

This poem was written with great care for rhyme and meter, yet it has the "feel" of free verse.

Read it aloud to hear its music. Where do variations in meter keep it from sounding singsong?

Boy at the Window

53

Richard Wilbur

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

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

This poem starts out in a voice that sounds like an adult's. Read the poem aloud, so that you hear how, in line 32, the voice becomes a child's. Be-



6. bitumen: coal.

fore you read, decide what you think the title means.

The Fury of Overshoes

54

Anne Sexton

They sit in a row
outside the kindergarten,
black, red, brown, all
with those brass buckles.

5 Remember when you couldn't
buckle your own
overshoe
or tie your own
shoe

10 or cut your own meat,
and the tears
running down like mud
because you fell off your
tricycle?

15 Remember, big fish,
when you couldn't swim
and simply slipped under
like a stone frog?
The world wasn't

20 yours,
It belonged to
the big people.
Under your bed

25 sat the wolf
and he made a shadow
when cars passed by
at night.

30 They made you give up
your night light
and your Teddy
and your thumb.

Oh, overshoes,
don't you
remember me,
35 pushing you up and down
in the winter snow?

Oh, thumb,
I want a drink,
it is dark,
40 where are the big people,
when will I get there,
taking giant steps

all day
each day
45 and thinking
nothing of it?

CHILDHOOD OF THE ANCIENTS 55

Andrew Hudgins

Hard? You don't know what hard is, boy:
When I was your age we got up in pitch dark,
and walked five miles to school and ten miles back,
uphill both ways, and all we had for lunch
5 was a cold sweet potato and dry cornbread.

And when we got back home your grandma made us
chop cotton, slop¹ the hogs, then milk the chickens
before supper, and all we had to eat
was chicken-fried² pine straw and redeye gravy.³
Maybe some turnip greens. Maybe some collards.
But what do you know? Shoot, you've always had
hot food plopped in front of you, like magic.
For you, it's all ice cream and soda pop. ■

1. slop. Feed slop, or food scraps, to animals
2. chicken-fried. Battered and deep fried
3. redeye gravy. Gravy made from the juices of ham

56

Night Clouds

Amy Lovat

The white mares¹ of the moon rush along the sky
Beating their golden hoofs upon the glass Heavens;
The white mares of the moon are all standing on their hind legs
Pawing at the green porcelain doors of the remote Heavens.
5 Fly, Mares!
Strain your utmost,
Scatter the milky dust of stars,
Or the tiger sun will leap upon you and destroy you
With one lick of his vermillion tongue. ■

GUIDED READING

What might the "white mares of the moon" be?

GUIDED READING

What does the speaker tell the mares to do? What warning does the speaker give?

1. mares. Mature female horses

WORDS
FOOT
EVERYDAY
USE

por • ce • lain (pôr' sə lin) *adj.*, made of or like a hard, translucent ceramic. We all shuddered when Sula knocked our mother's favorite milky white porcelain vase to the floor, but thankfully the fragile vase did not break.

re • mote (ri môt') *adj.*, distant. Tara lived in a remote town in the desert; only fifty other people lived there, since it was far away from any other towns or cities.

ver • mil • lion (vər mil' yən) *adj.*, bright red or scarlet. After a long hike with his family, Paul warmed himself by the vermillion glow of a campfire.

Abuelito who

Sandra Cisneros

Abuelito who throws coins like rain
 and asks who loves him
 who is dough and feathers
 who is a watch and glass of water
 whose hair is made of fur
 is too sad to come downstairs today
 who tells me in Spanish you are my diamond
 who tells me in English you are my sky
 whose little eyes are string
 can't come out to play
 sleeps in his little room all night and day
 who used to laugh like the letter k
 is sick
 is a doorknob tied to a sour stick
 is tired shut the door
 doesn't live here anymore
 is hiding underneath the bed
 who talks to me inside my head
 is blankets and spoons and big brown shoes
 who snores up and down up and down up and down
 again
 is the rain on the roof that falls like coins
 asking who loves him
 who loves him who?

