

# On Humanity



A poetry collection



## Foreword

Throughout history humanity has turned to art to express themselves. Through visual and written art, we can understand each other more and learn what it means to be human. This collection of poetry seeks to answer the question, is humanity good or evil? We may never know the answer, but by reading different perspectives on topics like war, love, violence, and kindness, we can consider both sides, and approach each other with more understanding.

Although the poetry in this collection may have strong political opinions you may not agree with, try to put them aside as you read. Remember, we are all human.

### Content warning:

This book contains themes that may be triggering, including death, discrimination, profanity, war, and violence.

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# Contents

"During the Second World War"	3	The End and the Beginning	40
Alabanza: In Praise of Local 100	5	For the Heart	41
To the United States Army	7	Grandfather	42
Things	9	Digging in a Footlocker	43
Blues and the Abstract Truth	10	Afterimages	45
I Ask My Grandmother if We Can Make Lahmajoun	11	L.A. Prayer	47
Bell theory	13	The Black Maria	49
Minor Miracle	15	Old Story	52
Arms and the Boy	17	On Hearing a New Escalation	53
Christmas Day Truce	19	Her Life Runs Like a Red Silk Flag	55
Haiku from Hiroshima	20	Enemies	57
Pitahaya	21	Maybe the World Ends Here	58
Emerald Spider Among Rose Thorns	22	Ode for the American Dead in Asia	59
Song of Napalm	23	Ballad of Birmingham	61
Us	25	When Given the Opportunity	63
One Christmas in the Trenches	27	September 1918	65
We Lived Happily During the War	29	First Dog in Space	66
The Anthropocene Reviewed: CNN	30	Life at War	67
There are Birds Here	31	Shank	69
When I Think About Tamir Rice While Driving	33	A Word on Statistics	71
This be the Verse	35	Names	73
Good Bones	36	In the Ruins	74
The Love Cook	37	Anthem for Doomed Youth	75
Try to Praise the Mutilated World	39	Yellow Glove	77
		Of History and Hope	81

# “During the Second World War”

Charles Reznikoff

During the Second World War, I was going home one night along a street I seldom used. All the stores were closed except one—a small fruit store.

An old Italian was inside to wait on customers.

As I was paying him I saw that he was sad.

“You are sad,” I said. “What is troubling you?”

“Yes,” he said, “I am sad.” Then he added

in the same monotone, not looking at me:

“My son left for the front today and I’ll never see him again.”

“Don’t say that!” I said. “Of course, you will!”

“No,” he answered. “I’ll never see him again.”

Afterwards, when the war was over,  
I found myself once more in that street  
and again it was late at night, dark and lonely;  
and again I saw the old man alone in the store.  
I bought some apples and looked closely at him:  
his thin wrinkled face was grim  
but not particularly sad. “How about your son?” I said.  
“Did he come back from the war?” “Yes,” he answered.  
“He was not wounded?” “No. He is all right.”  
“That’s fine,” I said. “Fine!”  
He took the bag of apples from my hands and groping inside  
took out one that had begun to rot  
and put in a good one instead.  
“He came back at Christmas,” he added.  
“How wonderful! That was wonderful!”  
“Yes,” he said gently, “it was wonderful.”  
He took the bag of apples from my hands again  
and took out one of the smaller apples and put in a large one.





# Alabanza: In praise of Local 100

**Martín Espada**

for the 43 members of Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Local 100,  
working at the Windows on the World restaurant, who lost their lives in the  
attack on the World Trade Center

*Alabanza.* Praise the cook with a shaven head  
and a tattoo on his shoulder that said Oye,  
a blue-eyed Puerto Rican with people from Fajardo,  
the harbor of pirates centuries ago.

Praise the lighthouse in Fajardo, candle  
glimmering white to worship the dark saint of the sea.

*Alabanza.* Praise the cook's yellow Pirates cap  
worn in the name of Roberto Clemente, his plane  
that flamed into the ocean loaded with cans for Nicaragua,  
for all the mouths chewing the ash of earthquakes.

*Alabanza.* Praise the kitchen radio, dial clicked  
even before the dial on the oven, so that music and Spanish  
rose before bread. Praise the bread. *Alabanza.*

Praise Manhattan from a hundred and seven flights up,  
like Atlantis glimpsed through the windows of an ancient aquarium.

Praise the great windows where immigrants from the kitchen  
could squint and almost see their world, hear the chant of nations:

*Ecuador, México, República Dominicana,*  
*Haití, Yemen, Ghana, Bangladesh.*

*Alabanza.* Praise the kitchen in the morning,  
where the gas burned blue on every stove  
and exhaust fans fired their diminutive propellers,

hands cracked eggs with quick thumbs  
or sliced open cartons to build an altar of cans.  
*Alabanza.* Praise the busboy's music, the *chime-chime*  
of his dishes and silverware in the tub.

*Alabanza.* Praise the dish-dog, the dishwasher  
who worked that morning because another dishwasher  
could not stop coughing, or because he needed overtime  
to pile the sacks of rice and beans for a family  
floating away on some Caribbean island plagued by frogs.  
*Alabanza.* Praise the waitress who heard the radio in the kitchen  
and sang to herself about a man gone. *Alabanza.*

After the thunder wilder than thunder,  
after the shudder deep in the glass of the great windows,  
after the radio stopped singing like a tree full of terrified frogs,  
after night burst the dam of day and flooded the kitchen,  
for a time the stoves glowed in darkness like the lighthouse in Fajardo,  
like a cook's soul. Soul I say, even if the dead cannot tell us  
about the bristles of God's beard because God has no face,  
soul I say, to name the smoke-beings flung in constellations  
across the night sky of this city and cities to come.  
*Alabanza* I say, even if God has no face.

*Alabanza.* When the war began, from Manhattan and Kabul  
two constellations of smoke rose and drifted to each other,  
mingling in icy air, and one said with an Afghan tongue:  
*Teach me to dance. We have no music here.*  
And the other said with a Spanish tongue:  
*I will teach you. Music is all we have.*





# To the United States Army

Kenneth Koch

It felt unusual  
Even if for a good cause  
To be part of a destructive force  
With my rifle in my hands  
And in my head  
My serial number  
The entire object of my existence  
Was to eliminate Japanese soldiers  
By killing them  
With a rifle or with a grenade  
And then, many years after that,  
I could write poetry  
Fall in love  
And have a daughter  
And think  
About these things  
From a great distance  
If I survived  
I was "paying my debt  
To society" a paid  
Killer. It wasn't  
Like anything I'd done  
Before, on the paved  
Streets of Cincinnati



Or on the ballroom floor  
At Mr. Vathé's dancing class  
What would Anne Marie Goldsmith  
Have thought of me  
If instead of asking her to dance  
I had put my BAR to my shoulder  
And shot her in the face  
(Or what would a certain Japanese rifleman  
Have done  
If I asked him to dance?)  
They were unusual afternoons  
Unusual mornings, evenings, and nights.  
As machines make ice  
So we made dead enemy soldiers  
You sending us forth  
Onto beaches and through  
Dark jungle alleys  
With weapons in our hands  
That produced fire  
The blood spilled on you  
Came off in the dry cleaning of headlines  
With Extras  
You shook yourself free  
Of the mutilation and the lament  
And came out strong  
You put up posters  
To convince new people to come in  
And be glad to be with you.



# Things

Lisel Mueller

What happened is, we grew lonely  
living among the things,  
so we gave the clock a face,  
the chair a back,  
the table four stout legs  
which will never suffer fatigue.

We fitted our shoes with tongues  
as smooth as our own  
and hung tongues inside bells  
so we could listen  
to their emotional language,

and because we loved graceful profiles  
the pitcher received a lip,  
the bottle a long, slender neck.

