

MORA'S LIST OF SPOKEN WORD POETRY TASTING FOR THE MONTH OF APRIL

1. ***Changing the World***
by Belissa Escobedo, Rhiannon McGavin, Zariyah Allen
2. ***To This Day***
by Shane Koyczan
3. ***Totally Like Whatever, You Know?***
by Taylor Mali
4. ***Knock Knock***
by Daniel Beaty
5. ***Today***
by Billy Collins
6. ***B***
by Sarah Kay
7. ***Kumulipo***
by Jamaica Osorio
8. ***Tamara's Opus***
by Joshua Bennett
9. ***Scratch and Dent Dreams***
by Eric Darby
10. ***What Guys Look For In Girls***
by Savannah Brown
11. ***Shrinking Woman***
by Lily Myers
12. ***For Teenage Girls***
by Clementine von Radics

13. ***Like Math***
by Chad Anderson
14. ***What Kind of Asian Are You?***
by Alex Dang
15. ***I Wanna Hear A Poem***
by Steve Colman
16. ***Selfie***
by Jenna Robinson, William Giles
17. ***Dear Future Generations: Sorry***
by Prince Ea
18. ***Names***
by Rachel Rostad
19. ***Shake The Dust***
by Anis Mojgani
20. ***P.O.W.***
by Alicia Keys
21. ***Counting Down From 21***
by Patrick Roche
22. ***Repetition***
by Phil Kaye
23. ***Please Don't Take My Air Jordans***
by Lemon Anderson
24. ***Sometimes Silence Is The Loudest... Kind of Noise***
by Basseyy Ikpi



Day 1!

Introduction to Poetry

BY BILLY COLLINS

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

or press an ear against its hive.

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

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

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

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

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

Billy Collins, "Introduction to Poetry" from *The Apple that Astonished Paris*. Copyright © 1988, 1996 by Billy Collins. Reprinted with the permission of the University of Arkansas Press.

Source: *The Apple that Astonished Paris* (1996)

2

America the Beautiful? by Emily Brooks

History class disillusioned me.
Tarnished America the Beautiful in my mind.
Dimmed my patriotic pride.
Each black word on each white textbook page
was like an accusing finger, a silent voice saying
"Look! Look what YOU have done."
And my vision of America began to crumble, to change.
I saw purple mountain majesties
stained with Cherokee blood, a trail of tears under their feet,
its twin trickling down their cheeks.
Amber waves of grain replaced by barbed wire
imprisoning Japanese fathers, daughters, sons.
I heard the faint cry of slaves,
the crack of the whip, the pain.
And this is the land of the free?
Instead of liberty, slavery.
Instead of equality, segregation.
Instead of democracy, corruption.
And when the American Dream's sparkling cover is ripped away
there is only greed.
Shame paints my cheeks red.
Liberty and justice? For all? Were they lies
tossed carelessly around by the men I admired?
Washington, Lincoln, Jefferson,
are they really just "dead white guys"
with a penchant for deception?
And then realization came like the sun rising anew,
shedding its golden light on my America that had become
foggy, clouded with hypocrisy.
My realization was this:
America is human.
Horrible mistakes clutter its shores like offending garbage,
but America learns and changes.
America is people, you and me, clasping hands and fixing our mistakes.
Righting our wrongs.
Making apologies.
And when I look beyond the dirt and grime of national atrocities,
I see the America I love,
a land bruised by a few centuries of bad choices
but standing strong, a sturdy oak tree
rooted in liberty and justice.
A country where people hold the power
instead of the power holding them.
Where rainbowed people from a thousand different cultures
can pray and speak their mind
without fear that those words will be their last.
Searching beyond inky words on a textbook page
that imprison America behind nightmares of the past,
I see that the star-spangled banner does indeed wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

3 Kindness by Naomi Shihab Nye

Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.
How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.
Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.
Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.
Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to mail letters and purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
it is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.

