

Nikki 1

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF POETRY

Poetry is as necessary
To life
As salt is to stew
As garlic is to pasta
As perfume is to summer nights
As shaving lotion is to mornings
As your smile is to
My happiness

Poetry is as significant
To life
As yeast is to bread
As butter is to toast
As grapes are to wine
As sugar is to lemons
How else will we get
Lemonade

Poetry is to me
Your voice
Your touch
Your laughter
That feeling at the end of day
That I am
Not alone



from "Chasing Utopia" by Nikki Giovanni

Nikki 2

NOTE TO THE SOUTH: YOU LOST

The buzz of the flies
Almost was a lullaby
Rocking the dead
To a restful place

You couldn't hear the ants
Though they were
Clearly there
In the eyes the mouths
Any wound or soft
Tissue

The worms had come
Understanding those
Which were not
Trampled
Would have a great
Feast

The grasses had no
Choice but to drink
Down the blood
And bits of flesh
That were ground
Into them

In the future
It would be girls
Not field rats
Who would follow
The soldiers
Into the trenches

by Nikki Giovanni

Nikki
Za

THE GOLDEN SHOVEL POEM

they eat beans mostly, this old yellow pair
—From "The Bean Eaters" by Gwendolyn Brooks

In the future there
Would be single
Engine airplanes
Dropping bombs

And then
In the scientific imagination
Of the 21st century
There would be men

And women
Pushing buttons
Making war clean
And distant

But today
On This battlefield
The deadliest of This war
The Songbirds had been
Frightened off

The Turkey Buzzards retreated to watch
Deer Skunk Raccoons
Possum Groundhogs gathered
To let the smoke clear

And only the moans
Of the almost dead
And the quiet march of Lice
Gave cadence to this concert of sacrifice
For
Freedom



At the Evening of Life

I wonder if *they*
See the evening of life as a treat to *eat*
Or as a staple like *beans*
With corn bread *mostly*
A good warming meal *this*
Daily day *old*
Bread pudding love capped sunshine *yellow*
By an honest upstanding *pair*

Nikki 3



MORGANTOWN, WVA
(Haiku for Ethel and Lucy)

Pinto Beans Fried Corn Bread
Clean Spring Water Rocking Chair
Your Smile Home Peace

Nikki 4



FOR SONIA SANCHEZ

In the name of those incredibly Brave men and women
who made the Trek from Freedom in Africa to Enslavement in America
and maintained their humanity through unspeakable acts
In the precious name of Phillis Wheatley
who was put on Academic Trial
forcing her to prove she wrote her own Poems
to the confident Paul Laurence Dunbar
who kept the plantation tongue alive
In the Brave name of W. E. B. DuBois
who studied The Atlantic Slave Trade
to Jessie Faujet
who wrote children's stories
In the name of the incomparable Langston Hughes
who taught us
The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs
to the anger of Richard Wright
In the name of the Honesty of James Baldwin
In the fearlessness of Margaret Walker
to the beautiful poems of Gwendolyn Brooks
In the name of the awesome Toni Morrison
And the truly wonderful spirit of Rita Dove

WHEN GOD MADE MOUNTAINS

Nikki S

When God made mountains
He made runaway slaves
With no book knowledge of the North Star
Nor botany classes describing moss
On the north side of trees

He made black men and women unafraid
Of mountain lions and Florida
Panthers and no matter what
Teddy Roosevelt tried to show: bears
do not like people

not the cuddly little Koala
not the fierce Grizzly
not the mighty Polar
nor the humble mountain

Black bear . . . all bears and their dens
Are to be avoided

God did make the jackrabbit who could be snared
God made the possum who is slow
God made the clever raccoon
And rivers sweet with fish

He made berries and nuts and green leafy things
Which were safe and good
To eat

When God made runaway slaves
He knew they would need a friend
Not only in nature
But of a human kind
So he sent Mountaineers
He sent white people who would not be a slave
Nor own one