Even what was beyond us  
was recast in our image;  
we gave the country a heart,  
the storm an eye,  
the cave a mouth  
so we could pass into safety.



Excerpt from

# More Blues and the Abstract Truth

C.D. Wright

Well. Then. You say Grandmother  
let me just ask you this:  
How does a body rise up again and rinse  
her mouth from the tap. And how  
does a body put in a plum tree  
or lie again on top of another body  
or string a trellis. Or go on drying  
the flatware. Fix rainbow trout. Grout the tile.  
Buy a bag of onions. Beat an egg stiff. Yes,  
how does the cat continue  
to lick itself from toenail to tailhole.  
And how does a body break  
bread with the word when the word  
has broken. Again. And. Again.  
With the wine. And the loaf.  
And the excellent glass  
of the body. And she says,  
Even. If. The. Sky. Is. Falling.  
My. Peace. Rose. Is. In. Bloom.

# I Ask my Grandmother if We Can Make Lahmajoun

Gregory Djanikian

Sure, she says, why not,  
we buy the ground lamb from the market  
we buy parsley, fresh tomatoes, garlic  
we cut, press, dice, mix

make the yeasty dough  
the night before, kneading it  
until our knuckles feel the hardness  
of river beds or rocks in the desert

we tell Tante Lola to come  
with her rolling pins we tell  
Zaven and Maroush, Hagop and Arpiné  
to bring their baking sheets

we sprinkle the flour on the kitchen table  
and it is snowing on Ararat  
we sprinkle the flour and the memory  
of winter is in our eyes

we roll the dough out  
into small circles  
pale moons over  
every empty village

Kevork is standing on a chair  
and singing  
*O my Armenian girl*  
*my spirit longs to be nearer*

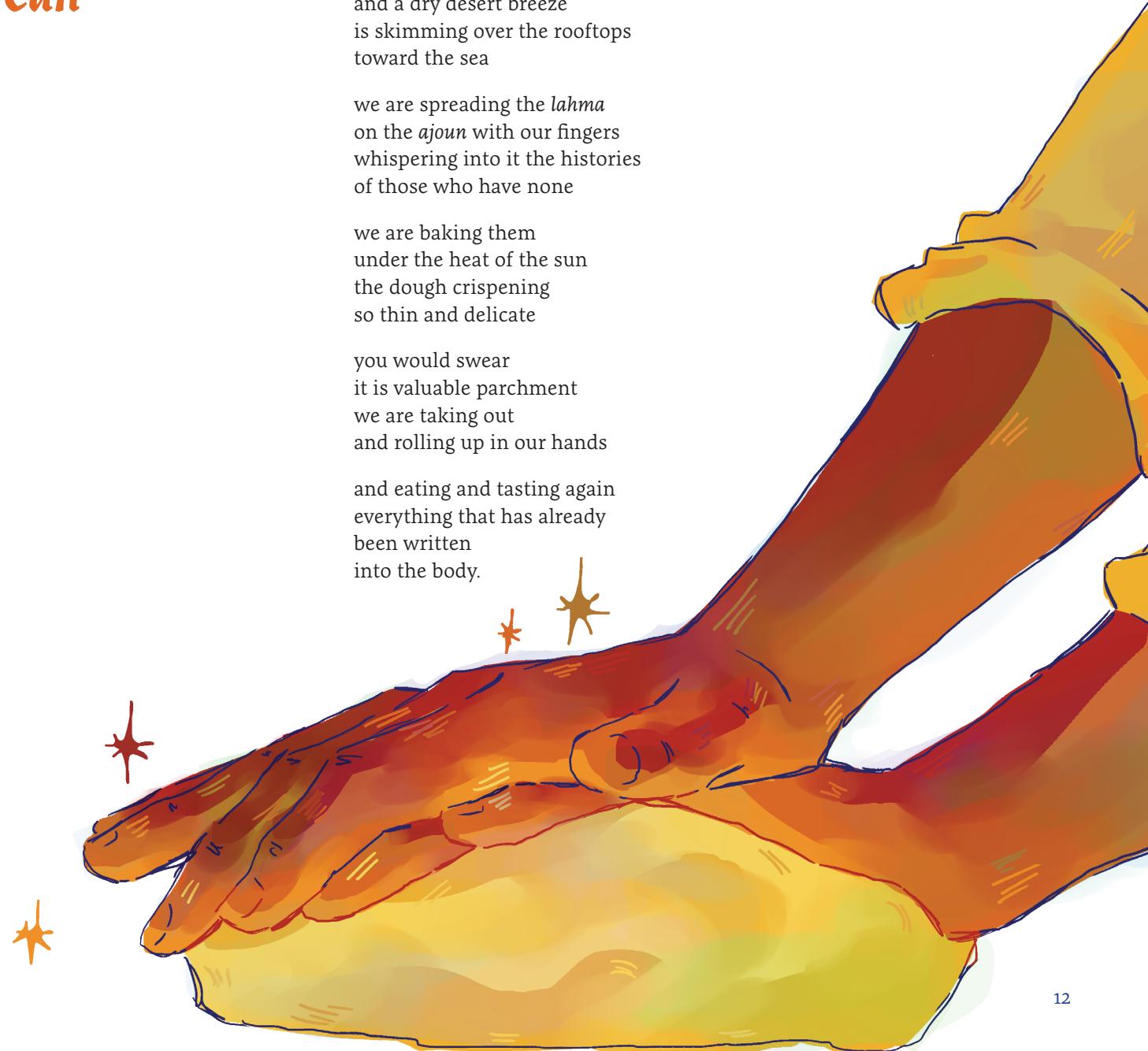
Nevrig is warming the oven  
and a dry desert breeze  
is skimming over the rooftops  
toward the sea

we are spreading the *lahma*  
on the *ajoun* with our fingers  
whispering into it the histories  
of those who have none

we are baking them  
under the heat of the sun  
the dough crispening  
so thin and delicate

you would swear  
it is valuable parchment  
we are taking out  
and rolling up in our hands

and eating and tasting again  
everything that has already  
been written  
into the body.



# Bell Theory

Emily Jungmin Yoon

When I was laughed at for my clumsy English, I touched my throat.  
 Which said *ear* when my ear said *year* and year after year  
 I pronounced a new thing wrong and other throats laughed.  
*Elevator. Library.* Vibrating bells in their mouths.

How to say *azalea*. How to say *forsythia*.  
 Say instead golden bells. Say *I'm in ESL*. In French class  
 a boy whose last name is Kring called me *belle*.  
 Called me by my Korean name, pronouncing it wrong.  
 Called it loudly, called attention to my alien.  
 (I touched the globe moving in my throat, a hemisphere sinking.)

Called me across the field lined with golden bells.  
 I wanted to run and be loved at the same time. By Kring.  
 As in ring of people. *Where are you going? We're laughing with you.*

The bell in our throat that rings with laughter is called uvula. From *uva*: grape.  
 A theory: special to our species, this grape-bell has to do with speech.  
 Which separates us from animals. Kring looked at me and said  
*Just curious, do you eat dogs?* and I wanted to end my small life.  
 Be reborn a golden retriever of North America.  
 Lie on a field lined with golden bells, loved.

Today, in a country where dogs are more cherished than a foreign child, an Oregon Senate candidate says no to refugees. Says, years ago, Vietnamese refugees ate dogs, harvested other people's pets. *Harvest* as in *harvest* grapes. *Harvest* as in *harvest* a field of golden rice. As do people from rice countries. As in people-eat-dog worlds.