57

WHAT YOUR MOTHER TELLS YOU NOW

58

mitsuye yamada

其母が今言ふ事
 其内七分之来る

*haha ga ima yu-koto
 sono uchi ni
 wakatte kuru*

What your mother tells you
 now
 in time
 you will come to know.

60

Legacies

Nikki Giovanni

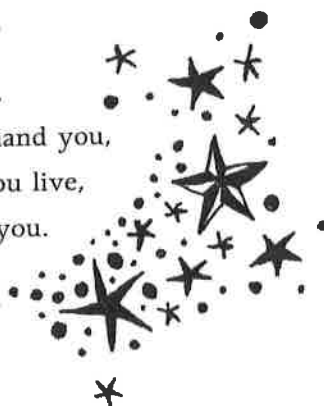
her grandmother called her from the playground
 "yes, ma'am"
 "I want chu to learn how to make rolls" said the old
 woman proudly
 but the little girl didn't want
 to learn how because she knew
 even if she couldn't say it that
 that would mean when the old one died she would
 be less
 dependent on her spirit so
 she said
 "I don't want to know how to make no rolls"
 with her lips poked out
 and the old woman wiped her hands on
 her apron saying "lord
 these children"
 and neither of them ever
 said what they meant
 and i guess nobody ever does.

THE ADVERSARY

59

phyllis mcginley

A mother's hardest to forgive.
 Life is the fruit she longs to hand you,
 Ripe on a plate. And while you live,
 Relentlessly she understands you.



61

When you're happy, Mother said, I'm happy. And when you're sad, I'm sad, so if you have a choice between being happy or sad, you should stop always thinking about yourself, & think about me for a change, & be happy. And if you have no choice, & have to be sad, then don't spend the whole day moping, but get it over with, so you & I can be happy again. ■

happy ☺
or
sad Hal Siowitz

PUNISHING

yourself
Hal Siowitz

62

All work & no play, Mother said, makes you into a dull boy. And then the mothers of your friends will think I'm dull too, & won't want to talk to me. You should go out of the house once in a while to see if the world is still there. If you sit around all day you'll become a bitter person, like the old woman who lived in a shoe. She could have moved into a larger place, like a boot, but she stayed where she was, probably because she was mad at her mother, & wanted to punish her, but you don't hurt anybody but yourself if you make your own life miserable. ■

NO MORE

birthdays

63

Hal Siowitz

Don't swing the umbrella in the store, Mother said. There are all these glass jars of spaghetti sauce above your head that can fall on you, & you can die. Then you won't be able to go to tonight's party, or go to the bowling alley tomorrow. And instead of celebrating your birthday with soda & cake, we'll have anniversaries of your death with tea & crackers. And your father & I won't be able to eat spaghetti anymore, because the marinara sauce will remind us of you. ■

The Secret Heart

64

Robert P. Tristram Coffin

Across the years he could recall
His father one way best of all.

In the stillest hour of night
The boy awakened to a light.

5 Half in dreams, he saw his sire°
With his great hands full of fire.

The man had struck a match to see
If his son slept peacefully.

10 He held his palms each side the spark
His love had kindled in the dark.

His two hands were curved apart
In the semblance of a heart.

He wore, it seemed to his small son,
A bare heart on his hidden one,

15 A heart that gave out such a glow
No son awake could bear to know.

It showed a look upon a face
Too tender for the day to trace.