CAROLINE

allison joseph

In eighth grade, we teased that girl
as much as we could, mocking

her clothes, her stringy hair,
her flat, pallid face that revealed

little protest. Used to being
the one white girl in our class

of blacks, Hispanics, she endured
our taunts on her lack of rhythm,

on her stiff, flat-buttèd walk.
How we pitied her—brown hair

parted straight, pulled back
in a dull ponytail, her jeans

or corduroy pants in washed-out
shades of gray or blue,

her homework neatly done
in pained, legible print.

How weak it was to be white,
we thought, not able to dance

or run fast, to have skin
that peeled from too much sun.

We never let Caroline forget
that she was white and we

were black, that we could
swing our hips and snap

our fingers without trying,
privy to street-slang rhythms.

But she was our white girl,
and if anyone else dared

to touch her or call her names,
we'd be on them in a second,

calling them ugly right back,
slapping offenders if necessary.

With one of us by her side,
she could walk the school

safely, knowing she was ours
even if we didn't let her in

all the way, even if we laughed
at her white speech, thin lips.



5 Lost Generation by Jon Reed

I am part of a lost generation.
And I refuse to believe that
I can change the world.
I realize this may be a shock, but
"Happiness comes from within"
Is a lie, and
"Money will make me happy"
So in thirty years, I will tell my children
They are not the most important thing in my life.
My employer will know that
I have my priorities straight because
Work
Is more important than
Family
I tell you this:
Once upon a time
Families stayed together
But this will not be true in my era.
This is a quick fix society
Experts tell me
Thirty years from now, I will be celebrating the tenth anniversary of my divorce.
I do not concede that
I will live in a country of my own making.
In the future,
Environmental destruction will be the norm.
No longer can it be said that
My peers and I care about this Earth.
It will be evident that
My generation is apathetic and lethargic.
It is foolish to presume that
There is hope.
And all of this will come true unless we reverse it.

6 PERMANENTLY

kenneth koch

One day the Nouns were clustered in the street.
An Adjective walked by, with her dark beauty.
The Nouns were struck, moved, changed.
The next day a Verb drove up, and created the Sentence.

Each Sentence says one thing—for example, "Although it was
a dark rainy

day when the Adjective walked by, I shall remember the
pure and sweet

expression on her face until the day I perish from the
green, effective earth."

Or, "Will you please close the window, Andrew?"

Or, for example, "Thank you, the pink pot of flowers on the
window sill

has changed color recently to a light yellow, due to the
heat from the

boiler factory which exists nearby."

In the springtime the Sentences and the Nouns lay silently on
the grass.

A lonely Conjunction here and there would call, "And! But!"

But the Adjective did not emerge.

As the Adjective is lost in the sentence,

So I am lost in your eyes, ears, nose, and throat—

You have enchanted me with a single kiss

Which can never be undone

Until the destruction of language.

7 If—

BY RUDYARD KIPLING

Poetry # 4

(‘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 mas
If you can think—and not make thoughts your a
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!

The Secret Heart

8

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^o
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.

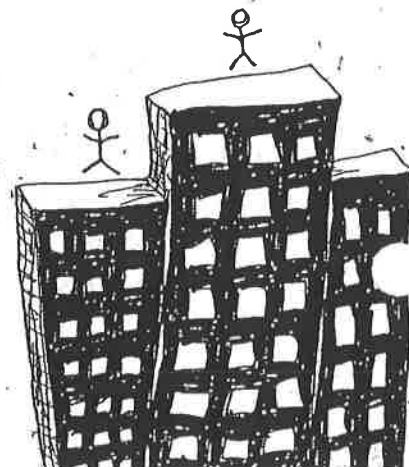
But it shone long enough for one
To know that hands held up the sun.

aire: father.

THE TALK


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.



FLASH CARDS

rita dove » track 18 read by the poet



In math I was the whiz kid, keeper
of oranges and apples. *What you don't understand,*
master, my father said; the faster
I answered; the faster they came.

I could see one bud on the teacher's geranium,
one clear bee sputtering at the wet pane.
The tulip trees always dragged after heavy rain
so I tucked my head as my boots slapped home.

