteen to work in
some hard-pressed
house in the suburbs—

some doctor's family, some Elsie—
voluptuous water
expressing with broken

brain the truth about us—
her great
ungainly hips and flopping breasts

addressed to cheap
jewelry
and rich young men with fine eyes

as if the earth under our feet
were
an excrement of some sky

and we degraded prisoners
destined
to hunger until we eat filth

while the imagination strains
after deer
going by fields of goldenrod in

the stifling heat of September
Somehow
it seems to destroy us

It is only in isolate flecks that
something
is given off

No one
to witness
and adjust, no one to drive the car

Ex Libris

By Eleanor Wilner

By the stream, where the ground is soft
and gives, under the slightest pressure—even
the fly would leave its footprint here
and the paw of the shrew the crescent
of its claws like the strokes of a chisel
in clay; where the lightest chill, lighter
than the least rumor of winter, sets the reeds
to a kind of speaking, and a single drop of rain
leaves a crater to catch the first silver
glint of sun when the clouds slide away
from each other like two tired lovers,
and the light returns, pale, though brightened
by the last chapter of late autumn:
copper, rusted oak, gold aspen, and the red
pages of maple, the wind leafing through to the end
the annals of beech, the slim volumes
of birch, the elegant script of the ferns ...

for the birds, it is all
notations for a coda, for the otter
an invitation to the river,
and for the deer—a dream
in which to disappear, light-footed
on the still open book of earth,
adding the marks of their passage,
adding it all in, waiting only
for the first thick flurry of snowflakes
for cover, soft cover that carries
no title, no name.

High Noon at Los Alamos

By Eleanor Wilner

To turn a stone
with its white squirming
underneath, to pry the disc
from the sun’s eclipse—white heat

coiling in the blinded eye: to these malign
necessities we come
from the dim time of dinosaurs
who crawled like breathing lava
from the earth's cracked crust, and swung
their tiny heads above the lumbering tons
of flesh, brains no bigger than a fist
clenched to resist the white flash
in the sky the day the sun-flares
pared them down to relics for museums,
turned glaciers back, seared Sinai's
meadows black—the ferns withered, the swamps
were melted down to molten mud, the cells
uncoupled, recombined, and madly
multiplied, huge trees toppled to the ground,
the slow life there abandoned hope,
a caterpillar stiffened in the grass.
Two apes, caught in the act of coupling,
made a mutant child
who woke to sunlight wondering, his mother
torn by the huge new head
that forced the narrow birth canal.

As if compelled to repetition
and to unearth again
white fire at the heart of matter—fire
we sought and fire we spoke,
our thoughts, however elegant, were fire
from first to last—like sentries set to watch
at Argos for the signal fire
passed peak to peak from Troy
to Nagasaki, triumphant echo of the burning
city walls and prologue to the murders
yet to come—we scan the sky
for that bright flash,
our eyes stared white from watching
for the signal fire that ends
the epic—a cursed line
with its caesura, a pause
to signal peace, or a rehearsal
for the silence.

Without Regret

By Eleanor Wilner

Nights, by the light of whatever would burn:
tallow, tinder and the silken rope
of wick that burns slow, slow
we wove the baskets from the long gold strands
of wheat that were another silk: worm soul
spun the one, yellow seed in the dark soil, the other.

The fields lay fallow, swollen with frost,
expectant winter. Mud clung to the edges
of our gowns; we had hung back like shadows
on the walls of trees and watched. In the little circles
that our tapers threw, murdered men rose red
in their clanging armor, muttered
words that bled through the bars
of iron masks: *the lord*
who sold us to the glory fields, lied.

Trumpets without tongues, we wove lilies
into the baskets. When they asked us
what we meant by these, we'd say "mary, mary"
and be still. We lined the baskets on the sill
in the barn, where it is always dusk
and the cows smell sweet. Now the snow

sifts through the trees, dismembered
lace, the white dust of angels, angels.
And the ringing of keys that hang
in bunches at our waists, and the sound of silk
whispering, whispering.
There is nothing in the high windows
but swirling snow,

the glittering milk of winter.
The halls grow chill. The candles flicker.
Let them wait who will and think what they want.
The lord has gone with the hunt, and the snow,
the snow grows thicker. Well he will keep
till spring thaw comes. Head, hand, and heart—
baskets of wicker, baskets of straw.

Black Matters

By Keith S. Wilson

after D.H. Lawrence

shall i tell you, then, that we exist?
there came a light, blue and white careening.
the police like wailing angels
to bitter me.

and so this:
dark matter is hypothetical. know
that it cannot be seen

in the gunpowder of a flower,
in a worm that raisins on the concrete,
in a man that wills himself not to speak.

gags, oh gags.
for a shadow cannot breathe.
it deprives them of nothing. pride

is born in the black and then dies in it.
i hear our shadow, low treble
of the clasping of our hands.

dark matter is invisible.
we infer it: how light bends around a black body,
and still you do not see black halos, even here,

my having told you plainly where they are.

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

And I wonder where you are

By Tanaya Winder

Sacred stars blanket a nighttime sky,
each light reminds us of the preciousness of life.
Your memory lives along the Milky Way,
each twinkle saying don't forget my name.

It's an epidemic, a sickness of the earth,
a war we enter as soon as we are birthed.

Indigenous women, girls, our two-spirit, too.
When did this world start disappearing you?

Being

By Tanaya Winder

Wake up, greet the sun, and pray.
Burn cedar, sweet grass, sage—
sacred herbs to honor the lives we've been given,
for we have been gifted these ways since the beginning of time.
Remember, when you step into the arena of your life,
think about those who stand beside you, next to, and with you.
Your ancestors are always in your corner, along with your people.
When we enter this world we are born hungry,
our spirits long for us to live out our traditions
that have been passed down for generations.
Prayer, ceremony, dance, language—our ways of being.
Never forget you were put on this earth for a reason—
honor your ancestors.
Be a good relative.

The Darker Sooner

By Catherine Wing

Then came the darker sooner,
came the later lower.
We were no longer a sweeter-here
happily-ever-after. We were after ever.
We were farther and further.
More was the word we used for harder.
Lost was our standard-bearer.
Our gods were fallen faster,
and fallen larger.
The day was duller, duller
was disaster. Our charge was error.
Instead of leader we had louder,
instead of lover, never. And over this river
broke the winter's black weather.

Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight

By Yvor Winters

Reptilian green the wrinkled throat,
Green as a bough of yew the beard;

He bent his head, and so I smote;
Then for a thought my vision cleared.

The head dropped clean; he rose and walked;
He fixed his fingers in the hair;
The head was unabashed and talked;
I understood what I must dare.

His flesh, cut down, arose and grew.
He bade me wait the season's round,
And then, when he had strength anew,
To meet him on his native ground.

The year declined; and in his keep
I passed in joy a thriving yule;
And whether waking or in sleep,
I lived in riot like a fool.

He beat the woods to bring me meat.
His lady, like a forest vine,
Grew in my arms; the growth was sweet;
And yet what thoughtless force was mine!

By practice and conviction formed,
With ancient stubbornness ingrained,
Although her body clung and swarmed,
My own identity remained.

Her beauty, lithe, unholy, pure,
Took shapes that I had never known;
And had I once been insecure,
Had grafted laurel in my bone.

And then, since I had kept the trust,
Had loved the lady, yet was true,
The knight withheld his giant thrust
And let me go with what I knew.

I left the green bark and the shade,
Where growth was rapid, thick, and still;
I found a road that men had made
And rested on a drying hill.

Tasting Braille

By Kathi Wolfe

> People can ... read Braille with their lips and their tongue ...
> — David J. Linden, *The Kojo Nnamdi Show*

Whitman is a foot-long sub
of grass-fed beef,
Falstaff, a fat onion ring,
Ophelia, a wailing wine.
Judas Iscariot's kiss
turns my lips against themselves.
Emily D makes my tongue
want to fly a kite.
The tongues of angels,
I cannot swallow.

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

My Standard Response

By Karenne Wood

I.

The first question is always phrased this way:
"So. How much Indian *are* you?"

II.

We did not live in tepees.
We did not braid our hair.
We did not fringe our shirts.
We did not wear war bonnets.
We did not chase the buffalo.
We did not carry shields.
We were never Plains Indians.
We tried to ride,
but we kept falling off of our dogs.

III.

A local official came to our office to ask our help with a city event. He had a splendid idea, he said. To kick off the event and show everyone in town that our tribe was still around, we should go up to the bluff overlooking the city and make a big smoke signal. Then they would know we were here.

Who ever heard of smoke signals in the forests? I imagined us upon the bluff, lighting one of those firestarter bricks. We haven't made fire since the Boy Scouts took over. And how would the citizens know it was us? They'd probably call the fire department.

IV.

As they ask, they think, *yes,*
I can see it in her face. High cheekbones
(whatever those are) *and dark hair*.

Here's a thought: don't we all have
high cheekbones? If we didn't,
our faces would cave in.
(But I do have a colonized nose.)

I'm sick of explaining myself.

"You know," I finally say,
"It doesn't matter to my people."
I ride off to my ranch-style home.
Time to weave a basket, or something.

football dreams

By Jacqueline Woodson

No one was faster
than my father on the football field.
No one could keep him
from crossing the line. Then
touching down again.
Coaches were watching the way he moved,
his easy stride, his long arms reaching
up, snatching the ball from its soft pockets
of air.

My father dreamed football dreams,
and woke up to a scholarship
at Ohio State University.
Grown now
living the big-city life
in Columbus
just sixty miles
from Nelsonville
and from there
Interstate 70 could get you

on your way west to Chicago
Interstate 77 could take you south
but my father said
no colored Buckeye in his right mind
would ever want to go there.

From Columbus, my father said,
you could go just about
anywhere

genetics

By Jacqueline Woodson

My mother has a gap between
her two front teeth. So does Daddy Gunnar.
Each child in this family has the same space
connecting us.

Our baby brother, Roman, was born pale as dust.
His soft brown curls and eyelashes stop
people on the street.
Whose angel child is this? they want to know.
When I say, *My brother*, the people
wear doubt
thick as a cape
until we smile
and the cape falls.

Occassional Poem

By Jacqueline Woodson

Ms. Marcus says that an occasional poem is a poem
written about something
important
or special
that's gonna happen
or already did.
Think of a specific occasion, she says—*and write about it.*

Like what?! Lamont asks.
He's all slouched down in his seat.
I don't feel like writing about no occasion.

How about your birthday? Ms. Marcus says.

What about it? Just a birthday. Comes in June and it ain't
June, Lamont says. *As a matter of fact,*
he says, *it's January and it's snowing.*
Then his voice gets real low and he says
And when it's January and all cold like this
feels like June's a long, long ways away.

The whole class looks at Ms. Marcus.
Some of the kids are nodding.
Outside the sky looks like it's made out of metal
and the cold, cold air is rattling the windowpanes
and coming underneath them too.

I seen Lamont's coat.
It's gray and the sleeves are too short.
It's down but it looks like a lot of the feathers fell out
a long time ago.
Ms. Marcus got a nice coat.
It's down too but real puffy so
maybe when she's inside it
she can't even tell January from June.

Then write about January, Ms. Marcus says, *that's*
an occasion.
But she looks a little bit sad when she says it
Like she's sorry she ever brought the whole
occasional poem thing up.

I was gonna write about Mama's funeral
but Lamont and Ms. Marcus going back and forth
zapped all the ideas from my head.

I guess them arguing
on a Tuesday in January's an occasion
So I guess this is an occasional poem.

Home and the Homeless

By Elizabeth Woody

The buildings are worn.
The trees are strong and ancient.
They bend against the grid of electric lines.
The windows are broken
by the homeless and the cold past.
I am home on the yard

that spreads mint, pales the Victorian roses,
takes into it the ravaged lilac tree.
The black bulk of plastic lies about
stopping unwanted weeds for the Landlord.
Tattered, the cedar tree is chipped to dry heaps of recklessness.
The unwanted spreads by the power of neglect.
The wear of traffic says that we are out of time,
must hurry.

Age, the creak in the handmade screen door fades behind itself.

Illumination

By Elizabeth Woody

The irresistible and benevolent light
brushes through the angel-wing begonias,
the clippings of ruddy ears for the living room.
Intimate motes, debris of grounded, forlorn walks,
speckle through the vitreous quality of blush.
As fluid lulls turn like trout backs, azure-tipped fins
oscillate in the shallows, the clear floating
is dizziness.