20 One instant, it lit all about,
And then the secret heart went out.

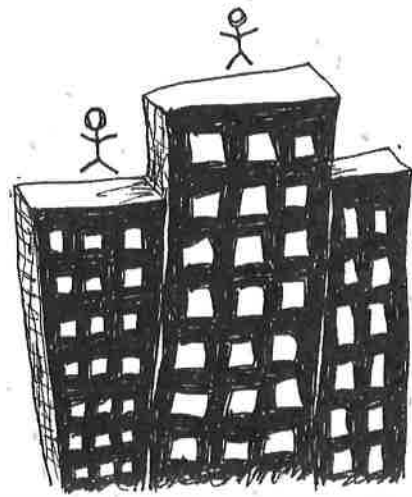
But it shone long enough for one
To know that hands held up the sun.

5. sire: father.

THE TALK 65

sharon olds

In the dark square wooden room at noon
the mother had a talk with her daughter.
The rudeness could not go on, the meanness
to her little brother, the selfishness.
The 8-year-old sat on the bed
in the corner of the room, her irises dark as
the last drops of something, her firm
face melting, reddening,
silver flashes in her eyes like distant
bodies of water glimpsed through woods.
She took it and took it and broke, crying out
I hate being a person! diving
into the mother
as if
into
a deep pond—and she cannot swim,
the child cannot swim.



Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night⁹

(66)

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

5

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

10

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

15

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

1952

⁹. This poem was written during the final illness of Thomas' father, D. J. Thomas, who had been a teacher at the Swansea Grammar School.

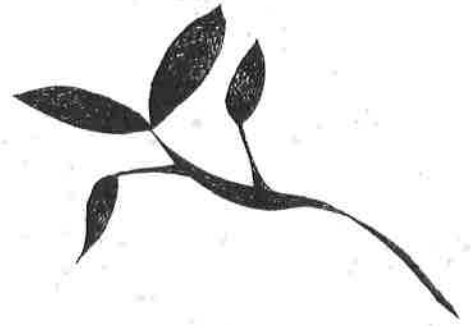
XVIII. OH, WHEN I WAS IN LOVE WITH YOU

(67)

a. e. housman

Oh, when I was in love with you,
Then I was clean and brave,
And miles around the wonder grew
How well did I behave.

And now the fancy passes by,
And nothing will remain,
And miles around they'll say that I
Am quite myself again.



(68)

i carry your heart with me 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 grow:
higher than the 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)



SOMETIMES WITH ONE I LOVE

walt whitman

(69)

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



DIGGING

Seamus Heaney

70

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:
5 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 drills¹
Where he was digging.

10 The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft²
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.

15 By God, the old man could handle a spade.
Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf³ in a day
Than any other man on Toner's bog.⁴

20 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 sods⁵
Over his shoulder, going down and down
For the good turf. Digging.

25 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.

30 Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it.

1. **potato drills.** Small furrows in which potato seeds are planted

2. **the lug, the shaft.** *Lug*—top of the blade (in this case, of the spade); *shaft*—long, slender part of an object (the handle of the spade)

3. **turf.** Slabs of peat (partly decayed plant matter) used as heating fuel in Ireland

4. **bog.** Wet, spongy ground as in a swamp

5. **sods.** Clumps of the surface layer of earth containing grass plants and their roots

FROM
FOR A GIRL
BECOMING

71

joy harjo

for Krista Rae Chico

Don't forget how you started your journey from that rainbow house,
How you traveled and will travel through the mountains and valleys
of human tests.

There are treacherous places along the way, but you can come to us.
There are lakes of tears shimmering sadly there, but you can come to us.
And valleys without horses or kindnesses, but you can come to us.
And angry, jealous gods and wayward humans who will hurt you,
but you can come to us.

You will fall, but you will get back up again, because you are one of us.

And as you travel with us remember this:

Give a drink of water to all who ask, whether they be plant, creature,
human or helpful spirit;

May you always have clean, fresh, water.

Feed your neighbors. Give kind words and assistance
to all you meet along the way. We are all related in this place.

May you be surrounded with the helpfulness of family and good friends.

Grieve with the grieving, share joy with the joyful.

May you build a strong path with beautiful and truthful language.

Clean your room.