My father put up his feet after work
and relaxed with a highball and *The Life of Lincoln*.
After supper we drilled and I climbed the dark

before sleep, before a thin voice hissed
numbers as I spun on a wheel. I had to guess.
Ten, I kept saying, I'm only ten.

⌘ Those Winter Sundays

Sundays too my father got up early
and put his clothes on in the blueback 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?

Robert E. Hayden



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Poetry Set #5

12 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.

Source: *Poetry* (April 2000).

MORE FROM THIS ISSUE

Happiness

13
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.

from *Otherwise: New and Selected Poems, 2005*
Graywolf Press, Saint Paul, MN

14 Blue Butterfly Day by Robert Frost

It is blue-butterfly day here in spring,
And with these sky-flakes down in flurry on flurry
There is more unmixed color on the wing
Than flowers will show for days unless they hurry.

But these are flowers that fly and all but sing:
And now from having ridden out desire
They lie closed over in the wind and cling
Where wheels have freshly sliced the April mire.

FROM
FOR A GIRL BECOMING 15

joy harjo » track 21 read by the poet

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.

WHAT YOUR MOTHER TELLS YOU NOW

mitsuye yamada

母が今言ふ事
其内に分る

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

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

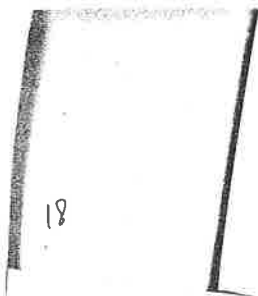
THE ADVERSARY

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.



Francisco X. Alarcon, *Promised Land*



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!

HOUSES 19

nancy willard » track 38 read by the poet

My father's house was made of sky. A
 His bookcases stood twelve feet high. A
 The snowy owl my father tamed; B
 the stones he showed me, stars he named, B
 agate, quartz, the Milky Way— C
 "It's good to know their names," he'd say, C
 "so when I'm gone and you are grown, D
 in any world you'll feel at home." D

My mother's house was made of talk, A
 words that could rouse a flea to flight B
 or make a stone stand up and walk. A
 Words filled the kitchen day and night. B
 Grandpa knew all the Psalms by heart. C
 My mother's sisters knew the art C
 of telling tales, and lies so new D
 all those who heard them called them true. D

My house is quieter than theirs. A
 My promises are frail as foam. B
 I still forget to say my prayers. A
 Between the lines I plucked this poem. B
 Look up. To the discerning eye, C
 my house stands open to the sky. C

Face It 21
 by Janet Wong

My nose belongs
 to Guangdong, China--
 short and round, a Jang family nose.

My eyes belong
 to Alsace, France--
 wide like Grandmother Hemmerling's.

But my mouth, my big-talking mouth, belongs
 to me, alone.

The Past by Ha Jin 20

I have supposed my past is a part of myself.
 As my shadow appears whenever I'm in the sun
 the past cannot be thrown off and its weight
 must be borne, or I will become another man.

But I saw someone wall his past into a garden
 whose produce is always in fashion.
 If you enter his property without permission
 he will welcome you with a watchdog or a gun.

I saw someone set up his past as a harbor.
 Wherever it sails, his boat is safe—
 if a storm comes, he can always head for home.
 His voyage is the adventure of a kite.

I saw someone drop his past like trash.
 He buried it and shed it altogether.
 He has shown me that without the past
 one can also move ahead and get somewhere.

Like a shroud my past surrounds me,
 but I will cut it and stitch it,
 to make good shoes with it,
 shoes that fit my feet.

THE SURVIVOR



marilyn chin » track 35 read by the poet

Don't tap your chopsticks against your bowl.
 Don't throw your teacup against the wall in anger.
 Don't suck on your long black braid and weep.
 Don't tarry around the big red sign that says "danger!"

That you have bloomed this way and not that,
 that your skin is yellow, not white, not black,
 that you were born not a boy-child but a girl,
 that this world will be forever puce-pink are just as well.

Remember, the survivor is not the strongest or most clever;
 merely, the survivor is almost always the youngest.
 And you shall have to relinquish that title before long.

DREAMS

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow. ■

GUIDED READING
What should we do with our dreams?

