

2015

English 9 Poetry Selections



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8/1/2015

I, Too, Sing America
by Langston Hughes

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed--

I, too, am America.

Madam and the Phone Bill
by Langston Hughes

You say I O.K.ed
LONG DISTANCE?
O.K.ed it when?
My goodness, Central
That was then!

I'm mad and disgusted
With that Negro now.
I don't pay no REVERSED
CHARGES nohow.

You say, I will pay it--
Else you'll take out my phone?
You better let
My phone alone.

I didn't ask him
To telephone me.
Roscoe knows darn well
LONG DISTANCE
Ain't free.

If I ever catch him,
Lawd, have pity!
Calling me up
From Kansas City.

Just to say he loves me!
I knowed that was so.
Why didn't he tell me some'n
I don't know?

For instance, what can
Them other girls do
That Alberta K. Johnson
Can't do--and more, too?

What's that, Central?
You say you don't care

Nothing about my
Private affair?

Well, even less about your
PHONE BILL, does I care!

Un-humm-m! . . . Yes!
You say I gave my O.K.?
Well, that O.K. you may keep--

But I sure ain't gonna pay!



Langston Hughes

Harlem Shadows
by Claude McKay

I hear the halting footsteps of a lass
 In Negro Harlem when the night lets fall
Its veil. I see the shapes of girls who pass
 To bend and barter at desire's call.
Ah, little dark girls who in slippered feet
Go prowling through the night from street to street!

Through the long night until the silver break
 Of day the little gray feet know no rest;
Through the lone night until the last snow-flake
 Has dropped from heaven upon the earth's white breast,
The dusky, half-clad girls of tired feet
Are trudging, thinly shod, from street to street.

Ah, stern harsh world, that in the wretched way
 Of poverty, dishonor and disgrace,
Has pushed the timid little feet of clay,
 The sacred brown feet of my fallen race!
Ah, heart of me, the weary, weary feet
In Harlem wandering from street to street.

If We Must Die
by Claude McKay

If we must die—let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die—oh, let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
Oh, Kinsmen! We must meet the common foe;
Though far outnumbered, let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

Saturday's Child

Countee Cullen

Some are teathed on a silver spoon,
With the stars strung for a rattle;
I cut my teeth as the black raccoon--
For implements of battle.

Some are swaddled in silk and down,
And heralded by a star;
They swathed my limbs in a sackcloth gown
On a night that was black as tar.

For some, godfather and goddame
The opulent fairies be;
Dame Poverty gave me my name,
And Pain godfathered me.

For I was born on Saturday--
"Bad time for planting a seed,"
Was all my father had to say,
And, "One mouth more to feed."

Death cut the strings that gave me life,
And handed me to Sorrow,
The only kind of middle wife
My folks could beg or borrow.

America

Allen Ginsberg

America I've given you all and now I'm nothing.
America two dollars and twenty-seven cents January 17, 1956.
I can't stand my own mind.
America when will we end the human war?
Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb
I don't feel good don't bother me.
I won't write my poem till I'm in my right mind.
America when will you be angelic?
When will you take off your clothes?
When will you look at yourself through the grave?
When will you be worthy of your million Trotskyites?
America why are your libraries full of tears?
America when will you send your eggs to India?
I'm sick of your insane demands.
When can I go into the supermarket and buy what I need with my good looks?
America after all it is you and I who are perfect not the next world.
Your machinery is too much for me.
You made me want to be a saint.
There must be some other way to settle this argument.
Burroughs is in Tangiers I don't think he'll come back it's sinister.
Are you being sinister or is this some form of practical joke?
I'm trying to come to the point.
I refuse to give up my obsession.
America stop pushing I know what I'm doing.
America the plum blossoms are falling.
I haven't read the newspapers for months, everyday somebody goes on trial for murder.
America I feel sentimental about the [Wobblies](#).
America I used to be a communist when I was a kid and I'm not sorry.
I smoke marijuana every chance I get.
I sit in my house for days on end and stare at the roses in the closet.
When I go to Chinatown I get drunk and never get laid.
My mind is made up there's going to be trouble.
You should have seen me reading Marx.
My psychoanalyst thinks I'm perfectly right.
I won't say the Lord's Prayer.
I have mystical visions and cosmic vibrations.
America I still haven't told you what you did to Uncle Max after he came over from Russia.