Years ago, 1923 Japan, the phrase *jūgoen gojissen* was used to set apart Koreans: say *15 yen 50 sen*. The colonized who used the chaos of the Kanto Earthquake to poison waters, set fire: a cruelty special to our species. A cruelty special to our species — how to say *jūgo*, how to say *gojit*, how *jūgo* sounds like *die* in Korean, how *gojit* sounds like *lie* — *lie, lie, library, azalea, library*.

*I'm going to the library*, I lied, years ago, on a field lined with *forsythia*.



## Minor Miracle

Marilyn Nelson

Which reminds me of another knock-on-wood memory. I was cycling with a male friend, through a small midwestern town. We came to a 4-way stop and stopped, chatting. As we started again, a rusty old pick-up truck, ignoring the stop sign, hurricaneed past scant inches from our front wheels. My partner called, "Hey, that was a 4-way stop!" The truck driver, stringy blond hair a long fringe under his brand-name beer cap, looked back and yelled, "You fucking niggers!" And sped off. My friend and I looked at each other and shook our heads. We remounted our bikes and headed out of town. We were pedaling through a clear blue afternoon between two fields of almost-ripened wheat bordered by cornflowers and Queen Anne's lace when we heard an unmuffled motor, a honk-honking. We stopped, closed ranks, made fists. It was the same truck. It pulled over.



A tall, very much in shape young white guy slid out: greasy jeans, homemade finger tattoos, probably a Marine Corps boot-camp footlockerful of martial arts techniques.

"What did you say back there!" he shouted.  
My friend said, "I said it was a 4-way stop.  
You went through it."  
"And what did I say?" the white guy asked.  
"You said: 'You fucking niggers.'"  
The afternoon froze.

"Well," said the white guy,  
shoving his hands into his pockets  
and pushing dirt around with the pointed toe of his boot,  
"I just want to say I'm sorry."  
He climbed back into his truck  
and drove away.

## Arms and the Boy

Wilfred Owen

Let the boy try along this bayonet-blade  
How cold steel is, and keen with hunger of blood;  
Blue with all malice, like a madman's flash;  
And thinly drawn with famishing for flesh.

Lend him to stroke these blind, blunt bullet-leads,  
Which long to nozzle in the hearts of lads,  
Or give him cartridges of fine zinc teeth  
Sharp with the sharpness of grief and death.

For his teeth seem for laughing round an apple.  
There lurk no claws behind his fingers supple;  
And God will grow no talons at his heels,  
Nor antlers through the thickness of his curls.





## Christmas Day Truce, 1914

*Clik the Mouse*

Exchanging presents – instead of bullets  
Pleasantries – rather than death-knells

Exchanging tackles – instead of tanks  
Goals – rather than grenades

Exchanging passes – instead of poison  
Shooting to score – rather than to kill

How we all wish – that the full-time whistle  
Had ended – the horrors that followed

## Haiku from Hiroshima

Fujikawa Genshi, translated by Kyoko Selden

God suddenly averted His eyes at 8:15.



# Pitahaya

Craig Arnold

Teach me a fruit of your  
country I asked and so you dipped  
into a shop and in your hand  
held me a thick yellow pinecone

no knife between us  
you put it to your teeth  
sideways like a bird and bit  
and peeled away the fleshy  
scales or were they petals

crisp white at the core  
peppered with black seeds  
sweet and light like a cold cloud  
like some exotic sherbet carried  
hand over hand from a mountaintop  
by a relay of runners straightway  
to the Inca's high table

we sat on metal chairs  
still pebbled with rain the seat  
of my pants damp we passed it  
back and forth no matter how  
carefully we could not help

spilling the juice making  
our cheeks sticky our fingers  
getting sticky our fingers no  
not even once touching



# Emerald Spider Between Rose Thorns

Dean Young

Imagine, not even or really ever tasting  
a peach until well over 50, not once  
sympathizing with Blake naked in his garden  
insisting on angels until getting off the table  
and coming home with my new heart. How absurd  
to still have a body in this rainbow-gored,  
crickety world and how ridiculous to be given one  
in the first place, to be an object  
like an orchid is an object, or a stone,  
so bruisable and plummeting, arms  
waving from the evening-ignited lake,  
heading singing in the furnace feral and sweet,  
tears that make the face grotesque,  
tears that make it pure. How easy  
it is now to get drunk on a single whiff  
like a hummingbird or ant, on the laughter  
of one woman and who knew how much I'd miss  
that inner light of snow now that I'm in Texas.



# Song of Napalm

Bruce Weigl

*for my wife*

After the storm, after the rain stopped pounding,  
 We stood in the doorway watching horses  
 Walk off lazily across the pasture's hill.  
 We stared through the black screen,  
 Our vision altered by the distance  
 So I thought I saw a mist  
 Kicked up around their hooves when they faded  
 Like cut-out horses  
 Away from us.  
 The grass was never more blue in that light, more  
 Scarlet; beyond the pasture  
 Trees scraped their voices into the wind, branches  
 Crisscrossed the sky like barbed wire  
 But you said they were only branches.  
 Okay. The storm stopped pounding.  
 I am trying to say this straight: for once  
 I was sane enough to pause and breathe  
 Outside my wild plans and after the hard rain  
 I turned my back on the old curses. I believed  
 They swung finally away from me ...  
 But still the branches are wire  
 And thunder is the pounding mortar,  
 Still I close my eyes and see the girl



Running from her village, napalm  
 Stuck to her dress like jelly,  
 Her hands reaching for the no one  
 Who waits in waves of heat before her.

So I can keep on living,  
 So I can stay here beside you,  
 I try to imagine she runs down the road and wings  
 Beat inside her until she rises  
 Above the stinking jungle and her pain  
 Eases, and your pain, and mine.

But the lie swings back again.  
 The lie works only as long as it takes to speak  
 And the girl runs only as far  
 As the napalm allows  
 Until her burning tendons and crackling  
 Muscles draw her up  
 into that final position

Burning bodies so perfectly assume. Nothing  
 Can change that; she is burned behind my eyes  
 And not your good love and not the rain-swept air  
 And not the jungle green  
 Pasture unfolding before us can deny it.

**us**

Tory Dent



in your arms  
it was incredibly often  
enough to be  
in your arms  
careful as we had to be at times  
about the I.V. catheter  
in my hand,  
or my wrist,  
or my forearm  
which we placed, consciously,  
like a Gamboni vase,  
the center of attention,  
placed, frail identity  
as if our someday-newborn  
on your chest—  
to be secluded, washed over  
in your arms  
often enough, it was  
in that stillness, the only stillness  
amidst the fears which wildly collided  
and the complexities  
of the illness, all the work  
we had yet to do, had just done,  
the hope, ridiculous amounts of it  
we had to pump  
from nothing, really,  
short-lived consensus  
possibility & experiment

to access  
from our pinched and tiny minds  
just the idea of hope  
make it from scratch, air and water  
like manufactured snow  
a colossal fatigue  
the severe concentration  
of that, the repetition of that  
lifted for a moment  
just above your arms  
inevitable, pressuring  
it weighed down  
but remained above  
like a cathedral ceiling,  
strangely sheltering  
while I held tightly  
while there I could  
in your arms  
only there, the only stillness  
remember the will,  
allow the pull, tow against inevitable ebb—  
you don't need reasons to live  
one reason, blinking in the fog,  
organically sweet in muddy dark  
incredibly often enough  
it is, it was  
in your arms

Excerpt from

# One Christmas in the Trenches

Chrispin Thomas

one Christmas in the trenches  
they stood in mud and sand  
their loved ones and their football  
a distant far off land -  
the snow lay thick as thick could be  
a bitter chill did spread  
behind the sand bags and the wire  
they stood among the dead

their sweethearts faces locked inside  
their tins and bits of things  
along with resignation  
of all that fighting brings  
on backs of Woodbine packets  
around some cold tinned stew  
like texts and up-dates of their day  
the scores would still get through