A DREAM DEFERRED

Harlem

What happens to a dream deferred:

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode? ■

GUIDED READING
Name one thing that the speaker says could happen to a dream deferred.

1. deferred. Delayed, postponed

23
24
25

THE DREAM KEEPER

Bring me all of your dreams,

You dreamers,

Bring me all of your

Heart melodies

That I may wrap them

In a blue cloud-cloth

Away from the too-rough fingers

Of the world. ■

GUIDED READING
What does the speaker want to do with our dreams?

26 DREAMS by Mark Strand

Trying to recall the plot
And characters we dreamed,
 What life was like
Before the morning came,
We are seldom satisfied,
 And even then
There is no way of knowing
If what we know is true.
 Something nameless
Hums us into sleep,
Withdraws, and leaves us in
 A place that seems
Always vaguely familiar.
Perhaps it is because
 We take the props
And fixtures of our days
With us into the dark,
 Assuring ourselves
We are still alive. And yet
Nothing here is certain;
 Landscapes merge
With one another, houses
Are never where they should be,
 Doors and windows
Sometimes open out
To other doors and windows,
 Even the person
Who seems most like ourselves
Cannot be counted on,
 For there have been
Too many times when he,
Like everything else, has done
 The unexpected.
And as the night wears on,
The dim allegory of ourselves
 Unfolds, and we
Feel dreamed by someone else,
A sleeping counterpart,
 Who gathers in
The darkness of his person
Shades of the real world.
 Nothing is clear;
We are not ever sure
If the life we live there
 Belongs to us.
Each night it is the same;
Just when we're on the verge
 Of catching on,
A sense of our remoteness

Closes in, and the world
 So lately seen
Gradually fades from sight.
We wake to find the sleeper
 Is ourselves
And the dreamt-of is someone who did
Something we can't quite put
 Our finger on,
But which involved a life
We are always, we feel,
 About to discover.

The Fairest

27

Mirror, mirror on the wall
Make her skinny, make her tall
Change the way she does her hair
Dye it blonde
Put highlights there

Mirror, mirror, take her youth
Wrap it in some made-up truth
Hide her face behind a mask
Of paint and powder, then
Conceal her spirit in a plaster cast

Mirror, mirror, steal her style
Plot and scheme, lie and beguile
Tell her what "true beauty" is
Define her worth
By what *Cosmo* says

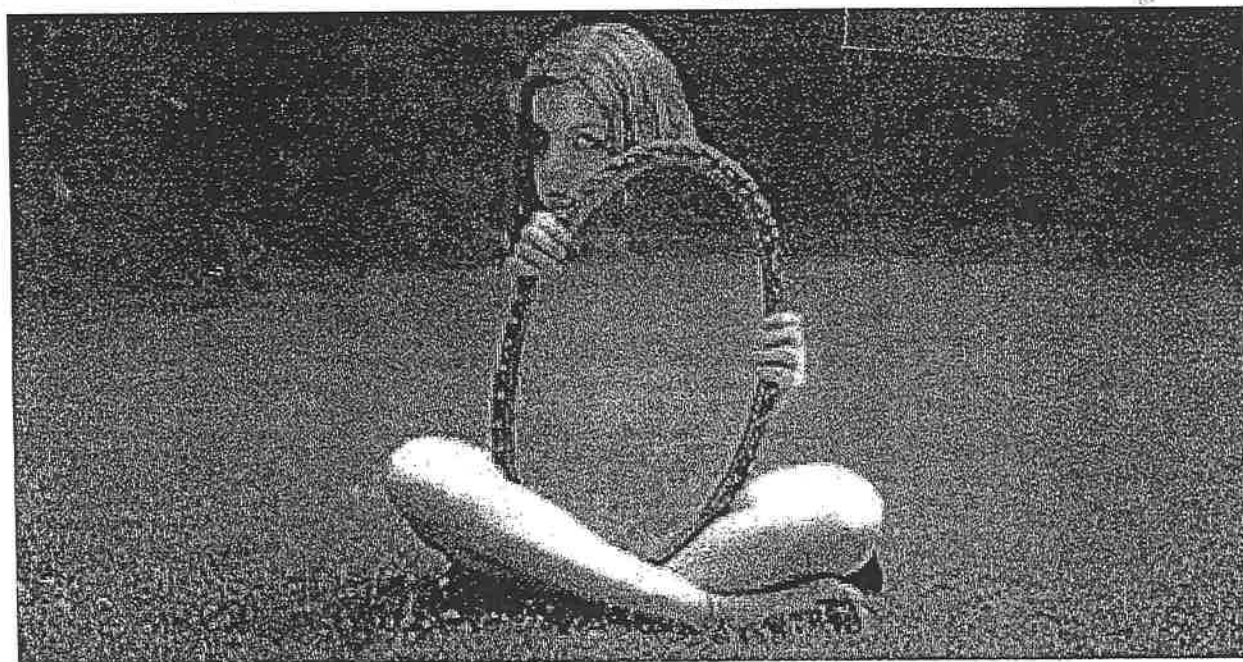
Mirror, mirror, watch her stand
On the scale with pill in hand
Watch her curb her appetite
Then watch her lie and say,
"Can't eat another bite!"

