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**ONOMATOPOEIA**

By Eve Merriam

The rusty spigot  
sputters,  
utters,  
a splutter  
spatters a smattering of drops,  
gashes wider,  
slash  
splatters,  
scatters,  
spurts,  
finally stops sputtering  
and plash!  
gushes rushes splashes  
clear water dashes.

**Weather**

By Eve Merriam

Dot a dot dot dot a dot dot  
Spotting the windowpane.

Spack a spack speck flick a flack fleck  
Freckling the windowpane.

A spatter a scatter a wet cat a clatter  
A splatter a rumble outside.

Umbrella umbrella umbrella umbrella  
Bumbershoot barrel of rain.

Slosh a galosh slosh a galosh  
Slither and slather a glide

A puddle a jump a puddle a jump  
A puddle a jump puddle splosh

A juddle a pump a luddle a dump  
A pudmuddle jump in and slide!

## Evolution

By Sherman Alexie

Buffalo Bill opens a pawn shop on the reservation  
right across the border from the liquor store  
and he stays open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

and the Indians come running in with jewelry  
television sets, a VCR, a full-length beaded buckskin outfit  
it took Inez Muse 12 years to finish. Buffalo Bill

takes everything the Indians have to offer, keeps it  
all catalogues and filed in a storage room. The Indians  
pawn their hands, saving the thumbs for last, they pawn

their skeletons, falling endlessly from the skin  
and when the last Indian has pawned everything  
but his heart, Buffalo Bill takes that for twenty bucks

closes up the pawn shop, paints a new sign over the old  
calls his venture THE MUSEUM OF NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURES  
charges the Indians five bucks a head to enter.

## **I Am In Need Of Music**

By Elizabeth Bishop

I am in need of music that  
would flow Over my fretful,  
feeling fingertips, Over my  
bitter-tainted, trembling lips,  
With melody, deep, clear, and  
liquid-slow. Oh, for the healing  
swaying, old and low, Of some song  
sung to rest the tired dead, A song  
to fall like water on my head,  
And over quivering limbs, dream flushed  
to glow! There is a magic made by  
melody:  
A spell of rest, and quiet breath, and  
cool Heart, that sinks through fading  
colors deep To the subaqueous  
stillness of the sea,  
And floats forever in a moon-green  
pool, Held in the arms of rhythm  
and of sleep.

## Phenomenal Woman

By Maya Angelou

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.

I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size

But when I start to tell them,  
They think I'm telling lies.

I say,

It's in the reach of my arms,

The span of my hips,

The stride of my step,

The curl of my lips.

I'm a woman

Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,

That's me.

I walk into a room

Just as cool as you please,

And to a man,

The fellows stand or

Fall down on their knees.

Then they swarm around me,

A hive of honey bees.

I say,

It's the fire in my eyes,

And the flash of my teeth,

The swing in my waist,

And the joy in my feet.

I'm a woman

Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,

That's me.

Men themselves have wondered  
What they see in me.

They try so much

But they can't touch

My inner mystery.

When I try to show them,

They say they still can't see.

I say,

It's in the arch of my back,

The sun of my smile,

The ride of my breasts,

The grace of my style.

I'm a woman

Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,

That's me.

Now you understand

Just why my head's not bowed.

I don't shout or jump about

Or have to talk real loud.

When you see me passing,

It ought to make you proud.

I say,

It's in the click of my heels,

The bend of my hair,

the palm of my hand,

The need for my care.

'Cause I'm a woman

Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,

That's me.

## Jabberwocky

By Lewis Carrol

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;  
All mimsy were the borogoves,  
And the mome raths outgrabe.

"Beware the Jabberwock, my son!  
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!  
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun  
The frumious Bandersnatch!"

He took his vorpal sword in hand:  
Long time the manxome foe he sought--  
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,  
And stood awhile in thought.

And, as in uffish thought he stood,  
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,  
Came whiffling through the tulgey  
wood,  
And burbled as it came!

One two! One two! And through and  
through

The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!  
He left it dead, and with its head  
He went galumphing back.

"And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?  
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!  
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!"  
He chortled in his joy.