December Nineteen Fourteen  
upon that Christmas morn  
when to a man an act un-planned  
and instant truce was born -  
behind the barbed wire barricades  
all scorched and bleak and bare  
a distant sound grew all around  
a song hung on the air

that Christmas in the trenches  
a hope blew on the wind  
a carol in another tongue  
from far off did begin -  
we'll never know who made the call



to move in such a way  
but something somehow lifted them  
upon that Christmas Day

forbidden breach of orders  
we call it what we will  
but hearts were stirred and greetings heard  
the air grew calm and still -  
from burrows then on either side  
they met in no-man's land  
as enemy met enemy  
with gifts and outstretched hands

a football thrown between the guns  
from nowhere did appear  
and in that silence voices rang  
and echoed loud and clear -  
we'll never ever know the scores  
or just how many games  
when Tommy Atkins challenged Fritz  
upon that Christmas Day -

but one result is certain  
as game and friendship ceased  
the sudden opportunity  
for peace was never seized -  
and still we wonder how a man  
can laugh and play with men  
to then return like sheep to fold  
to kill and kill again

one Christmas in that first Great War  
of stench and blood and grime  
their football brought them closer  
for one brief day in time  
and though commanders drove them back  
their orders to obey  
between the lines a match was played  
upon that Christmas Day



## We Lived Happily During the War

Ilya Kaminsky

And when they bombed other people's houses, we  
protested  
but not enough, we opposed them but not  
enough. I was  
in my bed, around my bed America  
was falling: invisible house by invisible house by invisible house.  
I took a chair outside and watched the sun.  
In the sixth month  
of a disastrous reign in the house of money  
in the street of money in the city of money in the country of money,  
our great country of money, we (forgive us)  
lived happily during the war.

Excerpt from

## The Anthropocene Reviewed: CNN

John Green

One evening, just after the U.S.-led forces entered Baghdad, we were all watching the news on the couch together. Unedited footage was being broadcast from the city, and we watched as a cameraman panned across a home with a huge hole in one of its walls that was mostly covered by a piece of plywood. There was Arabic graffiti scrawled in black spray paint on the plywood, and the reporter on the news was talking about the anger in the street, and the hatred. Hassan started to laugh.

I asked him what was so funny, and he said, "The graffiti."

And I said, "What's funny about it?"

Hassan answered, "It says 'Happy birthday, sir, despite the circumstances.'"

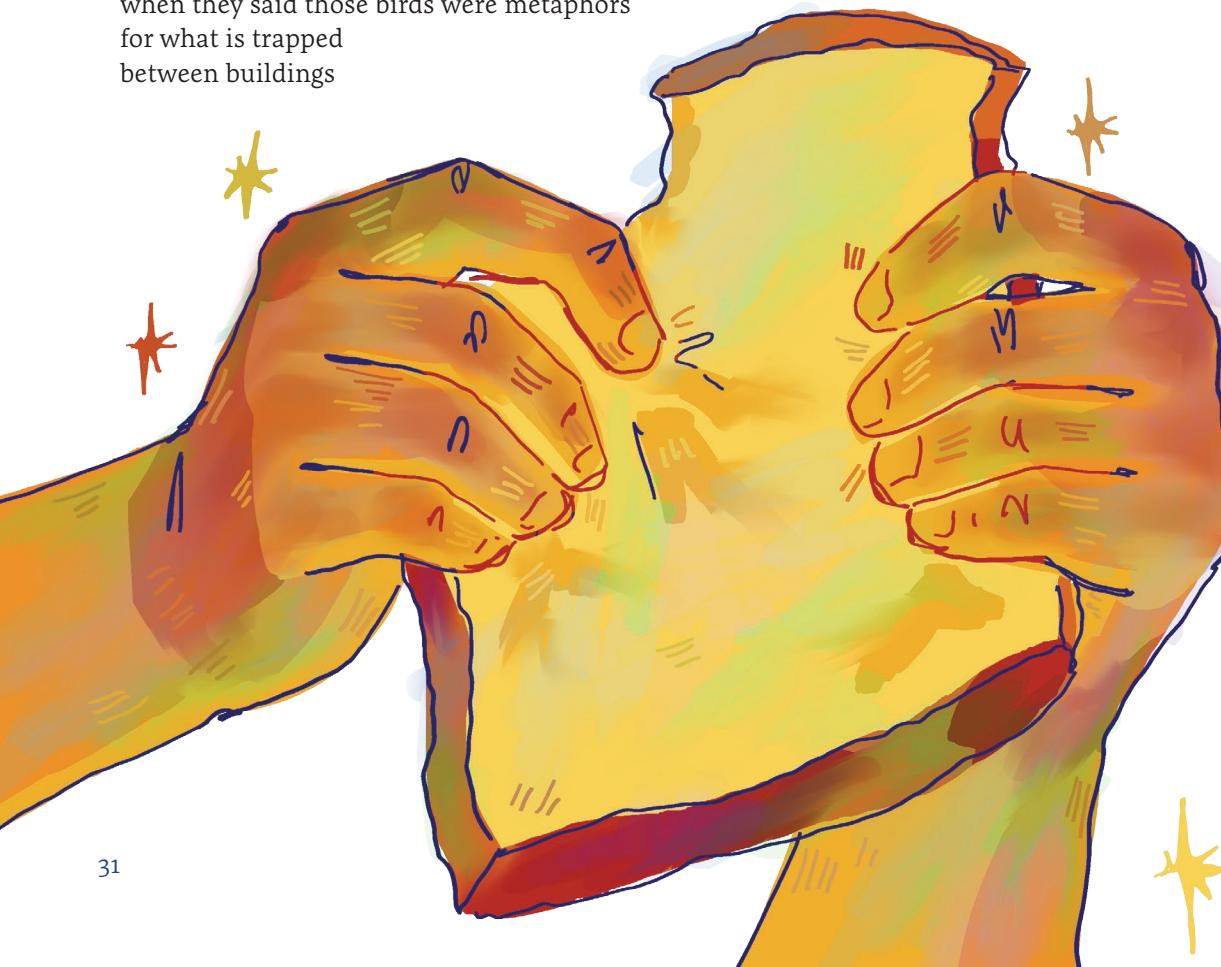


# There are Birds Here

Jamaal May

For Detroit

There are birds here,  
so many birds here  
is what I was trying to say  
when they said those birds were metaphors  
for what is trapped  
between buildings



and buildings. No.  
The birds are here  
to root around for bread  
the girl's hands tear  
and toss like confetti. No,  
I don't mean the bread is torn like cotton,  
I said confetti, and no  
not the confetti  
a tank can make of a building.  
I mean the confetti  
a boy can't stop smiling about  
and no his smile isn't much  
like a skeleton at all. And no  
his neighborhood is not like a war zone.  
I am trying to say  
his neighborhood  
is as tattered and feathered  
as anything else,  
as shadow pierced by sun  
and light parted  
by shadow-dance as anything else,  
but they won't stop saying  
how lovely the ruins,  
how ruined the lovely  
children must be in that birdless city.