Tender events are meeting halves and wholes of affinity,
the recurrence of whimsy and parallel streams
flush away the blockage of malaise.
Incessant gratitude, pliable kindness smolders
in the husk of these sweet accumulations:
abalone shells, the thoughtful carvings from friends,
the stone of another's pocket, the photo of mystified
moon over water, the smiles of worn chairs.

Austere hopes find pleasure in lately cherished flowers.
The blooms are articulate deluge, hues of delicacy.
Petals parted dim renderings, the viable imprint
of the blood-hot beam of light with reformed courage.
Beveling the finish to suppression, the blade of choice
brings the flourish of dividing while adequately doubling
worth by two. Multiplying. The luminescent burning of space.
The heat is a domicile as abandoned as red roses budding
their ascension from stem.

The sun has its own drum contenting itself with the rose
heart it takes into continual rumbling. The connection
of surface and hand. The great head of dark clouds finds

its own place of unraveled repercussions and disruption,
elsewhere, over the tall, staunch mountains of indemnity.

Goldfish

By Koon Woon

The goldfish in my bowl
turns into a carp each night.
Swimming in circles in the day,
regal, admired by emperors,
but each night, while I sleep,
it turns into silver, a dagger
cold and sharp, couched at one spot,
enough to frighten cats.

The rest of the furniture
squats in the cold and dark,
complains of being a lone man's
furnishings, and plots a revolt.
I can hear myself snore, but not
their infidelity. Sometimes I wake
with a start; silently they move back
into their places.

I have been unpopular with myself,
pacing in my small, square room.
But my uncle said, "Even in a palace,
you can but sleep in one room."
With this I become humble as a simple
preacher, saying, "I have no powers;
they emanate from God."
With this I sleep soundly,

Fish or no fish, dagger or no dagger.
When I wake, my fish is gold,
it pleases me with a trail of bubbles.
My furniture has been loyal all night,
waiting to provide me comfort.
There was no conspiracy against a poor man.
With this I consider myself king.

Floating Island

By Dorothy Wordsworth

Harmonious Powers with Nature work
On sky, earth, river, lake, and sea:
Sunshine and storm, whirlwind and breeze
All in one duteous task agree.

Once did I see a slip of earth,
By throbbing waves long undermined,
Loosed from its hold; — *how* no one knew
But all might see it float, obedient to the wind.

Might see it, from the mossy shore
Dissevered float upon the Lake,
Float, with its crest of trees adorned
On which the warbling birds their pastime take.

Food, shelter, safety there they find
There berries ripen, flowerets bloom;
There insects live their lives — and die:
A peopled *world* it is; in size a tiny room.

And thus through many seasons' space
This little Island may survive
But Nature, though we mark her not,
Will take away — may cease to give.

Perchance when you are wandering forth
Upon some vacant sunny day
Without an object, hope, or fear,
Thither your eyes may turn — the Isle is passed away.

Buried beneath the glittering Lake!
Its place no longer to be found,
Yet the lost fragments shall remain,
To fertilize some other ground.

I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud

By William Wordsworth

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;

Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

Lines Written in Early Spring

By William Wordsworth

I heard a thousand blended notes,
While in a grove I sate reclined,
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to the mind.

To her fair works did Nature link
The human soul that through me ran;
And much it grieved my heart to think
What man has made of man.

Through primrose tufts, in that green bower,
The periwinkle trailed its wreaths;
And ’tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes.

The birds around me hopped and played,
Their thoughts I cannot measure:—
But the least motion which they made

It seemed a thrill of pleasure.

The budding twigs spread out their fan,
To catch the breezy air;
And I must think, do all I can,
That there was pleasure there.

If this belief from heaven be sent,
If such be Nature's holy plan,
Have I not reason to lament
What man has made of man?

Nuns Fret Not at Their Convent's Narrow Room

By William Wordsworth

Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room;
And hermits are contented with their cells;
And students with their pensive citadels;
Maids at the wheel, the weaver at his loom,
Sit blithe and happy; bees that soar for bloom,
High as the highest Peak of Furness-fells,
Will murmur by the hour in foxglove bells:
In truth the prison, into which we doom
Ourselves, no prison is: and hence for me,
In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound
Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground;
Pleased if some Souls (for such there needs must be)
Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,
Should find brief solace there, as I have found.

Surprised by Joy

By William Wordsworth

Surprised by joy—impatient as the Wind
I turned to share the transport—Oh! with whom
But Thee, long buried in the silent Tomb,
That spot which no vicissitude can find?
Love, faithful love, recalled thee to my mind—
But how could I forget thee?—Through what power,
Even for the least division of an hour,
Have I been so beguiled as to be blind
To my most grievous loss!—That thought's return
Was the worst pang that sorrow ever bore,
Save one, one only, when I stood forlorn,

Knowing my heart’s best treasure was no more;
That neither present time, nor years unborn
Could to my sight that heavenly face restore.

The Tables Turned

By William Wordsworth

Up! up! my Friend, and quit your books;
Or surely you'll grow double:
Up! up! my Friend, and clear your looks;
Why all this toil and trouble?

The sun above the mountain's head,
A freshening lustre mellow
Through all the long green fields has spread,
His first sweet evening yellow.

Books! 'tis a dull and endless strife:
Come, hear the woodland linnet,
How sweet his music! on my life,
There's more of wisdom in it.

And hark! how blithe the throstle sings!
He, too, is no mean preacher:
Come forth into the light of things,
Let Nature be your teacher.

She has a world of ready wealth,
Our minds and hearts to bless—
Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health,
Truth breathed by cheerfulness.

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:—
We murder to dissect.

Enough of Science and of Art;
Close up those barren leaves;
Come forth, and bring with you a heart

That watches and receives.

The World Is Too Much With Us

By William Wordsworth

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;—
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

The Appalachian Book of the Dead

By Charles Wright

Sunday, September Sunday ... Outdoors,
Like an early page from The Appalachian Book of the Dead,
Sunlight lavishes brilliance on every surface,
Doves settle, surreptitious angels, on tree limb and box branch,
A crow calls, deep in its own darkness,
Something like water ticks on
Just there, beyond the horizon, just there, steady clock ...

Go in fear of abstractions ...
Well, possibly. Meanwhile,
They *are* the strata our bodies rise through, the sere veins
Our skins rub off on.
For instance, whatever enlightenment there might be
Housels compassion and affection, those two tributaries
That river above our lives,
Whose waters we sense the sense of
late at night, and later still.