May you always have a home: a refuge from storm, a gathering place
for safety, for comfort.

Bury what needs to be buried.

Laugh easily at yourself.

May you always travel lightly and well.

Praise and give thanks for each small and large thing.

May you grow in knowledge, in compassion, in beauty.

Always within you is that day your spirit came to us

When rains came in from the Pacific to bless

They peered over the mountains in response to the singing of medicine plants

Who danced back and forth in shawls of mist

Your mother labored there, so young in earthly years.

And we who love you gather here,

Pollen blows throughout this desert house to bless

And horses run the land, hundreds of them for you,

And you are here to bless.

Francisco X. Alarcon, *Promised Land*

72

let us carry our roots
with us all the time
let us roll them up and
use them as our pillow

let us be the dream
of our elders,
the promise of their ribs,
the answer to their prayers

let us fill up all gaps,
tear down all barriers,
let us find godliness
in every face, every tree

may our ears hear
what nobody wants to hear,
may our eyes see
what everyone wants to hide

may our mouths speak up
the truth of our hearts,
may our arms be branches
that give shade to the needy

let us be a drizzle,
the salt of the earth,
the horizon that unites
the beginning and the end

let us accept ourselves
the way we are,
let us take presents in
and give them back manifold

let us see ourselves
twenty years from now
who is now the doctor,
the nurse who can heal

who is now the teacher
who can really teach
and learn from students,
the social worker who cares

the lawyer who defends
the poor, the innocent,
the organizer who makes
dreams come true

who is now the mother
that takes a child to school,
the lover that can forgive
and love again

let us keep forever
the child within each of us,
may our shoulders grow wings
so we can be butterflies

let us be the key that opens
new doors to our people,
let tomorrow be today,
yesterday has never left

let us all right now
take the first step:
let us finally arrive
at our Promise Land!

América

by Richard Blanco

73

I.

Although Tía Miriam boasted she discovered
at least half-a-dozen uses for peanut butter—
topping for guava shells in syrup,
butter substitute for Cuban toast,
hair conditioner and relaxer—
Mamá never knew what to make
of the monthly five-pound jars
handed out by the immigration department
until my friend, Jeff, mentioned jelly.

II.

There was always pork though,
for every birthday and wedding,
whole ones on Christmas and New Year's Eves,
even on Thanksgiving Day—pork,
fried, broiled or crispy skin roasted—
as well as cauldrons of black beans,
fried plantain chips and *yuca con mojito*.
These items required a special visit
to Antonio's Mercado on the corner of 8th street
where men in *guayaberas* stood in senate
blaming Kennedy for everything—"Ese hijo de puta!"
the bile of Cuban coffee and cigar residue
filling the creases of their wrinkled lips;
clinging to one another's lies of lost wealth,
ashamed and empty as hollow trees.

III.

By seven I had grown suspicious—we were still here.
Overheard conversations about returning
had grown wistful and less frequent.
I spoke English; my parents didn't.
We didn't live in a two story house
with a maid or a wood panel station wagon
nor vacation camping in Colorado.
None of the girls had hair of gold;
none of my brothers or cousins
were named Greg, Peter, or Marcia;
we were not the Brady Bunch.
None of the black and white characters
on Donna Reed or on Dick Van Dyke Show
were named Guadalupe, Lázaro, or Mercedes.
Patty Duke's family wasn't like us either—
they didn't have pork on Thanksgiving,
they ate turkey with cranberry sauce;
they didn't have *yuca*, they had yams
like the dittos of Pilgrims I colored in class.

IV.

A week before Thanksgiving
I explained to my *abuelita*
about the Indians and the Mayflower,
how Lincoln set the slaves free;
I explained to my parents about
the purple mountain's majesty,
"one if by land, two if by sea"
the cherry tree, the tea party,
the amber waves of grain,
the "masses yearning to be free"
liberty and justice for all, until
finally they agreed:
this Thanksgiving we would have turkey,
as well as pork.

