

Poems for the "Poetry For All" Worship Service

Poetry for All

Harriet Blymiller

A poem should be equal to:
Not true.

For all the history of grief
An empty doorway and a maple leaf.

For love
The leaning grasses and two lights above the sea—

A poem should not mean
But be
Archibald MacLeish from "Ars Poetica"

You took

The last bus home

Don't know how
You got it through the door

You're always doing amazing stuff

Like the time
You caught that train
Brian Bilston

In poetry, "Tis not enough no harshness gives
offense,
The sound must seem an echo to the sense."
Alexander Pope from *An Essay on Criticism*

Wind whines and whines the shingle
The crazy pierstakes groan;
A senile sea numbers each single
Slimesilvered stone.
Henry Dehlinger from "On the beach at
Fontana"

CROWDED TUB

By Shel Silverstein

Read by Joan Lund

There's too many kids in this tub.
There's too many elbows to scrub.
I just washed a behind
That I'm sure wasn't mine.
There's too many kids in this tub.

THEY'VE PUT A BRASSIERE ON THE CAMEL

By Shel Silverstein

Read by Joan Lund

They've put a brassiere on the camel,
She wasn't dressed proper, you know,
They've put a brassiere on the camel
So that her humps wouldn't show.
And they're making other respectable plans.
They're even insisting the pigs should wear pants,
They'll dress up the ducks if we give them the
chance
Since they've put a brassiere on the camel.

They've put a brassiere on the camel,
They claim she's more decent this way.
They've put a brassiere on the camel,
The camel had nothing to say.
They squeezed her into it, I'll never know how,
They say that she looks more respectable now,
Lord knows what they've got in mind for the cow,
Since they've put a brassiere on the camel.

KIDNAPPED!

By Shel Silverstein

Read by Joan Lund

This morning I got kidnapped
By three masked men.
They stopped me on the sidewalk,
And offered me some candy,
And when I wouldn't take it
They grabbed me by the collar,
And pinned my arms behind me,
And shoved me in the backseat
Of this big black limousine and
Tied my hands behind my back
With sharp and rusty wire.
Then they put a blindfold on me,
So I couldn't see where they took me,
And plugged up my ears with cotton
So I couldn't hear their voices.
And drove for 20 miles or
At least for 20 minutes, and then
Dragged me from the car down to
Some cold and moldy basement,
Where they stuck me in a corner
And went off to get the ransom
Leaving one of them to guard me
With a shotgun pointed at me,
Tied up sitting on a stool...
That's why I'm late for school.

LANYARD

By Billy Collins

Read by Mary Wolgemuth

The other day I was ricocheting slowly
off the blue walls of this room,
moving as if underwater from typewriter to piano,
from bookshelf to an envelope lying on the floor,
when I found myself in the L section of the
dictionary
where my eyes fell upon the word lanyard.

No cookie nibbled by a French novelist
could send one into the past more suddenly—
a past where I sat at a workbench at a camp
by a deep Adirondack lake
learning how to braid long thin plastic strips
into a lanyard, a gift for my mother.

I had never seen anyone use a lanyard
or wear one, if that's what you did with them,
but that did not keep me from crossing
strand over strand again and again
until I had made a boxy
red and white lanyard for my mother.

She gave me life and milk from her breasts,
and I gave her a lanyard.
She nursed me in many a sick room,
lifted spoons of medicine to my lips,
laid cold face-cloths on my forehead,
and then led me out into the airy light

and taught me to walk and swim,
and I, in turn, presented her with a lanyard.
Here are thousands of meals, she said,
and here is clothing and a good education.
And here is your lanyard, I replied,
which I made with a little help from a counselor.

Here is a breathing body and a beating heart,
strong legs, bones and teeth,
and two clear eyes to read the world, she
whispered,
and here, I said, is the lanyard I made at camp.
And here, I wish to say to her now,

is a smaller gift—not the worn truth
that you can never repay your mother
but the rueful admission that when she took
the two-tone lanyard from my hand,
I was as sure as a boy could be
that this useless, worthless thing I wove
out of boredom would be enough to make us even.