Uneasy, suburbanized,
I drift from the lawn chair to the back porch to the dwarf orchard
Testing the grass and border garden.

A stillness, as in the passageways of Paradise,
Bell jars the afternoon.
Leaves, like *ex votos,* hang hard and shine
Under the endlessness of heaven.
Such skeletal altars, such vacant sanctuary.

It always amazes me
How landscape recalibrates the stations of the dead,
How what we see jacks up
the odd quotient of what we don't see,
How God's breath reconstitutes our walking up and walking down.
First glimpse of autumn, stretched tight and snicked, a bad face lift,
Flicks in and flicks out,
a virtual reality.
Time to begin the long division.

Clear Night

By Charles Wright

Clear night, thumb-top of a moon, a back-lit sky.
Moon-fingers lay down their same routine
On the side deck and the threshold, the white keys and the black keys.
Bird hush and bird song. A cassia flower falls.

I want to be bruised by God.
I want to be strung up in a strong light and singled out.
I want to be stretched, like music wrung from a dropped seed.
I want to be entered and picked clean.

And the wind says "What?" to me.
And the castor beans, with their little earrings of death, say "What?" to me.
And the stars start out on their cold slide through the dark.
And the gears notch and the engines wheel.

Auto-Lullaby

By Franz Wright

Think of a sheep
knitting a sweater;
think of your life
getting better and better.

Think of your cat
asleep in a tree;

think of that spot
where you once skinned your knee.

Think of a bird
that stands in your palm.
Try to remember
the Twenty-first Psalm.

Think of a big pink horse
galloping south;
think of a fly, and
close your mouth.

If you feel thirsty, then
drink from your cup.
The birds will keep singing
until they wake up.

To Myself

By Franz Wright

You are riding the bus again
burrowing into the blackness of Interstate 80,
the sole passenger

with an overhead light on.
And I am with you.
I'm the interminable fields you can't see,

the little lights off in the distance
(in one of those rooms we are
living) and I am the rain

and the others all
around you, and the loneliness you love,
and the universe that loves you specifically, maybe,

and the catastrophic dawn,
the nicotine crawling on your skin—
and when you begin

to cough I won't cover my face,
and if you vomit this time I will hold you:
everything's going to be fine

I will whisper.
It won’t always be like this.
I am going to buy you a sandwich.

Beginning

By James Wright

The moon drops one or two feathers into the field.
The dark wheat listens.
Be still.
Now.
There they are, the moon's young, trying
Their wings.
Between trees, a slender woman lifts up the lovely shadow
Of her face, and now she steps into the air, now she is gone
Wholly, into the air.
I stand alone by an elder tree, I do not dare breathe
Or move.
I listen.
The wheat leans back toward its own darkness,
And I lean toward mine.

A Blessing

By James Wright

Just off the highway to Rochester, Minnesota,
Twilight bounds softly forth on the grass.
And the eyes of those two Indian ponies
Darken with kindness.
They have come gladly out of the willows
To welcome my friend and me.
We step over the barbed wire into the pasture
Where they have been grazing all day, alone.
They ripple tensely, they can hardly contain their happiness
That we have come.
They bow shyly as wet swans. They love each other.
There is no loneliness like theirs.
At home once more,
They begin munching the young tufts of spring in the darkness.
I would like to hold the slenderer one in my arms,
For she has walked over to me
And nuzzled my left hand.
She is black and white,
Her mane falls wild on her forehead,

And the light breeze moves me to caress her long ear
That is delicate as the skin over a girl's wrist.
Suddenly I realize
That if I stepped out of my body I would break
Into blossom.

Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota

By James Wright

Over my head, I see the bronze butterfly,
Asleep on the black trunk,
Blowing like a leaf in green shadow.
Down the ravine behind the empty house,
The cowbells follow one another
Into the distances of the afternoon.
To my right,
In a field of sunlight between two pines,
The droppings of last year's horses
Blaze up into golden stones.
I lean back, as the evening darkens and comes on.
A chicken hawk floats over, looking for home.
I have wasted my life.

Youth

By James Wright

Strange bird,
His song remains secret.
He worked too hard to read books.
He never heard how Sherwood Anderson
Got out of it, and fled to Chicago, furious to free himself
From his hatred of factories.
My father toiled fifty years
At Hazel-Atlas Glass,
Caught among girders that smash the kneecaps
Of dumb honyaks.
Did he shudder with hatred in the cold shadow of grease?
Maybe. But my brother and I do know
He came home as quiet as the evening.

He will be getting dark, soon,
And loom through new snow.
I know his ghost will drift home

To the Ohio River, and sit down, alone,
Whittling a root.
He will say nothing.
The waters flow past, older, younger
Than he is, or I am.

The Healing Improvisation of Hair

By Jay Wright

If you undo your do you would
be strange. Hair has been on my mind.
I used to lean in the doorway
and watch my stony woman wind
the copper through the black, and play
with my understanding, show me she cóuld
take a cup of river water,
and watch it shimmy, watch it change,
turn around and become ash bone.
Wind in the cottonwoods wakes me
to a day so thin its breastbone
shows, so paid out it shakes me free
of its blue dust. I will arrange
that river water, bottom juice.
I conjure my head in the stream
and ride with the silk feel of it
as my woman bathes me, and shaves
away the scorn, sponges the grit
of solitude from my skin, laves
the salt water of self-esteem
over my feathering body.
How like joy to come upon me
in remembering a head of hair
and the way water would caress
it, and stress beauty in the flair
and cut of the only witness
to my dance under sorrow's tree.
This swift darkness is spring's first hour.

I carried my life, like a stone,
in a ragged pocket, but I
had a true weaving song, a sly
way with rhythm, a healing tone.

After a Rainstorm

By Robert Wrigley

Because I have come to the fence at night,
the horses arrive also from their ancient stable.
They let me stroke their long faces, and I note
in the light of the now-merging moon

how they, a Morgan and a Quarter, have been
by shake-guttered raindrops
spotted around their rumps and thus made
Appaloosas, the ancestral horses of this place.

Maybe because it is night, they are nervous,
or maybe because they too sense
what they have become, they seem
to be waiting for me to say something

to whatever ancient spirits might still abide here,
that they might awaken from this strange dream,
in which there are fences and stables and a man
who doesn't know a single word they understand.