~~she cried
when she realized poems
were her true calling
not night flights nor
evading predators
but she was such a fragile creature
with no pockets like the kangaroo
nor folds like the walrus
she was vulnerable
to the vestiges of
wind and weather
she feared for the pride
she took in her muse
her fear turned
to depression
and she drank herself
to an early death
by carelessness around
a ten-year-old boy with a slingshot~~



Who would not kill a slaveholder
Nor die for one
He sent a free white man
Who believed in change
And a free white woman who believed in him
And they made their home
Amid these mighty mountains

They liked to have a drink or two
So they welcomed Johnny Appleseed
Who brought stories and fermented applejack
They liked heroes so they welcomed the traveling
preacher

With his message of a man "who has trampled
out the vineyard

Where the grapes of wrath are stored"
They liked to sing so they welcomed
The runaway slave with his banjo
And friendships were formed

When God made mountains he made men and
women

Who would need each other
Who would respect each other
Who would carry the Word so that all men
And women could be saved

When God made mountains
He said "Come unto me, ye who need rest"
And they called it Appalachia, the Original Word
For Peace

And some folk said: This cannot be Done
And the rest said: Yes we Can
And the clouds settle in that welcome place

Between ground and trees and sky
Like smoke coming off a coffeepot
Like steam coming from a kettle of pinto beans
Like the rustic smell of a wood-burning fire at
day's end

At home and at peace
Like God has a rocking chair in the sky
Smoking his pipe
And being proud
Of His Great Smoky Mountains

Nikki
6 and 7



~~forever
forgiving
church/people
are fireproof
and/Faith
won't just go up
in smoke~~

Amazin' Grace

*Amazing grace! how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found
Was blind, but now I see...*

It isn't negro
but it is spiritual
it do speak to the power
of redemption
to power period
converting lost
to found
creating sight
where there was none
but what sound could be
so powerfully sweet
sweet enough
to turn a wretched
slave-ship captain
into england's most outspoken
abolitionist and songwriter
was it the splash of bodies
dragged kicking and screaming

from "Affrilachia" (2000)
by: Frank X Walker

Walker ☺

jettisoned off decks
to the outstretched arms
of ocean coral
was it the crack of the whip
or the popping sound bloody flesh makes
when a sizzling branding iron
breaks the skin

the sound of fear and confusion
below deck
muffled by the sound of rape up above

the sound of 609 beating hearts
sardined into a space for 300

amazing is to be lost and blind
and still the captain
a willing participant
in crimes against humanity

but what was that sound
that liberating release
granting pardons
for penitence undone?
what does forgiveness sound like?

*Thro' many dangers, toils and suares
I have already come...*

now every time you hear amazing grace
listen for john newton's apology
his silent sobs seeking salvation
listen and hear
what healing sounds like

*'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home*

Walker
9 and 10

Breakfast in Hazard

Thick as grits
or biscuit gravy
fog gathers in the night
like a quilt
wrapping itself round
everything
making an island
of this high ridge turned
holiday inn
carved straight out of
bedrock
Drawn tight against
the fence
a quiet cover
of handspun
cotton and wool
spiders
out of the coffee
and blankets the sky
on mountain
mornings

Walker
11

Walker 12

AMBIGUITY OVER THE CONFEDERATE FLAG

In the old south
we would sit on the veranda
look out over the horizon at
the young
who happily played behind
while their mothers
sang rapturous spirituals
those were good ol' days
not having to use the whip
was more civilized
than slavery

*life was full of work
from sunup to sundown*

*nothing but fields of cotton
children
tried to pick their own weight*

*by age 13 filled 500 lb sacks
and lived the blues*

*for plantation owners
sharecropping and extending debt
was almost more profitable*

Turn Me Loose!
from: "The Unghosting of"
Medgar Evers"

by: Frank X Walker

ROTTEN FRUIT

Byron De La Beckwith

I.
I fish for pleasure and to relax.
It's the best way
to sort out details of a plan
that needs flawless execution.

Every useful thing I know
I learned sitting in the bottom
of a boat across from my granddaddy
in one of Mississippi's finest

fishing holes. How to
pick out the best spot. How to
get there early. How to lay
low, be patient and wait.