# When I think of Tamir Rice While Driving

Reginald Dwayne Betts

in the backseat of my car are my own sons,  
still not yet Tamir's age, already having heard  
me warn them against playing with toy pistols,  
though my rhetoric is always about what I don't  
like, not what I fear, because sometimes  
I think of Tamir Rice & shed tears, the weeping  
all another insignificance, all another way to avoid  
saying what should be said: the Second Amendment  
is a ruthless one, the pomp & constitutional circumstance  
that says my arms should be heavy with the weight  
of a pistol when forced to confront death like  
this: a child, a hidden toy gun, an officer that fires  
before his heart beats twice. My two young sons play  
in the backseat while the video of Tamir dying  
plays in my head, & for everything I do know, the thing  
I don't say is that this should not be the brick and mortar  
of poetry, the moment when a black father drives  
his black sons to school & the thing in the air is the death  
of a black boy that the father cannot mention,  
because to mention the death is to invite discussion  
of taboo: if you touch my sons the crimson  
that touches the concrete must belong, at some point,



to you, the police officer who justifies the echo  
of the fired pistol; taboo: the thing that says that justice  
is a killer's body mangled and disrupted by bullets  
because his mind would not accept the narrative  
of your child's dignity, of his right to life, of his humanity,  
and the crystalline brilliance you saw when your boys first breathed;  
the narrative must invite more than the children bleeding  
on crisp fall days; & this is why I hate it all, the people around me,  
the black people who march, the white people who cheer,  
the other brown people, Latinos & Asians & all the colors of humanity  
that we erase in this American dance around death, as we  
are not permitted to articulate the reasons we might yearn  
to see a man die; there is so much that has to disappear  
for my mind not to abandon sanity: Tamir for instance, everything  
about him, even as his face, really and truly reminds me  
of my own, in the last photo I took before heading off  
to a cell, disappears, and all I have stomach for is blood,  
and there is a part of me that wishes that it would go away,  
the memories, & that I could abandon all talk of making it right  
& justice. But my mind is no sieve & sanity is no elixir & I am bound  
to be haunted by the strength that lets Tamir's father,  
mother, kinfolk resist the temptation to turn everything  
they see into a grave & make home the series of cells  
that so many of my brothers already call their tomb.



## This be the Verse

Philip Larkin

They fuck you up, your mum and dad.  
They may not mean to, but they do.  
They fill you with the faults they had  
And add some extra, just for you.

But they were fucked up in their turn  
By fools in old-style hats and coats,  
Who half the time were soppy-stern  
And half at one another's throats.

Man hands on misery to man.  
It deepens like a coastal shelf.  
Get out as early as you can,  
And don't have any kids yourself.



## Good Bones

Maggie Smith

Life is short, though I keep this from my children.  
Life is short, and I've shortened mine  
in a thousand delicious, ill-advised ways,  
a thousand deliciously ill-advised ways  
I'll keep from my children. The world is at least  
fifty percent terrible, and that's a conservative  
estimate, though I keep this from my children.  
For every bird there is a stone thrown at a bird.  
For every loved child, a child broken, bagged,  
sunk in a lake. Life is short and the world  
is at least half terrible, and for every kind  
stranger, there is one who would break you,  
though I keep this from my children. I am trying  
to sell them the world. Any decent realtor,  
walking you through a real shithole, chirps on  
about good bones: This place could be beautiful,  
right? You could make this place beautiful.



# The Love Cook

Ron Padgett

Let me cook you some dinner.  
Sit down and take off your shoes  
and socks and in fact the rest  
of your clothes, have a daiquiri,  
turn on some music and dance  
around the house, inside and out,  
it's night and the neighbors  
are sleeping, those dolts, and  
the stars are shining bright,  
and I've got the burners lit  
for you, you hungry thing.



## Try to Praise the Mutilated World

Adam Zagajewski, translated by Clare Cavanagh

Try to praise the mutilated world.  
Remember June's long days,  
and wild strawberries, drops of rosé wine.  
The nettles that methodically overgrow  
the abandoned homesteads of exiles.  
You must praise the mutilated world.  
You watched the stylish yachts and ships;  
one of them had a long trip ahead of it,  
while salty oblivion awaited others.  
You've seen the refugees going nowhere,  
you've heard the executioners sing joyfully.  
You should praise the mutilated world.  
Remember the moments when we were together  
in a white room and the curtain fluttered.  
Return in thought to the concert where music flared.  
You gathered acorns in the park in autumn  
and leaves eddied over the earth's scars.  
Praise the mutilated world  
and the gray feather a thrush lost,  
and the gentle light that strays and vanishes  
and returns.



Excerpt from

## The End and the Beginning

Wislawa Szymborska, translated by Joanna Trzeciak

After every war  
someone has to clean up.  
Things won't  
straighten themselves up, after all.

Someone has to push the rubble  
to the side of the road,  
so the corpse-filled wagons  
can pass.

Someone has to get mired  
in scum and ashes,  
sofa springs,  
splintered glass,  
and bloody rags.

Someone has to drag in a girder  
to prop up a wall.  
Someone has to glaze a window,  
rehang a door.

Photogenic it's not,  
and takes years.  
All the cameras have left  
for another war.



## For the Heart

Neal Bowers

Running on Highway 30, the last leg  
of a long route in early evening heat,  
I was soaked through and talking to myself  
like a fighter in the late rounds  
when a car slowed down to match my pace  
and Dale Shoemaker, killed in Vietnam  
just out of high school twenty years ago,  
leaned over from behind the wheel and grinned his  
yearbook grin, then gunned the engine and disappeared  
around a curve bowed out with August corn.

For a moment the air held still,  
a bell about to ring, a wave  
drawn back before it falls,  
and I saw Dale Shoemaker, whom we called  
"Mole" for fun, for love, the way he was  
and always would be, a boy without responsibility,  
free to drive the countryside forever, not tagged  
by yearbook editors, who didn't know him,  
with a quotation that read like an epitaph—  
"Every mission constitutes a pledge of duty" —  
not dead of duty in a wet field far from home,  
not middle-aged and legging it down the backroads  
of America, as if this one, too, were winnable.

## Grandfather

Andrei Gurvianu

Dead before I came into this world, grandfather,  
I carry your name, yet I've never met you.  
I hear my name, and know  
that somehow they refer to you.  
When I scribble those six letters  
fast, to sign some document  
or print them neatly in a box,  
I feel your presence flow with the ink  
stain and burn through the paper,  
forever imprinted in my mind.  
Late summer nights  
gathered around the dinner table,  
leftovers being cleared away,  
faces clouded in cigarette smoke,  
I hear voices pass the word  
back and forth in reverence.  
Somehow I know it's not me  
the little one grabbing for attention.  
They speak of you, Andrei,  
the one I've never met,  
whose name I carry.



# Digging in a Footlocker

Walter McDonald

Crouched before dismantled guns,  
we found war souvenirs  
our uncle padlocked in the attic,  
a brittle latch easily pried off.

Stiff uniforms on top, snapshots  
of soldiers young as our cousins,  
a velvet box of medals  
as if he fought all battles

in World War II. Bayonets, machetes,  
a folded flag, two hand grenades  
with missing pins. We picked up teeth  
like pennies, loose, as if tossed in,

a piece of something dark and waxy  
like a fig, curved like a question mark,  
a human ear. We touched dried pieces  
of cloth stuck to curved bones

and held them to the light,  
turning them over and over, wondering  
how did uncles learn to kill,  
what would happen when we grew up.



Excerpt from

# Afterimages

Audre Lorde

III

I inherited Jackson, Mississippi.  
For my majority it gave me Emmett Till  
his 15 years puffed out like bruises  
on plump boy-cheeks  
his only Mississippi summer  
whistling a 21 gun salute to Dixie  
as a white girl passed him in the street  
and he was baptized my son forever  
in the midnight waters of the Pearl.