Figure

By Robert Wrigley

You want a piece of me
to see, from the flesh of me,
a flesh from within me
no one's ever seen, not me,
nor the mother or the lovers of me.
A piece that will have been me
but then no longer me,
instead a synecdoche of me,

or possibly metonymy,
a figure of speech of me,
in contiguity or association with me,
a part for the whole of me,
a sliver that once was me,
so you might perceive the end of me.

Might Have Been July, Might Have Been December

By Robert Wrigley

More oblique the eagle's angle
than the osprey's precipitous fall,
but rose up both and under them dangled
a trout, the point of it all.

Festooned, a limb on each one's
favored tree either side of the river,
with chains of bone and lace of skin
the river's wind made shiver.

Sat under them both, one in December,
one in July, in diametrical seasonal airs,
and once arrived home, as I remember,
with a thin white fish rib lodged in my hair.

Coyote, with Mange

By Mark Wunderlich

Oh, Unreadable One, why
have you done this to your dumb creature?
Why have you chosen to punish the coyote

rummaging for chicken bones in the dung heap,
shucked the fur from his tail
and fashioned it into a scabby cane?

Why have you denuded his face,
tufted it, so that when he turns he looks
like a slow child unhinging his face in a smile?

The coyote shambles, crow-hops, keeps his head low,
and without fur, his now visible pizzle
is a sad red protuberance,

his hind legs the backward image
of a bandy-legged grandfather, stripped.
Why have you unhoused this wretch

from his one aesthetic virtue,
taken from him that which kept him
from burning in the sun like a man?

Why have you pushed him from his world into mine,
stopped him there and turned his ear
toward my warning shout?

I Find no Peace

By Sir Thomas Wyatt

I find no peace, and all my war is done.
I fear and hope. I burn and freeze like ice.
I fly above the wind, yet can I not arise;
And nought I have, and all the world I season.
That loseth nor locketh holdeth me in prison
And holdeth me not—yet can I scape no wise—
Nor letteth me live nor die at my device,
And yet of death it giveth me occasion.
Without eyen I see, and without tongue I plain.
I desire to perish, and yet I ask health.
I love another, and thus I hate myself.
I feed me in sorrow and laugh in all my pain;
Likewise displeaseth me both life and death,
And my delight is causer of this strife.

They Flee From Me

By Sir Thomas Wyatt

They flee from me that sometime did me seek
With naked foot, stalking in my chamber.
I have seen them gentle, tame, and meek,
That now are wild and do not remember
That sometime they put themself in danger
To take bread at my hand; and now they range,
Busily seeking with a continual change.

Thanked be fortune it hath been otherwise
Twenty times better; but once in special,
In thin array after a pleasant guise,
When her loose gown from her shoulders did fall,
And she me caught in her arms long and small;
Therewithall sweetly did me kiss
And softly said, “Dear heart, how like you this?”

It was no dream: I lay broad waking.
But all is turned thorough my gentleness
Into a strange fashion of forsaking;

And I have leave to go of her goodness,
And she also, to use newfangleness.
But since that I so kindly am served
I would fain know what she hath deserved.

Cold Blooded Creatures

By Elinor Wylie

Man, the egregious egoist,
(In mystery the twig is bent,)
Imagines, by some mental twist,
That he alone is sentient

Of the intolerable load
Which on all living creatures lies,
Nor stoops to pity in the toad
The speechless sorrow of its eyes.

He asks no questions of the snake,
Nor plumbs the phosphorescent gloom
Where lidless fishes, broad awake,
Swim staring at a night-mare doom.

Full Moon

By Elinor Wylie

My bands of silk and miniver
Momently grew heavier;
The black gauze was beggarly thin;
The ermine muffled mouth and chin;
I could not suck the moonlight in.

Harlequin in lozenges
Of love and hate, I walked in these
Striped and ragged rigmaroles;
Along the pavement my footsoles
Trod warily on living coals.

Shouldering the thoughts I loathed,
In their corrupt disguises clothed,
Morality I could not tear
From my ribs, to leave them bare
Ivory in silver air.

There I walked, and there I raged;
The spiritual savage caged
Within my skeleton, raged afresh
To feel, behind a carnal mesh,
The clean bones crying in the flesh.

Valentine

By Elinor Wylie

Too high, too high to pluck
My heart shall swing.
A fruit no bee shall suck,
No wasp shall sting.

If on some night of cold
It falls to ground
In apple-leaves of gold
I'll wrap it round.

And I shall seal it up
With spice and salt,
In a carven silver cup,
In a deep vault.

Before my eyes are blind
And my lips mute,
I must eat core and rind
Of that same fruit.

Before my heart is dust
At the end of all,
Eat it I must, I must
Were it bitter gall.

But I shall keep it sweet
By some strange art;
Wild honey I shall eat
When I eat my heart.

O honey cool and chaste
As clover's breath!
Sweet Heaven I shall taste
Before my death.

Metamorphosis

By Jenny Xie

Nowhere in those kerosene years
could she find a soft-headed match.

The wife crosses over an ocean, red-faced and cheerless.
Trades the flat pad of a stethoscope for a dining hall spatula.

Life is two choices, she thinks:
you hatch a life, or you pass through one.

Photographs of a child swaddled in layers arrive by post.
Money doesn't, to her embarrassment.

Over time, she grows out her hair. Then she sprouts nerves.
The wife was no fool, but neither did she wander.

She lives inside a season of thrift, which stretches on.
Her sorrow has thickness and a certain sheen.

The wife knows to hurry when she washes.
When she cooks, she licks spoons slowly.

Every night, she made a dish with ground pork.
Paired with a dish that was fibrous.

The Forecast

By Wendy Xu

Distrust this season breeds
in me whole
blue worlds, am second
to leafy nouns,
pinned back darkening lip
of the night,
untrustworthy sidewalk glazed
and sleeping there,
peachy trees, a line drawn from one
brow of a star down
and planted, each pillow
little shimmer, little wilt startled
from out the arranging field
moonlit pale behind
no foxes, in me finding the fragrant

new crisis, not dead still
where I love you in feast
and pledge, worlds rolling first
on crookedly
and on.