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;  
All mimsy were the borogoves,  
And the mome raths outgrabe.

## **No Longer Mourn For Me When I Am Dead**

By William Shakespeare, Sonnet 71

No longer mourn for me when I am dead  
Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell  
Give warning to the world that I am fled  
From this vile world with vilest worms to dwell:  
Nay, if you read this line, remember not  
The hand that writ it, for I love you so,  
That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,  
If thinking on me then should make you woe.  
O! if, I say, you look upon this verse,  
When I perhaps compounded am with clay,  
Do not so much as my poor name rehearse;  
But let your love even with my life decay;  
Lest the wise world should look into your moan,  
And mock you with me after I am gone.



**homage to my hips**

By Lucille Clifton

these hips are big hips  
they need space to  
move around in.  
they don't fit into little  
petty places. these hips  
are free hips.  
they don't like to be held back.  
these hips have never been enslaved,  
they go where they want to go  
they do what they want to do.  
these hips are mighty hips.  
these hips are magic hips.  
i have known them  
to put a spell on a man and  
spin him like a top!

## Some Questions You Might Ask

By Mary Oliver

Is the soul solid, like iron?

Or is it tender and breakable, like

the wings of a moth in the beak of an owl?

Who has it, and who doesn't?

I keep looking around me.

The face of the moose is as sad

as the face of Jesus.

The swan opens her white wings slowly.

In the fall, the black bear carries leaves into the darkness.

One question leads to another.

Does it have a shape? Like an iceberg?

Like the eye of a hummingbird?

Does it have one lung, like the snake and the scallop?

Why should I have it, and not the anteater

who loves her children?

Why should I have it, and not the camel?

Come to think of it, what about maple trees?

What about the blue iris?

What about all the little stones, sitting alone in the moonlight?

What about roses, and lemons, and their shining leaves?

What about the grass?

**And a Lie**

By Hannah Sanghee Park

The asking was askance.

And the tell all told.

So then, in tandem,

Anathema, and anthem.

The truth was on hold,

Seeking too tasking.

And the wool was pulled

Over as cover.

No eyes were kept peeled.

My iris I missed

The truth, now mistrust

All things seen, and this

Distrust, the sounded distress signal

Called and called and culled from your damsel.

## **The Unbearable Weight Of Staying**

By Warsan Shire

I don't know when love became elusive  
What I know, is that no one I know has it.

My father's arms around my mother's neck,  
Fruit too ripe to eat, a door half way open.  
When your name is a just a hand I can never hold,  
everything I have ever believed in, becomes magic.

I think of lovers as trees, growing to and  
from one another, searching for the same light.  
My mother's laughter in a dark room,  
a photograph greying under my touch.  
This is all I know how to do, carry loss around until  
I begin to resemble every bad memory,  
every terrible fear,  
every nightmare anyone has ever had.

I ask, did you ever love me?  
You say of course, of course so quickly  
that you sound like someone else  
I ask are you made of steel? are you made of iron?  
You cry on the phone, my stomach hurts

I let you leave, I need someone who knows how to stay.

**“next to of course god america i”**

By E.E. Cummings

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

He spoke. And drank rapidly a glass of water

**Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night**

By Dylan Thomas

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

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

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

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

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

And you, my father, there on that 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.

**Alone**

By Maya Angelou

Lying, thinking

Last night

How to find my soul a home

Where water is not thirsty

And bread loaf is not stone

I came up with one thing

And I don't believe I'm wrong

That nobody,

But nobody

Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone

Nobody, but nobody

Can make it out here alone.

There are some millionaires

With money they can't use

Their wives run round like banshees

Their children sing the blues

They've got expensive doctors

To cure their hearts of stone.

But nobody

No, nobody

Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone

Nobody, but nobody

Can make it out here alone.

Now if you listen closely

I'll tell you what I know

Storm clouds are gathering

The wind is gonna blow

The race of man is suffering

And I can hear the moan,

'Cause nobody,

But nobody

Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone

Nobody, but nobody

Can make it out here alone.