Mirror, mirror, slice her up
Tell her she's not good enough
Change her nose, change her smile
But do not mention that
Beauty fades after a short while

Mirror, mirror, do you see this girl?
Torn to pieces by the world?
Stretched and squeezed into a mold
She'll never fit into
Despite what she's been told

Mirror, mirror on the wall
Who's the fairest one of all?
Look at those whose beauty has passed
And tell them the truth:
That inner beauty is what really lasts

by Olivia Stewart, Defiance, OH



Nothing Gold Can Stay

by Robert Frost

28 Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.

Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.

Then leaf subsides to leaf,
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day
Nothing gold can stay.

CINDERELLA'S DIARY

29 ron koertge

I miss my stepmother. What a thing to say
but it's true. The prince is so boring: four
hours to dress and then the cheering throngs.
Again. The page who holds the door is cute
enough to eat. Where is he once Mr. Charming
kisses my forehead goodnight?

Every morning I gaze out a casement window
at the hunters, dark men with blood on their
boots who joke and mount, their black trousers
straining, rough beards, callused hands, selfish,
abrupt...

Oh, dear diary—I am lost in ever after:
Those insufferable birds, someone in every
room with a lute, the queen calling me to look
at another painting of her son, this time
holding the transparent slipper I wish
I'd never seen.

Perfect Imperfection

30 Melissa Bachara

I am a contradiction
a perfect imperfection
On looking in from outside
I think I'd pass inspection

My nails are neat, each hair in place
My clothes the latest styles
But look a little closer,
And you can see my trials

The window to my balanced soul
Is stained from too much smoke
A bird's eye view down at my heart
Will clearly show it's broke

My best intentions lead to pain
And complicated messes
My head is filled with wishes,
My decisions second guesses

There was a time I tried to hide
each wrinkle, scar and tear
But I'm learning to appreciate
That I'm more than I appear

Each wrinkle tells a story
The path from there to here
I've earned a little wisdom
With every falling tear

My soul will soar in brilliant skies
But then I'll need to rest
The embers of my passion
Still smolder in my chest

Perhaps I'll let my hair go wild
And skip the manicure
I'll wear my favorite color
They'll say "Hey, look at her"

My hair, my heart, my clothes, my soul
Will walk in one direction
No longer contradicting
My perfect imperfection

Numbers

31

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 mothers' call,
two Italians off to the sea,
one sock that isn't anywhere you look.

ARITHMETIC

32

carl sandburg

Arithmetic is where numbers fly like pigeons in and out of your head.

Arithmetic tells you how many you lose or win if you know how many you had before you lost or won.

Arithmetic is seven eleven all good children go to heaven—or five six bundle of sticks.

Arithmetic is numbers you squeeze from your head to your hand to your pencil to your paper till you get the answer:

Arithmetic is where the answer is right and everything is nice and you can look out of the window and see the blue sky—or the answer is wrong and you have to start all over and try again and see how it comes out this time.