His broken body is the afterimage of my 21st year  
when I walked through a northern summer  
my eyes averted  
from each corner's photographies  
newspapers protest posters magazines  
Police Story, Confidential, True  
the avid insistence of detail  
pretending insight or information  
the length of gash across the dead boy's loins  
his grieving mother's lamentation  
the severed lips, how many burns  
his gouged out eyes  
sewed shut upon the screaming covers  
louder than life



all over  
the veiled warning, the secret relish  
of a black child's mutilated body  
fingered by street-corner eyes  
bruise upon livid bruise  
and wherever I looked that summer  
I learned to be at home with children's blood  
with savored violence  
with pictures of black broken flesh  
used, crumpled, and discarded  
lying amid the sidewalk refuse  
like a raped woman's face.

A black boy from Chicago  
whistled on the streets of Jackson, Mississippi  
testing what he'd been taught was a manly thing to do  
his teachers  
ripped his eyes out his sex his tongue  
and flung him to the Pearl weighted with stone  
in the name of white womanhood  
they took their aroused honor  
back to Jackson  
and celebrated in a whorehouse  
the double ritual of white manhood  
confirmed.



# L.A. Prayer

Francisco X. Alarcón

April 1992

something  
was wrong  
when buses  
didn't come

streets  
were  
no longer  
streets

how easy  
hands  
became  
weapons

blows  
gunfire  
rupturing  
the night



the more  
we run  
the more  
we burn

o god  
show us  
the way  
lead us

spare us  
from ever  
turning into  
walking

matches  
amidst  
so much  
gasoline

Excerpt from

# The Black Maria

Aracelis Girmay

*Body of space. Body of dark.*

*Body of light.*

The Skyview apartments  
circa 1973, a boy is  
kneeling on the rooftop, a boy who  
(it is important  
to mention here his skin  
is brown) prepares his telescope,  
the weights & rods,  
to better see the moon. His neighbor  
(it is important to mention here  
that she is white) calls the police  
because she suspects the brown boy  
of something, she does not know  
what at first, then turns,  
with her looking,  
his telescope into a gun,  
his duffel into a bag of objects  
thieved from the neighbors' houses  
(maybe even hers) & the police  
(it is important to mention  
that statistically they  
are also white) arrive to find  
the boy who has been turned, by now,  
into "the suspect," on the roof  
with a long, black lens, which is,



in the neighbor's mind, a weapon &  
depending on who you are, reading this,  
you know that the boy is in grave danger,  
& you might have known  
somewhere quiet in your gut,  
you might have worried for him  
in the white space between lines 5 & 6,  
or maybe even earlier, & you might be holding  
your breath for him right now  
because you know this story,  
it's a true story, though,  
miraculously, in this version  
of the story, anyway,  
the boy on the roof of the Skyview lives  
to tell the police that he is studying  
the night & moon & lives  
long enough to offer them (the cops) a view  
through his telescope's long, black eye, which,  
if I am spelling it out anyway,  
is the instrument he borrowed  
& the beautiful "trouble" he went through  
lugging it up to the roof  
to better see the leopard body of  
space speckled with stars & the moon far off,  
much farther than (since I am spelling *The Thing*  
out) the distance between  
the white neighbor who cannot see the boy  
who is her neighbor, who,  
in fact, is much nearer  
to her than to the moon, the boy who

# The Black Maria

**Continued**

wants to understand the large  
 & gloriously un-human mysteries of  
 the galaxy, the boy who, despite "America,"  
 has not been killed by the murderous jury of  
 his neighbor's imagination & wound. This poem  
 wants only the moon in its hair & the boy on the roof.  
 This boy on the roof of this poem  
     with a moon in his heart. Inside my own body  
 as I write this poem my body  
     is making a boy even as the radio  
 calls out the Missouri coroner's news,  
     the Ohio coroner's news.  
 2015. My boy will nod  
     for his milk & close his mouth around  
 the black eye of my nipple.  
     We will survive. How did it happen?  
 The boy. The cops. My body in this poem.  
     My milk pulling down into droplets of light  
 as the baby drinks & drinks them down  
     into the body that is his own, see it,  
 splayed & sighing as a star in my arms.  
     Maybe he will be the boy who studies stars.  
 Maybe he will be (say it)  
     the boy on the coroner's table  
 splayed & spangled  
     by an officer's lead as if he, too, weren't made  
 of a trillion glorious cells & sentences. Trying to last.



# An Old Story

**Tracy K. Smith**

We were made to understand it would be  
 Terrible. Every small want, every niggling urge,  
 Every hate swollen to a kind of epic wind.

Livid, the land, and ravaged, like a rageful  
 Dream. The worst in us having taken over  
 And broken the rest utterly down.

A long age  
 Passed. When at last we knew how little  
 Would survive us—how little we had mended

Or built that was not now lost—something  
 Large and old awoke. And then our singing  
 Brought on a different manner of weather.

Then animals long believed gone crept down  
 From trees. We took new stock of one another.  
 We wept to be reminded of such color.



## On Hearing a New Escalation

Richard Hugo

From time one I've been reading slaughter,  
seeing the same bewildered face of a child  
staring at nothing beside his dead mother  
in Egypt, the pyramid blueprints approved,  
the phrases of national purpose streaming  
from the mouth of some automated sphynx.  
Day on day, the same photographed suffering,  
the bitterness, the opportune hate handed down  
from Xerxes to Nixon, a line strong  
as transatlantic cable and stale ideals.

Killing's still in though glory is out of style.  
And what does it come to, this blood cold  
in the streets and a history book printed  
and bound with such cost saving American  
methods, the names and dates are soon bones?  
Beware certain words: enemy. Liberty. Freedom.  
Believe those sounds and you're aiming a bomb.



# Her Life Runs Like a Red Silk Flag

Bruce Weigl

Because this evening Miss Hoang Yen  
sat down with me in the small  
tiled room of her family house  
I am unable to sleep.  
We shared a glass of cold and sweet water.  
On a blue plate her mother brought us  
cake and smiled her betel-black teeth at me  
but I did not feel strange in the house  
my country had tried to bomb into dust.  
In English thick and dazed as blood  
she told me how she watched our planes  
cross her childhood's sky,  
all the children of Hanoi  
carried in darkness to mountain hamlets, Nixon's  
Christmas bombing. She let me hold her hand,  
her shy unmoving fingers, and told me  
how afraid she was those days and how this fear  
had dug inside her like a worm and lives  
inside her still, won't die or go away.  
And because she's stronger, she comforted me,  
said I'm not to blame,  
the million sorrows alive in her gaze.

With the dead we share no common rooms.  
With the frightened we can't think straight;  
no words can bring the burning city back.

Outside on Hung Dao Street  
I tried to say good-bye and held her hand  
too long so she looked back through traffic  
towards her house and with her eyes  
she told me I should leave.

All night I ached for her and for myself  
and nothing I could think or pray  
would make it stop. Some birds sang morning  
home across the lake. In small reed boats  
the lotus gatherers sailed out  
among their resuming white blossoms.

*Hanoi, 1990*



## Enemies

**Wendell Berry**

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

If you care what they think,

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

is love to come—love for your enemy  
that is the way of liberty?

From forgiveness. Forgiven, they go

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

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



## Perhaps the World Ends Here

**Joy Harjo**

The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, we must eat to live.  
The gifts of earth are brought and prepared, set on the table. So it has been  
since creation, and it will go on.

We chase chickens or dogs away from it. Babies teethe at the corners. They  
scrape their knees under it.

It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be human.  
We make men at it, we make women.

At this table we gossip, recall enemies and the ghosts of lovers.

Our dreams drink coffee with us as they put their arms around our children.  
They laugh with us at our poor falling-down selves and as we put ourselves  
back together once again at the table.

This table has been a house in the rain, an umbrella in the sun.