IF

By Rudyard Kipling

Read by Gery Morey

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 wornout
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 CREMATION OF SAM MCGEE

By Robert W. Service

Read by Ron Phillips

*There are strange things done in the midnight sun
By the men who toil for gold;
The Arctic trails have their secret tales
That would make your blood run cold;
The Northern Lights have seen queer sights,
But the queerest they ever did see
Was that night on the marge of Lake Lebarge
I cremated Sam McGee.*

Now Sam McGee was from Tennessee, where the
cotton blooms and blows.
Why he left his home in the South to roam 'round the
Pole, God only knows.
He was always cold, but the land of gold seemed to
hold him like a spell;
Though he'd often say in his homely way that "he'd
sooner live in hell."

On a Christmas Day we were mushing our way over
the Dawson trail.
Talk of your cold! through the parka's fold it stabbed
like a driven nail.
If our eyes we'd close, then the lashes froze till
sometimes we couldn't see;
It wasn't much fun, but the only one to whimper was
Sam McGee.

And that very night, as we lay packed tight in our
robes beneath the snow,
And the dogs were fed, and the stars o'erhead were
dancing heel and toe,
He turned to me, and "Cap," says he, "I'll cash in this
trip, I guess;
And if I do, I'm asking that you won't refuse my last
request."

Well, he seemed so low that I couldn't say no; then he
says with a sort of moan:
"It's the curse cold, and it's got right hold till I'm
chilled clean through to the bone.
Yet 'tain't being dead—it's my awful dread of the icy
grave that pains;
So I want you to swear that, foul or fair, you'll
cremate my last remains."

A pal's last need is a thing to heed, so I swore I would
not fail;
And we started on at the streak of dawn; but God! he
looked ghastly pale.
He crouched on the sleigh, and he raved all day of his
home in Tennessee;
And before nightfall a corpse was all that was left of
Sam McGee.

There wasn't a breath in that land of death, and I
hurried, horror-driven,
With a corpse half hid that I couldn't get rid, because
of a promise given;
It was lashed to the sleigh, and it seemed to say: "You
may tax your brawn and brains,
But you promised true, and it's up to you to cremate
those last remains."

Now a promise made is a debt unpaid, and the trail
has its own stern code.
In the days to come, though my lips were dumb, in
my heart how I cursed that load.
In the long, long night, by the lone firelight, while the
huskies, round in a ring,
Howled out their woes to the homeless snows— O
God! how I loathed the thing.

And every day that quiet clay seemed to heavy and
heavier grow;
And on I went, though the dogs were spent and the
grub was getting low;
The trail was bad, and I felt half mad, but I swore I
would not give in;
And I'd often sing to the hateful thing, and it
hearkened with a grin.

Till I came to the marge of Lake Lebargé, and a
derelict there lay;
It was jammed in the ice, but I saw in a trice it was
called the "Alice May."
And I looked at it, and I thought a bit, and I looked at
my frozen chum;
Then "Here," said I, with a sudden cry, "is my cre-ma-
tor-eum."

Some planks I tore from the cabin floor, and I lit the
boiler fire;
Some coal I found that was lying around, and I
heaped the fuel higher;
The flames just soared, and the furnace roared—such
a blaze you seldom see;
And I burrowed a hole in the glowing coal, and I
stuffed in Sam McGee.

Then I made a hike, for I didn't like to hear him sizzle
so;
And the heavens scowled, and the huskies howled,
and the wind began to blow.
It was icy cold, but the hot sweat rolled down my
cheeks, and I don't know why;
And the greasy smoke in an inky cloak went streaking
down the sky.

I do not know how long in the snow I wrestled with
grisly fear;
But the stars came out and they danced about ere
again I ventured near;
I was sick with dread, but I bravely said: "I'll just take
a peep inside.
I guess he's cooked, and it's time I looked"; ... then
the door I opened wide.

And there sat Sam, looking cool and calm, in the heart
of the furnace roar;
And he wore a smile you could see a mile, and he
said: "Please close that door.
It's fine in here, but I greatly fear you'll let in the cold
and storm—
Since I left Plumtree, down in Tennessee, it's the first
time I've been warm."

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THE GUEST HOUSE

by the Persian poet Rumi
Read by Dottie Mann

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them all at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

1

By Malcolm S. McDonald

Read by Kim McDonald

You are my love song
the lyrics and music of my life;
gentle background melody, ever present,
softly reminding of the purpose I am
Harmonies to caress and soothe my soul
and take away my fear.

You are my love song
the heavy metal chords and screaming chorus
that quickens my pounding heart
impossible to sustain the urgent demanding
response in every cell of me, vibrating,
resonant, present and accounted for,
here and now.