If you take a number and double it and double it again and then double it a few more times, the number gets bigger and bigger and goes higher and higher and only arithmetic can tell you what the number is when you decide to quit doubling.

Arithmetic is where you have to multiply—and you carry the multiplication table in your head and hope you won't lose it.

If you have two animal crackers, one good and one bad, and you eat one and a striped zebra with streaks all over him eats the other, how many animal crackers will you have if somebody offers you five six seven and you say No no no and you say Nay nay nay and you say Nix nix nix?

If you ask your mother for one fried egg for breakfast and she gives you two fried eggs and you eat both of them, who is better in arithmetic, you or your mother?

STILL I RISE

maya angelou

33

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops.
Weakened by my soulful cries.

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own back yard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

HOW I DISCOVERED POETRY

34

marilyn nelson » track 33 read by the poet

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

35

marilyn nelson » track 16 read by the poet

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.

SILENCE by Billy Collins

36

Now it is time to say what you have to say.
The room is quiet.
The whirring fan has been unplugged,
and the girl who was tapping
a pencil on her desktop has been removed.

So tell us what is on your mind.
We want to hear the sound of your foliage,
the unraveling of your tool kit,
your songs of loneliness,
your songs of hurt.

The trains are motionless on the tracks,
the ships are at rest in the harbor.
The dogs are cocking their heads
and the gods are peering down from their balloons.
The town is hushed,

and everyone here has a copy.
So tell us about your parents—
your father behind the steering wheel,
your cruel mother at the sink.
Let's hear about all the clouds you saw, all the trees.

Read the poem you brought with you tonight.
The ocean has stopped sloshing around,
and even Beethoven
is sitting up in his deathbed,
his cold hearing horn inserted in one ear.

EATING POETRY by Mark Strand

37

*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.*

The Trouble with Poetry 38

The trouble with poetry, I realized
as I walked along a beach one night --
cold Florida sand under my bare feet,
a show of stars in the sky --

the trouble with poetry is
that it encourages the writing of more poetry,
more guppies crowding the fish tank,
more baby rabbits
hopping out of their mothers into the dewy grass.

And how will it ever end?
unless the day finally arrives
when we have compared everything in the world
to everything else in the world,

and there is nothing left to do
but quietly close our notebooks
and sit with our hands folded on our desks.

Poetry fills me with joy
and I rise like a feather in the wind.
Poetry fills me with sorrow
and I sink like a chain flung from a bridge.

But mostly poetry fills me
with the urge to write poetry,
to sit in the dark and wait for a little flame
to appear at the tip of my pencil.

And along with that, the longing to steal,
to break into the poems of others
with a flashlight and a ski mask.

And what an unmerry band of thieves we are,
cut-purses, common shoplifters,
I thought to myself
as a cold wave swirled around my feet
and the lighthouse moved its megaphone over the sea,
which is an image I stole directly
from Lawrence Ferlinghetti --
to be perfectly honest for a moment --

the bicycling poet of San Francisco
whose little amusement park of a book
I carried in a side pocket of my uniform
up and down the treacherous halls of high school.

-- Billy Collins

All of the Indians must have tragic features: tragic noses, eyes, and arms. Their hands and fingers must be tragic when they reach for tragic food.

The hero must be a half-breed, half white and half Indian, preferably from a horse culture. He should often weep alone. That is mandatory.

If the hero is an Indian woman, she is beautiful. She must be slender and in love with a white man. But if she loves an Indian man

then he must be a half-breed, preferably from a horse culture. If the Indian woman loves a white man, then he has to be so white

that we can see the blue veins running through his skin like rivers. When the Indian woman steps out of her dress, the white man gasps

at the endless beauty of her brown skin. She should be compared to nature: brown hills, mountains, fertile valleys, dewy grass, wind, and clear water.

If she is compared to murky water, however, then she must have a secret. Indians always have secrets, which are carefully and slowly revealed.