**An Exchange of Gifts**

By Alden Nowlan

As long as you read this poem  
I will be writing it.  
I am writing it here and now  
before your eyes,  
although you can't see me.  
Perhaps you'll dismiss this  
as a verbal trick,  
the joke is you're wrong;  
the real trick  
is your pretending  
this is something  
fixed and solid,  
external to us both.  
I tell you better:  
I will keep on  
writing this poem for you  
even after I'm dead.



**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.

## It Is Dangerous to Read Newspapers

By Margaret Atwood

While I was building neat  
castles in the sandbox,  
the hasty pits were  
filling with bulldozed corpses

and as I walked to the school  
washed and combed, my feet  
stepping on the cracks in the cement  
detonated red bombs.

Now I am grownup  
and literate, and I sit in my chair  
as quietly as a fuse

and the jungles are flaming, the under-  
brush is charged with soldiers,  
the names on the difficult  
maps go up in smoke.

I am the cause, I am a stockpile of chemical  
toys, my body  
is a deadly gadget,  
I reach out in love, my hands are guns,  
my good intentions are completely lethal.

Even my  
passive eyes transmute  
everything I look at to the pocked  
black and white of a war photo,  
how  
can I stop myself.

It is dangerous to read newspapers.

Each time I hit a key  
on my electric typewriter,  
speaking of peaceful trees  
  
another village explodes.

**I'm Nobody! Who Are You?**

By Emily Dickinson

I'm nobody! Who are you?

Are you nobody, too?

Then there's a pair of us--don't tell!

They'd banish us, you know.

How dreary to be somebody!

How public, like a frog

To tell your name the livelong day

To an admiring bog!

**Minstrel Man**

By Langston Hughes

Because my mouth  
Is wide with laughter  
And my throat  
Is deep with song,  
You do not think  
I suffer after  
I have held my pain  
So long?

Because my mouth  
Is wide with laughter,  
You do not hear  
My inner cry?  
Because my feet  
Are gay with dancing,  
You do not know  
I die?

**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.

**You Who Wronged**

By Czeslaw Milosz

You who wronged a simple man  
Bursting into laughter at the crime,  
And kept a pack of fools around you  
To mix good and evil, to blur the line,

Though everyone bowed down before you,  
Saying virtue and wisdom lit your way,  
Striking gold medals in your honor,  
Glad to have survived another day,

Do not feel safe. The poet remembers.  
You can kill one, but another is born.  
The words are written down, the deed, the date.

And you'd have done better with a winter dawn,  
A rope, and a branch bowed beneath your weight.

## Boy Breaking Glass

By Gwendolyn Brooks

Whose broken window is a cry of art  
 (success, that winks aware  
 as elegance, as a treasonable faith)  
 is raw: is sonic: is old-eyed première.  
 Our beautiful flaw and terrible ornament.  
 Our barbarous and metal little man.

“I shall create! If not a note, a hole.  
 If not an overture, a desecration.”

Full of pepper and light  
 and Salt and night and cargoes.

“Don’t go down the plank  
 if you see there’s no extension.  
 Each to his grief, each to  
 his loneliness and fidgety revenge.  
 Nobody knew where I was and now I am no longer there.”

The only sanity is a cup of tea.  
 The music is in minors.

Each one other  
 is having different weather.

“It was you, it was you who threw away my name!  
 And this is everything I have for me.”

Who has not Congress, lobster, love, luau,  
 the Regency Room, the Statue of Liberty,  
 runs. A sloppy amalgamation.  
 A mistake.  
 A cliff.

**Ghazal, After Ferguson**

By Yusef Komunyakaa

Somebody go & ask Biggie to orate  
what's going down in the streets.

No, an attitude is not a suicide note  
written on walls around the streets.

Twitter stays lockstep in the frontal lobe  
as we hope for a bypass beyond the streets,

but only each day bears witness  
in the echo chamber of the streets.

Grandmaster Flash's thunderclap says  
he's not the grand jury in the streets,

says he doesn't care if you're big or small  
fear can kill a man on the streets.

Take back the night. Take killjoy's  
cameras & microphones to the streets.