Wars have begun and ended at this table. It is a place to hide in the shadow  
of terror. A place to celebrate the terrible victory.

We have given birth on this table, and have prepared our parents for burial here.  
At this table we sing with joy, with sorrow. We pray of suffering and remorse.  
We give thanks.

Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing and  
crying, eating of the last sweet bite.



# Ode for the American Dead in Asia

Thomas McGrath

1.

God love you now, if no one else will ever,  
 Corpse in the paddy, or dead on a high hill  
 In the fine and ruinous summer of a war  
 You never wanted. All your false flags were  
 Of bravery and ignorance, like grade school maps:  
 Colors of countries you would never see—  
 Until that weekend in eternity  
 When, laughing, well armed, perfectly ready to kill  
 The world and your brother, the safe commanders sent  
 You into your future. Oh, dead on a hill,  
 Dead in a paddy, leeched and tumbled to  
 A tomb of footnotes. We mourn a changeling: you:  
 Handselled to poverty and drummed to war  
 By distinguished masters whom you never knew.

2.

The bee that spins his metal from the sun,  
 The shy mole drifting like a miner ghost  
 Through midnight earth—all happy creatures run  
 As strict as trains on rails the circuits of  
 Blind instinct. Happy in your summer follies,  
 You mined a culture that was mined for war:  
 The state to mold you, church to bless, and always  
 The elders to confirm you in your ignorance.  
 No scholar put your thinking cap on nor  
 Warned that in dead seas fishes died in schools  
 Before inventing legs to walk the land.  
 The rulers stuck a tennis racket in your hand,  
 An Ark against the flood. In time of change  
 Courage is not enough: the blind mole dies,  
 And you on your hill, who did not know the rules.

3.

Wet in the windy counties of the dawn  
 The lone crow skirls his draggled passage home:  
 And God (whose sparrows fall aslant his gaze,  
 Like grace or confetti) blinks and he is gone,  
 And you are gone. Your scarecrow valor grows  
 And rusts like early lilac while the rose  
 Blooms in Dakota and the stock exchange  
 Flowers. Roses, rents, all things conspire  
 To crown your death with wreaths of living fire.  
 And the public mourners come: the politic tear  
 Is cast in the Forum. But, in another year,  
 We will mourn you, whose fossil courage fills  
 The limestone histories: brave: ignorant: amazed:  
 Dead in the rice paddies, dead on the nameless hills.



# Ballad of Birmingham

Dudley Randall

(On the bombing of a church in Birmingham, Alabama, 1963)

"Mother dear, may I go downtown  
Instead of out to play,  
And march the streets of Birmingham  
In a Freedom March today?"

"No, baby, no, you may not go,  
For the dogs are fierce and wild,  
And clubs and hoses, guns and jails  
Aren't good for a little child."

"But, mother, I won't be alone.  
Other children will go with me,  
And march the streets of Birmingham  
To make our country free."

"No, baby, no, you may not go,  
For I fear those guns will fire.  
But you may go to church instead  
And sing in the children's choir."



She has combed and brushed her night-dark hair,  
And bathed rose petal sweet,  
And drawn white gloves on her small brown hands,  
And white shoes on her feet.

The mother smiled to know her child  
Was in the sacred place,  
But that smile was the last smile  
To come upon her face.

For when she heard the explosion,  
Her eyes grew wet and wild.  
She raced through the streets of Birmingham  
Calling for her child.

She clawed through bits of glass and brick,  
Then lifted out a shoe.  
"O, here's the shoe my baby wore,  
But, baby, where are you?"



# When Given the Opportunity

## Blue Rose

On July 7, 2003, MEB-1, better known as the Mars Rover christened Opportunity, launched in order to achieve a 90 sol mission on Mars, or approximately 92.5 days. On January 25, 2004, Opportunity landed on the surface of the Red planet.

1. When given the opportunity to travel into the cold embrace of the stars for the sake of humanity, you said yes. You craned your mechanical neck upward and took on the mission you were designed for. You shouldn't have had to. You were young, and we were curious, and yet in all our years on this desolate mud ball you would think we would have figured out that curiosity and youth are not a safe mix, that we would have figured that out before rocket science.

2. When given the opportunity to land on a cold, dusty planet, enriched with iron oxide sand, you did. You tucked neat grooves into the uninhabited martian terrain, alone. This was sol one of many, and you would do your mission well.

3. When given the opportunity to continue on to a ninety-first sol and continue to send data for our purposes, you took it. You treated every day like it was your last, sending as much as you could to us, each rock and image and pinch of sand a godsend to our scientists. You continued on, a brave warrior on a cold no man's land, our only eye in the darkness of the unknown.

4. When given the opportunity to find the first water on the Martian planet, you dug out a sample for us. You didn't know, but you gave us hope. Hope for better days on a different planet, hope for better days under different skies, unblemished by the damage of our forefathers. It may have been all chemical equation to you, but H<sub>2</sub>O is our life, much as solar power is yours. You radiated with light, and all we could do was be grateful, and hope that you could feel our love, although you don't. You didn't. You won't.

5. When given the opportunity to send us one last message after a sandstorm buried you in cenotaph fashion, your solar panels unable to reach the light, you sent us the most human message of fear and loneliness that a robot could possibly muster, eight months after the last update you sent us. You left us, then. You, buried there under the weight of your mission, left, and rightfully so. We mourn you, but not as much as we thank you, for your many years of service. Rest now- the opportunity is open.

On June 10, 2018, a planet-wide dust storm on Mars caused all communication between the Opportunity rover and NASA to cease. An eight month redemption plan involving over a thousand commands to open up communications with her failed. On February 13, 2019, NASA received the chilling final message from the rover: "My battery is low and it's getting dark." In response, NASA sang her to sleep with Billie Holiday's "I'll Be Seeing You": 'I'll find you / In the morning sun / And when the night is new. / I'll be looking at the moon, / But I'll be seeing you.' The Mars rover Opportunity, nicknamed Oppy, was programmed originally with the intent of 90 sols and 1,100 ft- three months. She lasted over 5,000 sols, and traveled around 28 miles- 15 years.

You were the opportunity of a lifetime. Thanks, Oppy, for everything. At ease.





## September, 1918

Amy Lowell

This afternoon was the colour of water falling through sunlight;  
The trees glittered with the tumbling of leaves;  
The sidewalks shone like alleys of dropped maple leaves,  
And the houses ran along them laughing out of square, open windows.  
Under a tree in the park,  
Two little boys, lying flat on their faces,  
Were carefully gathering red berries  
To put in a pasteboard box.  
Some day there will be no war,  
Then I shall take out this afternoon  
And turn it in my fingers,  
And remark the sweet taste of it upon my palate,  
And note the crisp variety of its flights of leaves.  
To-day I can only gather it  
And put it into my lunch-box,  
For I have time for nothing  
But the endeavour to balance myself  
Upon a broken world.



## First Dog in Space

Brennig Davies

They say that, from space,  
the Earth looks like a  
small, blue ball, but how  
did it look to you, Laika?  
From that shuttle like a balloon  
whose string they let go, and which  
they never trained for recall?



They say you were a stray  
who never fought with other dogs,  
and that the clever people called you pet names  
through the wires of your shrinking cages,  
and that, before you died, overheating  
in that heavy, weightless cold, one of them  
took you home, and you played with his kids.

They say that, from space,  
the Earth looks like a  
small, blue ball. I'll throw it  
for you, Laika, if you'll chase it,

dart through the stratosphere  
like a comet, undeserving  
of its fate.

Excerpt from

## Life at War

Denise Levertov

The same war

continues.