II.
Watching your cork disappear
in the water, bob back up and run
is as thrilling as sneaking your hand
up under a pretty girl's skirt.

They all put up a lil' fight, at first
but sooner or later a lucky man
will get his hands on a cat;
a patient man, inside a big wide mouth.

A MOON SOMEWHERE ELSE

Ice roses on a white bank,
translucent vases of blood-milk—
the deer are cautious, skittish.
Owls unscroll in their muffled Morse
all the meaning there is for the coming hours.
In the distance a train.
God forbid a stranger should find his way here.
Even the neigh of the dead horse has vanished.
It will be enough to remember
everything as it is.
And so he promises to make up nothing but the truth.

Harshman 13

LATE SEPTEMBER

Far up the south pasture, bristly and sharp now,
a golden fox nestles, patient
in a golden sun on a golden bank.
Night begins her slow walk over the next hill
carrying under her purple skirts
the book of chances
whose purpose is to pull everything together.

God should do this were He or She here
to study perfection like we do
looking up the hill, up the sky,
up the page to where Blake draws a line
between Adam's first breath
and all the thunder to follow.

Harshman 14

From "Green-Silver and Silent"
by Marc Harshman

BEECH BOTTOM, WEST VIRGINIA

Above the crumpled rise of hills west of the Ohio,
above their shadow shoulders,
another range lifts in the grayling dark,
an Andes-ragged accumulation of storm
burned white against the black undertow of wind
and there, where the river turns away south,
the sun from some place beyond words
leaves a palimpsest signature of light
to limn the jagged maw where comes the night,
and when it is has gone and there are only these
few snowflakes left within sight,
shaken out of the drooping blanket of cold,
I will remember the story told me long ago
of the blizzard that came and left
only after it had become the story it is now,
prehistoric legend grown to gospel.

Harshman B

JIMMY REMEMBERING

All my lives were lived on that ridge, dreamed into the root-stock of oak and mule, of ginseng and a smokehouse steaming under a slate November before Vietnam and twenty-four hour TV and marijuana and *Hustler* and we were all hippies for awhile and the yellow moon began to rise throwing new shadows where the woodlot met the meadow. And I looked back to see my mother sitting there, a wreath of onions roped to the wall above her and never once did I wonder what she made of it all, the flood of changes coming down the run quicker than Jack Flash and all the rest. The cat's green eyes stood still a moment. The chickens held their babble and the wind died. Mother started to say something. I stood up to tell them it was time to go. But I stumbled and started laughing again. It was good stuff. Columbian. *They were good times*. Yes, we said such things, said them for years...long enough to believe that we had endured, matured, married ourselves to this ancient hillscape where no one has an anchor without a bloodline tested by rock and death's inconveniences. Facts. White walnuts below the Miller farm. Paw paws—only a day between black frost and deer. Sponge mushrooms—apple roots and elms. Those are easy. Carmen was Merl's half-sister after Grandad remarried in 1957. Dean hung himself after the parade, his banjo still on the bale from which he stepped. These, as well. Easy. True. But something else...Endurance? Endurance beyond pink slips, land slips, beyond divorce, out-migration? Try to figure those into the equation and then come read me the graveyard's tally and we'll start to get somewhere. Find us something worth saying, something worth remembering. But she's gone now, into the boneyard below the run. A whippoorwill keens better than anything I know.

THERE WILL BE DANCING

A fiddle tune bearing, roughshod,
the memory of the village:
sunlight on stucco,
leaf-plastered paths in autumn,
spectral sheep
in moonlight and bracken,
the lilt of the market tongue,
ancient beyond telling.

A fiddle tune bearing, sweet as fruit,
a memory of timelessness:
candles on narrow sills
marching each night through Advent,
a bowl of rose petals, peach
and orange and crimson,
garlic and lamb simmering
in a black pan,
kisses long enough for tasting.

All have returned, just here.
Listen. They come round again.
There will be dancing, too.

Talgarth, Wales, 1991

Horsham
1/10