If you're holding the hand lightning strikes  
juice will light you up miles from the streets

where an electric chair surge dims  
all the county lights beyond the streets.

Who will go out there & speak laws  
of motion & relativity in the streets?

Yusef, this morning proves a crow  
the only truth serum in the street.



## Notes from a Non-Existent Himalayan Expedition (Yeti)

By Wislawa Szymborska

So these are the Himalayas.  
 Mountains racing to the moon.  
 The moment of their start recorded  
 on the startling, ripped canvas of the sky.  
 Holes punched in a desert of clouds.  
 Thrust into nothing.  
 Echo—a white mute.  
 Quiet.

Yeti, down there we've got Wednesday,  
 bread and alphabets.  
 Two times two is four.  
 Roses are red there,  
 and violets are blue.

Yeti, crime is not all  
 we're up to down there.  
 Yeti, not every sentence there  
 means death.

We've inherited hope —  
 the gift of forgetting.  
 You'll see how we give  
 birth among the ruins.

Yeti, we've got Shakespeare there.  
 Yeti, we play solitaire  
 and violin. At nightfall,  
 we turn lights on, Yeti.

Up here it's neither moon nor earth.  
 Tears freeze.  
 Oh Yeti, semi-moonman,  
 turn back, think again!

I called this to the Yeti  
 inside four walls of avalanche,  
 stomping my feet for warmth  
 on the everlasting  
 snow.

## Sympathy

by Paul Laurence Dunbar

I know what the caged bird feels, alas!

    When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;  
When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,  
And the river flows like a stream of glass;

    When the first bird sings and the first bud opes,  
And the faint perfume from its chalice steals—  
I know what the caged bird feels!

I know why the caged bird beats his wing

    Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;  
For he must fly back to his perch and cling  
When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;

    And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars  
And they pulse again with a keener sting—  
I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,

    When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,—  
When he beats his bars and he would be free;  
It is not a carol of joy or glee,

    But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,  
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings—  
I know why the caged bird sings!

**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.

**Letter To The Free** by Common

Southern leaves, southern trees we hung from  
 Barren souls, heroic songs unsung  
 Forgive them Father they know this knot is undone  
 Tied with the rope that my grandmother died  
 Pride of the pilgrims affect lives of millions  
 Since slave days separating, fathers from children  
 Institution ain't just a building  
 But a method, of having black and brown bodies fill them  
 We ain't seen as human beings with feelings  
 Will the U.S. ever be us? Lord willing!  
 For now we know, the new Jim Crow  
 They stop, search and arrest our souls  
 Police and policies patrol philosophies of control  
 A cruel hand taking hold  
 We let go to free them so we can free us  
 America's moment to come to Jesus

Freedom (Freedom)  
 Freedom come (Freedom come)  
 Hold on (Hold on)  
 Won't be long (Won't be long)  
 Freedom (Freedom)  
 Freedom come (Freedom come)  
 Hold on (Hold on)  
 Won't be long (Won't be long)

The caged birds sings for freedom to bring  
 Black bodies being lost in the American dream  
 Blood of black being, a pastoral scene  
 Slavery's still alive, check Amendment 13  
 Not whips and chains, all subliminal  
 Instead of 'nigga' they use the word 'criminal'  
 Sweet land of liberty, incarcerated country  
 Shot me with your ray-gun  
 And now you want to trump me  
 Prison is a business, America's the company  
 Investing in injustice, fear and long suffering  
 We staring in the face of hate again  
 The same hate they say will make America great again  
 No consolation prize for the dehumanized  
 For America to rise it's a matter of Black Lives  
 And we gonna free them, so we can free us  
 America's moment to come to Jesus

Freedom (Freedom)  
 Freedom come (Freedom come)  
 Hold on (Hold on)  
 Won't be long (Won't be long)  
 Freedom (Freedom)  
 Freedom come (Freedom come)  
 Hold on (Hold on)  
 Won't be long (Won't be long)

## **My Generation Reading the Newspapers**

By Kenneth Patchen

We must be slow and delicate; return  
the policeman's stare with some esteem,  
remember this is not a shadow play  
of doves and geese but this is now  
the time to write it down, record the words—  
I mean we should have left some pride  
of youth and not forget the destiny of men  
who say goodbye to the wives and homes  
they've read about at breakfast in a restaurant:  
"My love."—without regret or bitterness  
obtain the measure of the stride we make,  
the latest song has chosen a theme of love  
delivering us from all evil—destroy. . . ?  
why no. . . this too is fanciful. . . funny how  
hard it is to be slow and delicate in this,  
this thing of framing words to mark this grave  
I mean nothing short of blood in every street  
on earth can fitly voice the loss of these.