Yet Indian secrets can be disclosed suddenly, like a storm. Indian men, of course, are storms. They should destroy the lives

of any white women who choose to love them. All white women love Indian men. That is always the case. White women feign disgust

at the savage in blue jeans and T-shirt, but secretly lust after him. White women dream about half-breed Indian men from horse cultures.

Indian men are horses, smelling wild and gamey. When the Indian man unbuttons his pants, the white woman should think of topsoil.

There must be one murder, one suicide, one attempted rape. Alcohol should be consumed. Cars must be driven at high speeds.

Indians must see visions. White people can have the same visions if they are in love with Indians. If a white person loves an Indian

then the white person is Indian by proximity. White people must carry an Indian deep inside themselves. Those interior Indians are half-breed

and obviously from horse cultures. If the interior Indian is male then he must be a warrior, especially if he is inside a white man.

If the interior Indian is female, then she must be a healer, especially if she is inside a white woman. Sometimes there are complications.

An Indian man can be hidden inside a white woman. An Indian woman can be hidden inside a white man. In these rare instances,

everybody is a half-breed struggling to learn more about his or her horse culture. There must be redemption, of course, and sins must be forgiven.

For this, we need children. A white child and an Indian child, gender not important, should express deep affection in a childlike way.

In the Great American Indian novel, when it is finally written, all of the white people will be Indians and all of the Indians will be ghosts.

INDIAN EDUCATION

40

sherman alexie

Crazy Horse came back to life
in a storage room in the Smithsonian,
his body rising from a wooden crate
mistakenly marked ANONYMOUS HOPI MALE.

Crazy Horse wandered the halls, found
the surface of the moon, Judy Garland
and her red shoes, a stuffed horse named
Comanche, the only surviving

member of the Seventh Cavalry
at Little Horn. Crazy Horse was found
in the morning by a security guard
who took him home and left him alone

in a room with cable television. Crazy Horse
watched a basketball game, every black and white
western, a documentary about a scientist
who travelled the Great Plains in the 1800s

measuring Indians and settlers, discovering
that the Indians were two inches taller
on average, and in some areas, the difference
in height exceeded a foot, which proved nothing

although Crazy Horse measured himself
against the fact of a mirror, traded faces
with a taxi driver and memorized the city,
folding, unfolding, his mapped heart.

"Selfie"

by Jenna Robinson
+ William Giles

SNOWMEN

41

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.

"When the last tree is cut, the last fish is caught, and the last river is polluted; when to breathe the air is sickening, you will realize, too late, that wealth is not in bank accounts and that you can't eat money." - Alanis Obomsawin

Junkyards by Julian Lee Rayford ⁴²

You take any junkyard
and you will see it filled with
symbols of progress
remarkable things discarded

What civilization when ahead on
all its onward-impelling implements
are given over to the junkyards
to rust

The supreme implement, the wheel
is conspicuous in the junkyards

The axles and the levers
the cogs and the flywheels
all the parts of dynamos
all the parts of motors
fall the parts of rusting.

garbage ⁴⁴
by Valerie Worth

The stained,
Sour-scented
Bucket tips out
Hammered-gold
Orange rind

Eggshell ivory,
Garnet coffee-
Grounds, pearl
Wand of bared
Chicken bone:

Worked back soon
To still more
Curious jewelry
Of chemical
And molecule.

Earth Day By Jane Yolen ⁴³

I am the Earth
And the Earth is me.
Each blade of grass,
Each honey tree,
Each bit of mud,
And stick and stone
Is blood and muscle,
Skin and bone.

And just as I
Need every bit
Of me to make
My body fit,
So Earth needs
Grass and stone and tree
And things that grow here
Naturally:

That's why we
Celebrate this day.
That's why across
The world we say:
As long as life,
As dear, as free,
I am the Earth

The World Is Too Much With Us ⁴⁶

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 wreathed horn.

Before ⁴⁵
BY AVIS HARLEY

The butterfly was there
before any human art was made.
Before cathedrals rose in prayer,
the butterfly was there.
Before pyramids pierced the air
or Great Wall stones were laid,
the butterfly was there.
Before any human, art was made.

THE PEACE OF WILD THINGS 47

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

— Wendell Berry

The Summer Day by Mary Oliver 49

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?