You are my love song
incredible interweaving free form jazz
complex, ever changing, indescribable and
unpredictable
because it knows no boundaries
because its structure and its rules are forever
reinterpreted, newly experienced each new
moment
of conscious focus.

You are my love song
My anthem, my exultation,
The Hallelujah Chorus that brings tears of joy
and gives my soul wings.

You are my love song
forever my love
my song
my life.

THOSE WINTER SUNDAYS

By Robert Hayden

Read by Harriet Blymiller

Sundays too my father got up early
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,
then with cracked hands that ached
from labor in the weekday weather made
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
and slowly I would rise and dress,
Fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him,
who had driven out the cold
and polished my good shoes as well.
What did I know, what did I know
of love's austere and lonely offices?

BALLAD OF ORANGE AND GRAPE

By Muriel Rukeyser

Read by Jay Cortright

After you finish your work
After you do your day
After you've read your reading
After you've written your say —
You go down the street to the hot dog stand
One block down and across the way
On a blistering afternoon in East Harlem in the twentieth century

Most of the windows are boarded up
The rats run out of a sack —
Sticking out of the crummy garage
One shiny long Cadillac;
At the glass door of the drug-addiction center
A man who'd like to break your back
But here's a brown woman with a little girl dressed in rose and pink, too

Frankfurters, frankfurters sizzle on the steel
Where the hot-dog-man leans —
Nothing else on the counter
But the usual two machines
The grape one, empty, and the orange one, empty
I face him in between
A black boy comes along, looks at the hot dogs, goes on walking

I watch the man as he stands and pours
In the familiar shape
Bright purple in the one marked ORANGE
Orange in the one marked GRAPE
The grape drink in the machine marked ORANGE
And orange drink in the GRAPE
Just the one word large and clear, unmistakable, one each machine

I ask him: How can we go on reading
And make sense out of what we read? —
How can they write and believe what they're writing
The young ones across the street
While you go on pouring grape into ORANGE
And orange into the one marked GRAPE —?
(How are we going to believe what we read and what we write and we hear and we say and we do?)

He looks at the two machines and he smiles
And he shrugs and smiles and pours again
It could be violence and nonviolence
It could be black and white women and men
It could be war and peace or any
Binary system, love and hate, enemy, friend
Yes and no, be and not-be, what we do and what we don't do

On a corner in East Harlem
Garbage, reading, a deep smile, rape
Forgetfulness, a hot street of murder
Misery, withered hope
A man keeps pouring grape into ORANGE
And orange into the one marked GRAPE
Pouring orange into GRAPE and grape into ORANGE forever

From the movie **YES**
Sally Potter, Writer and Director
Read by Karen Zindell

If and when I die I want to see you cry, I want to see you tear your hair, your howls of anguish tear the air, I want to see you beat your breast, rend your clothes and all the rest, and sob and fall upon the bed. I want to know that I am dead.

I want to know that I'm part of you, and that you cannot bear me being torn away. I want to see you dressed in black, with red-rimmed eyes from sleepless nights of grieving. I want to hear you protest my leaving.

I want to see you in each other's arms and wailing, see you kick a chair and punch a wall and see you moan and fall upon the ground and scream. I want to know this isn't just a dream.

I want my death to be just like my life, I want the mess, the struggle and the strife, I want to fight, and see you fight for me, I want to hear your last regrets, the things you'd wished you'd done and said, in fact, I'd like that just before I'm dead.

Don't let them put you off, or make you go, or say it's bad for me, or makes it hard for me to leave, it won't be true. I want to see you grieve, don't let me drown in silence, so pious, so polite, let's make a lot of noise, a different light will fill the room. I want my death to Wake You Up, and Clean You Out and as I end I'll hear you shout...but I will go.

SING, NINA

By James Shaw

Read by James Shaw

Sing, Nina

Sing in the language of dead monsters who couldn't keep you from singing

Sing in a place you shouldn't be and we shouldn't be

Sing like no one told you to

Sing like an echo of an ancient eruption that still burns and breathes and sings

And burns

Sing and we'll build machines for you

We'll dig the metal in the ground and hurl it into the sky for you

We'll burn what will burn and tame the lightning for you and hold it in our hands

All to hear you sing a little longer

Sing with notes that last centuries with the voices whose echoes we couldn't keep

Sing for us for the next and the next and the last one burning

Sing us to sleep