**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.

**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.*

## **We Wear the Mask**

By Paul Laurence Dunbar

We wear the mask that grins and lies,  
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—  
This debt we pay to human guile;  
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,  
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over-wise,  
In counting all our tears and sighs?  
Nay, let them only see us, while  
We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries  
To thee from tortured souls arise.  
We sing, but oh the clay is vile  
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;  
But let the world dream otherwise,  
We wear the mask!



**Bilingual/Bilingüe**

By Rhina P. Espaillat

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**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.

## **America**

By Claude McKay

Although she feeds me bread of bitterness,  
And sinks into my throat her tiger's tooth,  
Stealing my breath of life, I will confess  
I love this cultured hell that tests my youth.  
Her vigor flows like tides into my blood,  
Giving me strength erect against her hate,  
Her bigness sweeps my being like a flood.  
Yet, as a rebel fronts a king in state,  
I stand within her walls with not a shred  
Of terror, malice, not a word of jeer.  
Darkly I gaze into the days ahead,  
And see her might and granite wonders there,  
Beneath the touch of Time's unerring hand,  
Like priceless treasures sinking in the sand.

**Believe, Believe**

By Bob Kaufman

Believe in this. Young apple seeds,  
In blue skies, radiating young breast,  
Not in blue-suited insects,  
Infesting society's garments.

Believe in the swinging sounds of jazz,  
Tearing the night into intricate shreds,  
Putting it back together again,  
In cool logical patterns,  
Not in the sick controllers,  
Who created only the Bomb.

Let the voices of dead poets  
Ring louder in your ears  
Than the screechings mouthed  
In mildewed editorials.  
Listen to the music of centuries,  
Rising above the mushroom time.

## **On the Steps of the Jefferson Memorial**

By Linda Pastan

We invent our gods  
the way the Greeks did,  
in our own image—but magnified.  
Athena, the very mother of wisdom,  
squabbled with Poseidon  
like any human sibling  
until their furious tempers  
made the sea writhe.

Zeus wore a crown  
of lightning bolts one minute,  
a cloak of feathers the next,  
as driven by earthly lust  
he prepared to swoop  
down on Leda.

Despite their power,  
frailty ran through them

like the darker veins  
in the marble of these temples  
we call monuments.

Looking at Jefferson now,  
I think of the language  
he left for us to live by.  
I think of the slave  
in the kitchen downstairs.

**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.

## **What Kind of Times Are These**

By Adrienne Rich

There's a place between two stands of trees where the grass grows uphill  
and the old revolutionary road breaks off into shadows  
near a meeting-house abandoned by the persecuted  
who disappeared into those shadows.

I've walked there picking mushrooms at the edge of dread, but don't be fooled  
this isn't a Russian poem, this is not somewhere else but here,  
our country moving closer to its own truth and dread,  
its own ways of making people disappear.

I won't tell you where the place is, the dark mesh of the woods  
meeting the unmarked strip of light—  
ghost-ridden crossroads, leafmold paradise:  
I know already who wants to buy it, sell it, make it disappear.

And I won't tell you where it is, so why do I tell you  
anything? Because you still listen, because in times like these  
to have you listen at all, it's necessary  
to talk about trees.

### **The Tragic Condition of the Statue of Liberty**

By Bernadette Mayer, a collaboration with Emma Lazarus

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!