Ill-Advised Love Poem

By John Yau

Come live with me
And we will sit

Upon the rocks
By shallow rivers

Come live with me
And we will plant acorns

In each other's mouth
It would be our way

Of greeting the earth
Before it shoves us

Back into the snow
Our interior cavities

Brimming with
Disagreeable substances

Come live with me
Before winter stops

To use the only pillow
The sky ever sleeps on

Our interior cavities
Brimming with snow

Come live with me
Before spring

Swallows the air
And birds sing

Adam's Curse

By William Butler Yeats

We sat together at one summer's end,
That beautiful mild woman, your close friend,
And you and I, and talked of poetry.
I said, 'A line will take us hours maybe;
Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,
Our stitching and unstitching has been naught.
Better go down upon your marrow-bones
And scrub a kitchen pavement, or break stones
Like an old pauper, in all kinds of weather;
For to articulate sweet sounds together
Is to work harder than all these, and yet
Be thought an idler by the noisy set
Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen
The martyrs call the world.'
And thereupon
That beautiful mild woman for whose sake
There's many a one shall find out all heartache
On finding that her voice is sweet and low
Replied, 'To be born woman is to know—
Although they do not talk of it at school—
That we must labour to be beautiful.'
I said, 'It's certain there is no fine thing
Since Adam's fall but needs much labouring.
There have been lovers who thought love should be
So much compounded of high courtesy
That they would sigh and quote with learned looks
Precedents out of beautiful old books;
Yet now it seems an idle trade enough.'

We sat grown quiet at the name of love;
We saw the last embers of daylight die,
And in the trembling blue-green of the sky
A moon, worn as if it had been a shell
Washed by time's waters as they rose and fell
About the stars and broke in days and years.

I had a thought for no one's but your ears:
That you were beautiful, and that I strove
To love you in the old high way of love;
That it had all seemed happy, and yet we'd grown
As weary-hearted as that hollow moon.

The Lake Isle of Innisfree

By William Butler Yeats

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

The Second Coming

By William Butler Yeats

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

The Sorrow of Love

By William Butler Yeats

The brawling of a sparrow in the eaves,
The brilliant moon and all the milky sky,
And all that famous harmony of leaves,
Had blotted out man's image and his cry.

A girl arose that had red mournful lips
And seemed the greatness of the world in tears,
Doomed like Odysseus and the labouring ships
And proud as Priam murdered with his peers;

Arose, and on the instant clamorous eaves,
A climbing moon upon an empty sky,
And all that lamentation of the leaves,
Could but compose man's image and his cry.

To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Nothing

By William Butler Yeats

Now all the truth is out,
Be secret and take defeat
From any brazen throat,
For how can you compete,
Being honor bred, with one
Who were it proved he lies
Were neither shamed in his own
Nor in his neighbors' eyes;
Bred to a harder thing
Than Triumph, turn away
And like a laughing string
Whereon mad fingers play
Amid a place of stone,
Be secret and exult,
Because of all things known
That is most difficult.

When You Are Old

By William Butler Yeats

When you are old and grey and full of sleep,
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look

Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;

How many loved your moments of glad grace,
And loved your beauty with love false or true,
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows of your changing face;

And bending down beside the glowing bars,
Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled
And paced upon the mountains overhead
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

Bel Canto

By Jane Yeh

The opera
In her head

Runs with no interval,
A lot of people singing tunelessly

About the same things.
An overheard

Comment like
A rotting peach.

The overzealous
Cockatoo of her impatience,

Flap flap. The slab
Of blue behind her

Is a sea of
Her doubts. The squirrel

In her stomach
Trying to get out—

They say you have to be
Twice as good. They say

There are pills
For everything now. Enamel

Eyes to see all
The better with, my

Dear. Fur coat
For your tongue—

Lazy

By David Yezzi

I don’t say things I don’t want to say
or chew the fat with fat cats just because.

With favor-givers who want favors back,
I tend to pass on going for the ask.

I send, instead, a series of regrets,
slip the winding snares that people lay.

The unruffledness I feel as a result,
the lank repose, the psychic field of rye

swayed in wavy air, is my respite
among the shivaree of clanging egos

on the packed commuter train again tonight.
Sapping and demeaning—it takes a lot

to get from bed to work and back to bed.
I barely go an hour before I’m caught

wincing at the way that woman laughs
or he keeps clucking at his magazine.

And my annoyance fills me with annoyance.
It’s laziness that lets them seem unreal

—a radio with in-and-out reception
blaring like hell when it finally hits a station.

The song that’s on is not the one I’d hoped for,
so I wait distractedly for what comes next.

Say Grace

By Emily Jungmin Yoon

In my country our shamans were women
and our gods multiple until white people brought
an ecstasy of rosaries and our cities today
glow with crosses like graveyards. As a child
in Sunday school I was told I'd go to hell
if I didn't believe in God. Our teacher was a woman
whose daughters wanted to be nuns and I asked
What about babies and what about Buddha, and she said
They're in hell too and so I memorized prayers
and recited them in front of women
I did not believe in. *Deliver us from evil.*
O sweet Virgin Mary, amen. O sweet. O sweet.
In this country, which calls itself Christian,
what is sweeter than hearing *Have mercy*
on us. From those who serve different gods. O
clement, O loving, O God, O God, amidst ruins,
amidst waters, fleeing, fleeing. *Deliver us from evil*.
O sweet, O sweet. In this country,
point at the moon, at the stars, point at the way the lake lies,
with a hand full of feathers,
and they will look at the feathers. And kill you for it.
If a word for religion they don't believe in is magic
so be it, let us have magic. Let us have
our own mothers and scarves, our spirits,
our shamans and our sacred books. Let us keep
our stars to ourselves and we shall pray
to no one. Let us eat
what makes us holy.

In Little Rock

By Jake Adam York

Perhaps, this morning, we're there,
normal and soon forgotten, as news is
when it's passed over breakfast, like love,
something that's always cast, too
heavy to hold for long. We breathe it in,
the bacon, the coffee. We listen to the little
quavers as the local tongues, water over rock,
rise and fall, like stones skipping soft
into the white that smoothed them. The women
speak like grandmothers, softly

opening their mouths, opening
and drawing advice from themselves,
like biscuits, and offering in kindness
a little more than anyone could ask, more
than anyone can take. I know their pitying.
It looks like patience, the look on everyone's
faces as the peddler shuffles in his blindness,
black hand held open, everyone awaiting
the hiss of door, the whisper in everyone's
throats, breaking from patience into pleasure.

Key to the Dollar Store

By Al Young

Just tell me who the hell am I?
What powers did I, do I hold?
What right have I to say "my"
or "mine" or "me" — all honey-
glazed, all bullet-proofed and
worshipful of any gangster "I"?