I'm addressing you.
Are you going to let our emotional life be run by Time Magazine?
I'm obsessed by Time Magazine.
I read it every week.
Its cover stares at me every time I slink past the corner candystore.
I read it in the basement of the Berkeley Public Library.
It's always telling me about responsibility. Businessmen are serious. Movie

producers are serious. Everybody's serious but me.
It occurs to me that I am America.
I am talking to myself again.

Asia is rising against me.
I haven't got a chinaman's chance.
I'd better consider my national resources.
My national resources consist of two joints of marijuana millions of genitals
an unpublishable private literature that goes 1400 miles and hour and
twentyfivethousand mental institutions.
I say nothing about my prisons nor the millions of underprivileged who live in
my flowerpots under the light of five hundred suns.
I have abolished the warehouses of France, Tangiers is the next to go.
My ambition is to be President despite the fact that I'm a Catholic.

America how can I write a holy litany in your silly mood?
I will continue like Henry Ford my strophes are as individual as his
automobiles more so they're all different sexes
America I will sell you strophes \$2500 apiece \$500 down on your old strophe
America free Tom Mooney
America save the [Spanish Loyalists](#)
America [Sacco & Vanzetti](#) must not die
America I am the [Scottsboro](#) boys.
America when I was seven momma took me to Communist Cell meetings they
sold us garbanzos a handful per ticket a ticket costs a nickel and the
speeches were free everybody was angelic and sentimental about the
workers it was all so sincere you have no idea what a good thing the party
was in 1835 Scott Nearing was a grand old man a real mensch Mother
Bloor made me cry I once saw Israel Amter plain. Everybody must have
been a spy.
America you don't really want to go to war.
America it's them bad Russians.
Them Russians them Russians and them Chinamen. And them Russians.
The Russia wants to eat us alive. The Russia's power mad. She wants to take
our cars from out our garages.
Her wants to grab Chicago. Her needs a Red Reader's Digest. her wants our
auto plants in Siberia. Him big bureaucracy running our fillingstations.
That no good. Ugh. Him makes Indians learn read. Him need big black niggers.
Hah. Her make us all work sixteen hours a day. Help.
America this is quite serious.
America this is the impression I get from looking in the television set.
America is this correct?
I'd better get right down to the job.
It's true I don't want to join the Army or turn lathes in precision parts
factories, I'm nearsighted and psychopathic anyway.
America I'm putting my queer shoulder to the wheel.

The Meaning of the Shovel

By Martín Espada

—Barrio René Cisneros

Managua, Nicaragua, June-July 1982

This was the dictator's land
before the revolution.

Now the dictator is exiled to necropolis,
his army brooding in camps on the border,
and the congregation of the landless
stipples the earth with a thousand shacks,
every weatherbeaten carpenter
planting a fistful of nails.

Here I dig latrines. I dig because last week
I saw a funeral in the streets of Managua,
the coffin swaddled in a red and black flag,
hoisted by a procession so silent
that even their feet seemed
to leave no sound on the gravel.
He was eighteen, with the border patrol,
when a sharpshooter from the dictator's army
took aim at the back of his head.

I dig because yesterday
I saw four walls of photographs:
the faces of volunteers
in high school uniforms
who taught campesinos to read,
bringing an alphabet
sandwiched in notebooks
to places where the mist never rises
from the trees. All dead,
by malaria or the greedy river
or the dictator's army
swarming the illiterate villages
like a sky full of corn-plundering birds.

I dig because today, in this barrio
without plumbing, I saw a woman
wearing a yellow dress
climb into a barrel of water
to wash herself and the dress
at the same time,
her cupped hands spilling.

I dig because today I stopped digging
to drink an orange soda. In a country
with no glass, the boy kept the treasured bottle
and poured the liquid into a plastic bag
full of ice, then poked a hole with a straw.

I dig because today my shovel
struck a clay bowl centuries old,
the art of ancient fingers
moist with this same earth,
perfect but for one crack in the lip.

I dig because I have hauled garbage
and pumped gas and cut paper
and sold encyclopedias door to door.
I dig, digging until the passport
in my back pocket saturates with dirt,
because here I work for nothing
and for everything.