Give me your gentrificatees of the Lower East Side including all the well-heeled young Europeans  
who'll take apartments without leases

Give me your landlords, give me your cooperators

Give me the guys who sell the food and the computers to the public schools in District One

Give me the IRS-FBI-CIA men who don't take election day off

Give me the certain members of the school board & give me the district superintendent

Give me all the greedy members of both american & foreign capitalist religious sects

Give me the parents of the punk people

Give me the guy who puts those stickers in the Rice Krispies

Give me the doctor who thinks his time is more valuable than mine and my daughter's & the time of  
all the other non-doctors in this world

Give me the mayor, his mansion, and the president & his white house

Give me the cops who laugh and sneer at meetings where they demonstrate the new uses of mace  
and robots instead of the old murder against people who are being evicted

Give me the landlord's sleazy lawyers and the deal-making judges in housing court & give me the  
landlord's arsonist

Give me the known & unknown big important rich guys who now bank on our quaint neighborhood

Give me, forgive me, the writers who have already or want to write bestsellers in this country

Together we will go to restore Ellis Island, ravaged for years by wind, weather and vandals

I was surprised and saddened when I heard that the Statue of Liberty was in such a serious state of  
disrepair & I want to help

This is the most generous contribution I can afford.



**American Smooth**

By Rita Dove

We were dancing—it must have  
been a foxtrot or a waltz,  
something romantic but  
requiring restraint,  
rise and fall, precise  
execution as we moved  
into the next song without  
stopping, two chests heaving  
above a seven-league  
stride—such perfect agony,  
one learns to smile through,  
ecstatic mimicry  
being the sine qua non  
of American Smooth.  
And because I was distracted  
by the effort of  
keeping my frame  
(the leftward lean, head turned  
just enough to gaze out  
past your ear and always  
smiling, smiling),  
I didn't notice  
how still you'd become until  
we had done it  
(for two measures?  
four?)—achieved flight,  
that swift and serene  
magnificence,  
before the earth  
remembered who we were  
and brought us down.

**Wintergirls** (excerpt)

By Laurie Halse-Anderson

The dead do walk,  
And Haunt,  
And crawl into your bed at night.  
Ghosts sneak into your head  
When you're not looking.

Stars line up  
And volcanoes birth out pieces of glass  
That foretell the future.  
Poison berries make girls stronger,  
But sometimes kill them.

If you howl at the moon,  
And swear on your blood,  
Anything you desire will be yours.  
Be careful what you wish for.  
There's always a catch.

Doctors and parents  
Live in a paper-mache world.  
They patch up problems with strips of paper  
And a little glue.

I live in the borderlands.  
The word *ghost* sounds like *memory*.  
The word *therapy* means *exorcism*.  
My visions echo and multiply multiply.  
I don't know how to figure out what they mean.

I can't tell where they start  
Or if they will end.  
But I know this.  
If they shrink my head anymore,  
Or float me away on an ocean of pills,  
I will never return.

**For You O Democracy**

By Walt Whitman

Come, I will make the continent indissoluble,  
I will make the most splendid race the sun ever shone upon,  
I will make divine magnetic lands,  
    With the love of comrades,  
    With the life-long love of comrades.

I will plant companionship thick as trees along all the rivers of America, and along the shores  
    of the great lakes, and all over the prairies,  
I will make inseparable cities with their arms about each other's necks,  
    By the love of comrades,  
    By the manly love of comrades.

For you these from me, O Democracy, to serve you ma femme!  
For you, for you I am trilling these songs.

## I Was Sleeping Where the Black Oaks Move

By Louise Eldrich

We watched from the house  
as the river grew, helpless  
and terrible in its unfamiliar body.  
Wrestling everything into it,  
the water wrapped around trees  
until their life-hold was broken.  
They went down, one by one,  
and the river dragged off their covering.

Nests of the herons, roots washed to bones,  
snags of soaked bark on the shoreline:  
a whole forest pulled through the teeth  
of the spillway. Trees surfacing  
singly, where the river poured off  
into arteries for fields below the reservation.