The key to the Dollar Store
hangs on my belt. Yes, "my"
again. And what of roof, of bread,
of loving laughter? What's in?
My vinyl favorite Booker Little,
vintage, soothes me. He jars
our ears with trumpet joy and
stuff freed folks stash in cabinets.

Never one to make too much of
why we love and what, I love my
powers. I might put you in my will.

Elegy on Toy Piano

By Dean Young

For Kenneth Koch

You don't need a pony
to connect you to the unseeable
or an airplane to connect you to the sky.

Necessary it is to love to live

and there are many manuals
but in all important ways
one is on one's own.

You need not cut off your hand.
No need to eat a bouquet.
Your head becomes a peach pit.
Your tongue a honeycomb.

Necessary it is to live to love,
to charge into the burning tower
then charge back out
and necessary it is to die.
Even for the trees, even for the pony
connecting you to what can't be grasped.

The injured gazelle falls behind the
herd. One last wild enjambment.

Because of the sores in his mouth,
the great poet struggles with a dumpling.
His work has enlarged the world
but the world is about to stop including him.
He is the tower the world runs out of.

When something becomes ash,
there's nothing you can do to turn it back.
About this, even diamonds do not lie.

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

Cadillac Moon

By Kevin Young

Crashing
again—Basquiat
sends fenders

& letters headlong
into each other
the future. Fusion.

AAAAAAAAAAA.

Big Bang. The Big
Apple, Atom's
behind him—

no sirens
in sight. His career
of careening

since—at six—
playing stickball
a car stole

his spleen. Blind
sided. Move
along folks—nothing

to see here. Driven,
does two Caddys
colliding, biting

the dust he's begun
to snort. Hit
& run. Red

Cross—the pill-pale
ambulance, inside
out, he hitched

to the hospital.
Joy ride. Hot
wired. O the rush

before the wreck—

each Cadillac,
a Titanic,
an iceberg that's met

its match—cabin
flooded
like an engine,

drawing even
dark Shine
from below deck.

FLATS FIX. Chop

shop. Body work
while-u-wait. *In situ*
the spleen

or lien, anterior view—
removed. Given
Gray's Anatomy

by his mother for recovery—

151. Reflexion of spleen
turned forwards
& to the right, like

pages of a book—
Basquiat pulled
into orbit

with tide, the moon
gold as a tooth,
a hubcap gleaming,

gleaned—Shine
swimming for land,
somewhere solid

to spin his own obit.

Eddie Priest's Barbershop & Notary

By Kevin Young

Closed Mondays

is music is men
off early from work is waiting
for the chance at the chair
while the eagle claws holes
in your pockets keeping
time by the turning
of rusty fans steel flowers with
cold breezes is having nothing
better to do than guess at the years
of hair matted beneath the soiled caps

of drunks the pain of running
a fisted comb through stubborn
knots is the dark dirty low
down blues the tender heads
of sons fresh from cornrows all
wonder at losing half their height
is a mother gathering hair for good
luck for a soft wig is the round
difficulty of ears the peach
faced boys asking Eddie
to cut in parts and arrows
wanting to have their names read
for just a few days and among thin
jazz is the quick brush of a done
head the black flood around
your feet grandfathers
stopping their games of ivory
dominoes just before they reach the bone
yard is winking widowers announcing
cut it clean off I'm through courting
and hair only gets in the way is the final
spin of the chair a reflection of
a reflection that sting of wintergreen
tonic on the neck of a sleeping snow
haired man when you realize it is
your turn you are next

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

I am Trying to Break Your Heart

By Kevin Young

I am hoping
to hang your head

on my wall
in shame—

the slightest taxidermy
thrills me. Fish

forever leaping
on the living-room wall—

paperweights made
from skulls

of small animals.
I want to wear

your smile on my sleeve
& break

your heart like a horse
or its leg. Weeks of being

bucked off, then
all at once, you're mine—

Put me down.

I want to call you *thine*

to tattoo *mercy*
along my knuckles. *I assassin*

down the avenue
I hope

to have you forgotten
by noon. To know you

by your knees
palsied by prayer.

Loneliness is a science—

consider the taxidermist's
tender hands

trying to keep from losing
skin, the bobcat grin

of the living.

Negative

By Kevin Young

Wake to find everything black

what was white, all the vice
versa—white maids on TV, black

sitcoms that star white dwarfs
cute as pearl buttons. Black Presidents,
Black Houses. White horse

candidates. All bleach burns
clothes black. Drive roads
white as you are, white songs

on the radio stolen by black bands
like secret pancake recipes, white back-up
singers, ball-players & boxers all

white as tar. Feathers on chickens
dark as everything, boiling in the pot
that called the kettle honky. Even

whites of the eye turn dark, pupils
clear & changing as a cat's.
Is this what we've wanted

& waited for? to see snow
covering everything black
as Christmas, dark pages written

white upon? All our eclipses bright,
dark stars shooting across pale
sky, glowing like ash in fire, shower

every skin. Only money keeps
green, still grows & burns like grass
under dark daylight.

Ode to the Hotel Near the Children's Hospital

By Kevin Young

Praise the restless beds
Praise the beds that do not adjust
    that won't lift the head to feed
    or lower for shots
    or blood
    or raise to watch the tinny TV
Praise the hotel TV that won't quit

its murmur & holler
Praise the room service
that doesn't exist
just the slow delivery to the front desk
of cooling pizzas
& brown bags leaky
greasy & clear
Praise the vending machines
Praise the change
Praise the hot water
& the heat
or the loud cool
that helps the helpless sleep.

Praise the front desk
who knows to wake
Rm 120 when the hospital rings
Praise the silent phone
Praise the dark drawn
by thick daytime curtains
after long nights of waiting,
awake.

Praise the waiting & then praise the nothing
that's better than bad news
Praise the wakeup call
at 6 am
Praise the sleeping in
Praise the card hung on the door
like a whisper
lips pressed silent
Praise the stranger's hands
that change the sweat of sheets
Praise the checking out

Praise the going home
to beds unmade
for days
Beds that won't resurrect
or rise
that lie there like a child should
sleeping, tubeless

Praise this mess
that can be left

Ode to the Midwest

By Kevin Young

The country I come from
Is called the Midwest
—Bob Dylan

I want to be doused
in cheese

& fried. I want
to wander

the aisles, my heart's
supermarket stocked high

as cholesterol. I want to die
wearing a sweatsuit—

I want to live
forever in a Christmas sweater,

a teddy bear nursing
off the front. I want to write

a check in the express lane.
I want to scrape

my driveway clean

myself, early, before
anyone's awake—

that'll put em to shame—
I want to see what the sun

sees before it tells
the snow to go. I want to be

the only black person I know.