The Legend of the Paper Plates 48

John Haines

They trace their ancestry
back to the forest.
There all the family stood,
proud, bushy, and strong.

5 Until hard times,
when from fire and drought
the patriarchs° crashed.

10 The land was taken for taxes,
the young people cut down
and sold to the mills.

15 Their manhood and womanhood
was crushed, bleached
with bitter acids,
their fibers dispersed
as sawdust
among ten million offspring.

You see them at any picnic,
at ball games, at home,
and at state occasions.

20 They are thin and pliable,
porous and identical.
They are made to be thrown away.

LOST SISTER

cathy song » track 17 read by the poet

In China,
Even the peasants
named their first daughters

Jade—
the stone that in the far fields,
could moisten the dry season,
could make men move mountains
for the healing green of the inner hills
glistening like slices of winter melon.

And the daughters were grateful:
They never left home.
To move freely was a luxury
stolen from them at birth.
Instead, they gathered patience,
learning to walk in shoes
the size of teacups,
without breaking—
the arc of their movements
as dormant as the rooted willow,
as redundant as the farmyard hens.
But they travelled far
in surviving,
learning to stretch the family rice,
to quiet the demons,
the noisy stomachs.

"Names"
by Rachel
Rostad

2

There is a sister
across the ocean,
who relinquished her name,
diluting jade green
with the blue of the Pacific.
Rising with a tide of locusts,
she swarmed with others
to inundate another shore.

In America,
there are many roads
and women can stride along with men.

But in another wilderness,
the possibilities,
the loneliness,
can strangulate like jungle vines.

The meager provisions and sentiments
of once belonging—
fermented roots, Mah-Jongg tiles and firecrackers—
set but a flimsy household
in a forest of nightless cities.

A giant snake rattles above,
spewing black clouds into your kitchen.
Dough-faced landlords
slip in and out of your keyholes,
making claims you don't understand,
tapping into your communication systems
of laundry lines and restaurant chains.

You find, you need China:

your one fragile identification,
a jade link
handcuffed to your wrist.

You remember your mother,
who walked for centuries,
footless—

and like her,

you have left no footprints,
but only because

there is an ocean in between,
the unremitting space of your rebellion.

Bilingual Sestina
by Julia Alvarez

51

Some things I have to say ain't getting said
in this snowy, blond, blue-eyed, gum-chewing English
dawn's early light sifting through *persianas* closed
the night before by dark-skinned girls whose words
evoke *cama, aposento, suenos* in *nombres*
from that first world I can't translate from Spanish.

Gladys, Rosario, Altagracia—the sounds of Spanish
wash over me like warm island waters as I say
your soothing names: a child again learning the *nombres*
of things you point to in the world before English
turned *sol, tierra, cielo, luna* to vocabulary words—
sun, earth, sky, moon. Language closed

like the touch-sensitive *morivivi* whose leaves closed
when we kids poked them, astonished. Even Spanish
failed us back then when we saw how frail a word is
when faced with the thing it names. How saying
its name won't always summon up in Spanish or English
the full blown genie from the bottled *nombre*.

Gladys, I summon you back by saying your *nombre*.
Open up again the house of slatted windows closed
since childhood, where *palabras* left behind for English
stand dusty and awkward in neglected Spanish.
Rosario, muse of *el patio*, sing to me and through me say
that world again, begin first with those first words

you put in my mouth as you pointed to the world—
not Adam, not God, but a country girl numbering
the stars, the blades of grass, warming the sun by saying,
Que calor! As you opened up the morning closed
inside the night until you sang in Spanish,
estas son las mananitas, and listening in bed, no English

yet in my head to confuse me with translations, no English
doubling the world with synonyms, no dizzying array of words
--the world was simple and intact in Spanish—
luna, sol, casa, luz, flor, as if the *nombres*
were the outer skin of things, as if the words were so close
one left a mist of breath on things by saying

their names, an intimacy I now yearn for in English—
words so close to what I mean that I almost hear my Spanish
heart beating, beating inside what I say *en ingles*.