We have breathed the grits of it in, all our lives,  
our lungs are pocked with it,

the mucous membrane of our dreams  
coated with it, the imagination  
filmed over with the gray filth of it:  
the knowledge that humankind,

delicate Man, whose flesh  
responds to a caress, whose eyes  
are flowers that perceive the stars,

whose music excels the music of birds,  
whose laughter matches the laughter of dogs,  
whose understanding manifests designs  
fairer than the spider's most intricate web



still turns without surprise, with mere regret  
to the scheduled breaking open of breasts whose milk  
runs out over the entrails of still-alive babies,  
transformation of witnessing eyes to pulp-fragments,  
implosion of skinned penises into carcass-gulleys.

We are the humans, men who can make;  
whose language imagines *mercy, lovingkindness*;  
we have believed one another  
the mirrored forms of a God we felt as good -

who do these acts, who convince ourselves  
it is necessary; these acts are done  
to our own flesh; burned human flesh  
is smelling in Viet Nam as I write.

Yes this is the knowledge that jostles for space  
in our bodies along with all we  
go on knowing of joy, of love;

our nerve filaments twitch with its presence  
day and night,  
nothing we say has not the husky phlegm of it in the saying,  
nothing we do has the quickness, the sureness,  
the deep intelligence living at peace would have.

# Shank

Sally Green

for Cora

Though she lives in a world of Velcro, snaps and zippers, I'm showing my granddaughter how to sew on a button. She's nine, same age I was watching my mother pick my favorite one, shaped like a flower a child might draw, color of sunshine. Her homemaker hands held everything together, needle and red thread lickety-splitting up, over, down, up again attaching the blossom to grass-green cloth: *Colors no bee could pass by.* Now, before the last tug of thread through the button my granddaughter brought me, I point out the pinch of space—width of a scissor-blade—between it and the fabric, a shaft of stitches with a half-dozen twists of thread around it before tying off. *Shank*, I tell her, same as Mother named it. It strengthens the bond between button and garment, less friction than ready-mades, fasteners that loosen too soon. *Like love*, my mother said. *Close, but not too close.* A snip of thread and my granddaughter's ready to go, fluorescent-pink button back on the nose of her dog-faced school bag, the shank fixing us together in this world my mother could trust only so long as everything was done right, only when she didn't forget to check I was *buttoned up proper*, buttoned up tight.



# A Word on Statistics

*Wislawa Szymborska, translated by Joanna Trzeciak*

Out of every hundred people

those who always know better:  
fifty-two.

Unsure of every step:  
almost all the rest.

Ready to help,  
if it doesn't take long:  
forty-nine.

Always good,  
because they cannot be otherwise:  
four—well, maybe five.

Able to admire without envy:  
eighteen.

Led to error  
by youth (which passes):  
sixty, plus or minus.

Those not to be messed with:  
forty and four.

Living in constant fear  
of someone or something:  
seventy-seven.



Capable of happiness:  
twenty-some-odd at most.

Harmless alone,  
turning savage in crowds:  
more than half, for sure.

Cruel  
when forced by circumstances:  
it's better not to know,  
not even approximately.

Wise in hindsight:  
not many more  
than wise in foresight.

Getting nothing out of life except things:  
thirty  
(though I would like to be wrong).

Doubled over in pain  
and without a flashlight in the dark:  
eighty-three, sooner or later.

Those who are just:  
quite a few at thirty-five.  
But if it takes effort to understand:  
three.

Worthy of empathy:  
ninety-nine.

Mortal:  
one hundred out of one hundred—  
a figure that has never varied yet.



## Names

Lisel Mueller

A few names tell it all,  
the whole incredible history  
of one generation, mine;  
names that we cannot manage  
with a drum-roll, like Waterloo,  
nor pitch to the eloquence  
of tragic Gettysburg.

Hiroshima sticks in our throats;  
we choke on the bones of Buchenwald,  
spit out the stones of Berlin.  
Who says Vietnam  
burns his tongue,  
and Mississippi, o Mississippi  
scrubs out our mouths  
till we cry mercy.

## In the Ruins

Frank Bidart

1. Man is a MORAL animal.
2. You can get human beings to do anything - IF you convince them it is moral.
3. You can convince human beings anything is moral.



# Anthem for Doomed Youth

Wilfred Owen

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?

— Only the monstrous anger of the guns.

Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle

Can patter out their hasty orisons.

No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells;

Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,—

The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;

And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?

Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes

Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.

The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;

Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,

And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.





## Yellow Glove

Naomi Shihab Nye

What can a yellow glove mean in a world of motorcars and governments?

I was small, like everyone. Life was a string of precautions: Don't kiss the squirrel before you bury him, don't suck candy, pop balloons, drop watermelons, watch TV. When the new gloves appeared one Christmas, tucked in soft tissue, I heard it trailing me: Don't lose the yellow gloves.

I was small, there was too much to remember. One day, waving at a stream—the ice had cracked, winter chipping down, soon we would sail boats and roll into ditches—I let a glove go. Into the stream, sucked under the street. Since when did streets have mouths? I walked home on a desperate road. Gloves cost money. We didn't have much. I would tell no one. I would wear the yellow glove that was left and keep the other hand in a pocket. I knew my mother's eyes had tears they had not cried yet, I didn't want to be the one to make them flow. It was the prayer I spoke secretly, folding socks, lining up donkeys in windowsills. *To be good*, a promise made to the roaches who scouted my closet at night. *If you don't get in my bed, I will be good.* And they listened. I had a lot to fulfill.

The months rolled down like towels out of a machine. I sang and drew and fattened the cat. Don't scream, don't lie, don't cheat, don't fight—you could hear it anywhere. A pebble could show you how to be smooth, tell the truth. A field could show how to sleep without walls. A stream could remember how to drift and change—next June I was stirring the stream like a soup, telling my brother dinner would be ready if he'd only hurry up with the bread, when I saw it. The yellow glove draped on a twig. A muddy survivor. A quiet flag.

Where had it been in the three gone months? I could wash it, fold it in my winter drawer with its sister, no one in that world would ever know. There were miracles on Harvey Street. Children walked home in yellow light. Trees were reborn and gloves traveled far, but returned. A thousand miles later, what can a yellow glove mean in a world of bankbooks and stereos?

Part of the difference between floating and going down.



## Of History and Hope

**Miller Williams**

We have memorized America,  
how it was born and who we have been and where.  
In ceremonies and silence we say the words,  
telling the stories, singing the old songs.  
We like the places they take us. Mostly we do.  
The great and all the anonymous dead are there.  
We know the sound of all the sounds we brought.  
The rich taste of it is on our tongues.  
But where are we going to be, and why, and who?  
The disenfranchised dead want to know.  
We mean to be the people we meant to be,  
to keep on going where we meant to go.

But how do we fashion the future? Who can say how  
except in the minds of those who will call it Now?  
The children. The children. And how does our garden grow?  
With waving hands—oh, rarely in a row—  
and flowering faces. And brambles, that we can no longer allow.

Who were many people coming together  
cannot become one people falling apart.  
Who dreamed for every child an even chance  
cannot let luck alone turn doorknobs or not.  
Whose law was never so much of the hand as the head  
cannot let chaos make its way to the heart.  
Who have seen learning struggle from teacher to child  
cannot let ignorance spread itself like rot.  
We know what we have done and what we have said,  
and how we have grown, degree by slow degree,  
believing ourselves toward all we have tried to become—  
just and compassionate, equal, able, and free.

All this in the hands of children, eyes already set  
on a land we never can visit—it isn't there yet—  
but looking through their eyes, we can see  
what our long gift to them may come to be.  
If we can truly remember, they will not forget.







on **star** humanity