When at last it was over, the long removal,  
they had all become the same dry wood.  
We walked among them, the branches  
whitening in the raw sun.  
Above us drifted herons,  
alone, hoarse-voiced, broken,  
settling their beaks among the hollows.  
Grandpa said, *These are the ghosts of the tree people  
moving among us, unable to take their rest.*

Sometimes now, we dream our way back to the heron dance.  
Their long wings are bending the air  
into circles through which they fall.  
They rise again in shifting wheels.  
How long must we live in the broken figures  
their necks make, narrowing the sky.

## Almost Livin' Almost Dyin'

by Juan Felipe Herrera

*for all the dead*

& hear my streets

with ragged beats & the beats  
 are too beat to live so the graves push out with  
 hands that cannot touch the makers of light & the  
 sun flames down through the roofs & the roots that slide  
 to one side & the whistlin' fires of the cops & the cops  
 in the shops do what they gotta do & your body's  
 on the fence & your ID's in the air & the shots  
 get fired & the gas in the face & the tanks  
 on your blood & the innocence all around & the  
 spillin' & the grillin' & the grinnin' & the game of Race  
 no one wanted & the same every day so U fire &  
 eat the smoke thru your long bones & the short mace  
 & the day? This last sweet Swisher day that turns to love  
 & no one knows how it came or what it is or what it says  
 or what it was or what for or from what gate  
 is it open is it locked can U pull it back to your life  
 filled with bitter juice & demon angel eyes even though  
 you pray & pray mama says you gotta sing she says  
 you got wings but from what skies from where could  
 they rise what are the things the no-things called love  
 how can its power be fixed or grasped so the beats  
 keep on blowin' keep on flyin' & the moon tracks your bed  
 where you are alone or maybe dead & the truth  
 carves you carves you & calls you back still alive  
 cry cry the candles by the last four trees still soaked  
 in Michael Brown red and Officer Liu red and  
 Officer Ramos red and Eric Garner whose  
 last words were not words they were just breath  
 askin' for breath they were just burnin' like me like  
 we are all still burnin' can you hear me  
 can you can you feel me swaggin' tall & driving low &  
 talkin' fine & hollerin' from my corner crime & fryin'  
 against the wall

almost livin' almost dyin'  
 almost livin' almost dyin'

**Spelling**

By Margaret Atwood

My daughter plays on the floor  
with plastic letters,  
red, blue & hard yellow,  
learning how to spell,  
spelling,  
how to make spells.

I wonder how many women  
denied themselves daughters,  
closed themselves in rooms,  
drew the curtains  
so they could mainline words.

A child is not a poem,  
a poem is not a child.  
there is no either/or.  
However.

I return to the story  
of the woman caught in the war  
& in labour, her thighs tied  
together by the enemy  
so she could not give birth.

Ancestress: the burning witch,  
her mouth covered by leather  
to strangle words.

A word after a word  
after a word is power.

At the point where language falls away  
from the hot bones, at the point  
where the rock breaks open and darkness  
flows out of it like blood, at  
the melting point of granite  
when the bones know  
they are hollow & the word  
splits & doubles & speaks  
the truth & the body  
itself becomes a mouth.

This is a metaphor.

How do you learn to spell?  
Blood, sky & the sun,  
your own name first,  
your first naming, your first name,  
your first word.

**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.

**On The Fifth Day**  
by Jane Hirschfield

On the fifth day  
the scientists who studied the rivers  
were forbidden to speak  
or to study the rivers.

The scientists who studied the air  
were told not to speak of the air,  
and the ones who worked for the farmers  
were silenced,  
and the ones who worked for the bees.

Someone, from deep in the Badlands,  
began posting facts.

The facts were told not to speak  
and were taken away.  
The facts, surprised to be taken, were silent.

Now it was only the rivers  
that spoke of the rivers,  
and only the wind that spoke of its bees,

while the unpausing factual buds of the fruit trees  
continued to move toward their fruit.

The silence spoke loudly of silence,  
and the rivers kept speaking,  
of rivers, of boulders and air.

Bound to gravity, earless and tongueless,  
the untested rivers kept speaking.

Bus drivers, shelf stockers,  
code writers, machinists, accountants,  
lab techs, cellists kept speaking.

They spoke, the fifth day,  
of silence.



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