I want to throw
out my back & not

complain about it.
I wanta drive

two blocks. Why walk—

I want love, n stuff—

I want to cut
my sutures myself.

I want to jog
down to the river

& make it my bed—

I want to walk
its muddy banks

& make me a withdrawal.

I tried jumping in,
found it frozen—

I'll go home, I guess,
to my rooms where the moon

changes & shines
like television.

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

Pietà

By Kevin Young

I hunted heaven
for him.

No dice.

Too uppity,
it was. Not enough

music, or dark dirt.

I begged the earth empty
of him. Death

believes in us whether
we believe

or not. For a long while
I watch the sound

of a boy bouncing a ball
down the block

take its time
to reach me. Father,

find me when
you want. I'll wait.

Mysticism for Beginners

By Adam Zagjewski
Translated by Clare Cavanagh

The day was mild, the light was generous.
The German on the café terrace
held a small book on his lap.
I caught sight of the title:
Mysticism for Beginners.
Suddenly I understood that the swallows
patrolling the streets of Montepulciano
with their shrill whistles,
and the hushed talk of timid travelers
from Eastern, so-called Central Europe,
and the white herons standing—yesterday? the day before?—
like nuns in fields of rice,
and the dusk, slow and systematic,
erasing the outlines of medieval houses,
and olive trees on little hills,
abandoned to the wind and heat,
and the head of the *Unknown Princess*
that I saw and admired in the Louvre,
and stained-glass windows like butterfly wings
sprinkled with pollen,
and the little nightingale practicing
its speech beside the highway,
and any journey, any kind of trip,
are only mysticism for beginners,
the elementary course, prelude

to a test that's been
postponed.

Try to Praise the Mutilated World

By Adam Zagjewski
Translated by Clare Cavanagh

Try to praise the mutilated world.
Remember June's long days,
and wild strawberries, drops of rosé wine.
The nettles that methodically overgrow
the abandoned homesteads of exiles.
You must praise the mutilated world.
You watched the stylish yachts and ships;
one of them had a long trip ahead of it,
while salty oblivion awaited others.
You've seen the refugees going nowhere,
you've heard the executioners sing joyfully.
You should praise the mutilated world.
Remember the moments when we were together
in a white room and the curtain fluttered.
Return in thought to the concert where music flared.
You gathered acorns in the park in autumn
and leaves eddied over the earth's scars.
Praise the mutilated world
and the gray feather a thrush lost,
and the gentle light that strays and vanishes
and returns.

Saguaros

By Javier Zamora

It was dusk for kilometers and bats in the lavender sky,
like spiders when a fly is caught, began to appear.

And there, not the promised land, but barbwire and barbwire

with nothing growing under it. I tried to fly that dusk

after a bat said *la sangre del saguaro nos seduce*. Sometimes
I wake and my throat is dry, so I drive to botanical gardens

to search for red fruit clutched to saguaros, the ones at dusk

I threw rocks at for the sake of slashing hunger.

But I never find them here. These bats say *speak English only*.
Sometimes in my car, that viscous red syrup

clings to my throat, and it's a tender seed toward my survival:

I also scraped needles first, then carved those tall torsos

for water, then spotlights drove me and thirty others dashing
into palos verdes, green-striped trucks surrounded us,

our empty bottles rattled and our breath spoke with rust.
When the trucks left, a cold cell swallowed us.

Flowers

By Cynthia Zarin

This morning I was walking upstairs
from the kitchen, carrying your
beautiful flowers, the flowers you

brought me last night, calla lilies
and something else, I am not
sure what to call them, white flowers,

of course you had no way of knowing
it has been years since I bought
white flowers—but now you have

and here they are again. I was carrying
your flowers and a coffee cup
and a soft yellow handbag and a book

of poems by a Chinese poet, in
which I had just read the words "come
or go but don't just stand there

in the doorway," as usual I was
carrying too many things, you
would have laughed if you saw me.

It seemed especially important

not to spill the coffee as I usually
do, as I turned up the stairs,

inside the whorl of the house as if
I were walking up inside the lilies.
I do not know how to hold all

the beauty and sorrow of my life.

Smoke in Our Hair

By Ofelia Zepeda

The scent of burning wood holds
the strongest memory.
Mesquite, cedar, piñon, juniper,
all are distinct.
Mesquite is dry desert air and mild winter.
Cedar and piñon are colder places.
Winter air in our hair is pulled away,
and scent of smoke settles in its place.
We walk around the rest of the day
with the aroma resting on our shoulders.
The sweet smell holds the strongest memory.
We stand around the fire.
The sound of the crackle of wood and spark
is ephemeral.
Smoke, like memories, permeates our hair,
our clothing, our layers of skin.
The smoke travels deep
to the seat of memory.
We walk away from the fire;
no matter how far we walk,
we carry this scent with us.
New York City, France, Germany—
we catch the scent of burning wood;
we are brought home.

“They buried their son last winter”

By Serhiy Zhadan
Translated by John Hennessy and Ostap Kin

They buried their son last winter.
Strange weather for winter—rain, thunder.
They buried him quietly—everybody’s busy.

Who did he fight for? I asked. We don't know, they say.
He fought for someone, they say, but who—who knows?
Will it change anything, they say, what's the point now?
I would have asked him myself, but now—there's no need.
And he wouldn't reply—he was buried without his head.

It's the third year of war; they're repairing the bridges.
I know so many things about you, but who'd listen?
I know, for example, the song you used to sing.
I know your sister. I always had a thing for her.
I know what you were afraid of, and why, even.
Who you met that winter, what you told him.
The sky gleams, full of ashes, every night now.
You always played for a neighboring school.
But who did you fight for?

To come here every year, to weed dry grass.
To dig the earth every year—heavy, lifeless.
To see the calm after tragedy every year.
To insist you didn't shoot at us, at your people.
The birds disappear behind waves of rain.
To ask forgiveness for your sins.
But what do I know about your sins?
To beg the rain to finally stop.
It's easier for birds, who know nothing of salvation, the soul.