V.

Abuelita prepared the poor fowl
as if committing an act of treason,
faking her enthusiasm for my sake.
Mamá set a frozen pumpkin pie in the oven
and prepared candied yams following instructions
I translated from the marshmallow bag.
The table was arrayed with gladiolus,
the plattered turkey loomed at the center
on plastic silver from Woolworths.
Everyone sat in green velvet chairs
we had upholstered with clear vinyl,
except Tío Carlos and Toti, seated
in the folding chairs from the Salvation Army.
I uttered a bilingual blessing
and the turkey was passed around
like a game of Russian Roulette.
"DRY", Tío Berto complained, and proceeded
to drown the lean slices with pork fat drippings
and cranberry jelly—"esa mierda roja," he called it.
Faces fell when *Mamá* presented her ochre pie—
pumpkin was a home remedy for ulcers, not a dessert.
Tía María made three rounds of Cuban coffee
then *Abuelo* and Pepe cleared the living room furniture,
put on a Celia Cruz LP and the entire family
began to *merengue* over the linoleum of our apartment,
sweating rum and coffee until they remembered—
it was 1970 and 46 degrees—
in *América*.
After repositioning the furniture,
an appropriate darkness filled the room.
Tío Berto was the last to leave.

If—

BY RUDYARD KIPLING

74

(‘Brother Square-Toes’—*Rewards and Fairies*)

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

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

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

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

So Much Happiness

by Naomi Shihab Nye

It is difficult to know what to do with so much happiness.
With sadness there is something to rub against,
A wound to tend with lotion and cloth.
When the world falls in around you, you have pieces to pick up,
Something to hold in your hands, like ticket stubs or change.
But happiness floats.
It doesn't need you to hold it down.
It doesn't need anything.
Happiness lands on the roof of the next house, singing,
And disappears when it wants to.
You are happy either way.
Even the fact that you once lived in a peaceful tree house
And now live over a quarry of noise and dust
Cannot make you unhappy.
Everything has a life of its own,
It too could wake up filled with possibilities
Of coffee cake and ripe peaches,
And love even the floor which needs to be swept,
The soiled linens and scratched records....
Since there is no place large enough
To contain so much happiness,
You shrug, you raise your hands, and it flows out of you
Into everything you touch. You are not responsible.
You take no credit, as the night sky takes no credit
For the moon, but continues to hold it, and to share it,
And in that way, be known.

75

"Ellipse"
by Naomi Shihab Nye

76

My father has a parenthesis
on either side of his mouth.
His new words
live inside his old words.
And there's a strange semicolon
birthmark on my neck--
what does it mean,
my sentence is incomplete?

Please,
live with me in the open slope
of a question mark.
Don't answer it!
Curl up in a comma
that says more, and more, and more...

"How Do I Know When a Poem is Finished?"

When you quietly close
the door to a room
the room is not finished.

It is resting. Temporarily.
Glad to be without you
for a while.

Now it has time to gather
its balls of gray dust,
to pitch them from corner to corner.

Now it seeps back into itself,
unruffled and proud.
Outlines grow firmer.

When you return,
you might move the stack of books,
freshen the water for the roses.

I think you could keep doing this
forever. But the blue chair looks best
with the red pillow. So you might as well

leave it that way.

Naomi Shihab Nye

77

"Because of Poems" by Naomi Shihab Nye

Words have secret parties.
Verbs, adjectives, and nouns
meet outside their usual boundaries,
wearing hats.

MOODY feels doubtful about attending
and pauses near the door, ready to escape.
But she's fascinated by DAZZLE.
BEFRIEND throws a comforting arm
around her shoulder.

LOST and REMEMBER huddle
in the same corner, trading
phone numbers.

I serve punch.

78

Wild Geese by Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting-
over and over announcing your place
In the family of things.

79

The Summer Day by Mary Oliver

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean-
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down-
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

80