

# English 213

Mark Brazaitis, ENGL 213, Fall 2006

ENGLISH 213/002

Professor Mark Brazaitis

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Class Hours: TTh 11:30-12:45

Class Location: 47 Stansbury Hall

**Objective:** In this class, you will learn to become a poet. To become a poet, you must dedicate yourself to both writing and reading poetry, and this class will allow you (read: require you) to do both.

**Requirements:** Over the course of the semester, you will read more than one hundred poems and write at least six, which you will collect in a mini-chapbook. You will be expected to master poetic terminology. You will be required to write an in-depth analysis of two of the poems on our reading list. You will also write two poems inspired by (or in imitation of) two of the poems on our reading list. In addition, you will be expected to participate in classroom discussions and give written feedback to your fellow students on their work.

**Texts:** *The Poet's Companion: A Guide to the Pleasures of Writing Poetry* (by Kim Addonizio and Dorianne Laux); *Tell Me* (by Kim Addonizio); *You & Yours* (by Naomi Shihab Nye); *Dein Cai Dau* (by Yusef Komunyakaa); and *The Owl Question* (by Faith Shearin).

**Grades:** Grades in this class will be based on the following: attendance and participation (20 percent); two quizzes on poetic terms and readings (30 percent); analyses of two poems from our reading (20 percent); two imitation poems (10 percent); four or more of your original poems to be critiqued in class and collected in a mini-chapbook along with your imitation poems (20 percent).

**Attendance:** Attendance will be graded as follows: 0-2 absences (A); 3-4 absences (B); 5-7 absences (C); 8 or more absences (F).

## Grading Key:

100=A+;

94-99=A;

90-93=A-;

85-89=B+;

83-84=B;

80-82=B-;

75-79=C+;  
73-74=C;  
70-72=C-;  
65-69=D+;  
63-64=D;  
60-62=D-;  
59 and below=F.

**Extra credit:** You may attend and write a one-page review of any two of the “special events” listed below. A review consists of a summary of the event as well as your opinion of the event. (Please type your review.) Each of the extra credit assignments counts for four extra points on one of your quizzes. You are encouraged to attend all the events.

## **Class Schedule and Day-to-Day Assignments**

Tuesday, August 22 Get acquainted

Thursday, August 24 Review poetic terms. Read: “Shall I Compare Thee,” “What Lips My Lips Have Kissed, and Where, and Why,” “To My Mother,” “Tonight I Can Write,” and “I, Too.”

Tuesday, August 29 Review poetic terms. Read: “We Real Cool,” “Let Evening Come,” “Tiara,” “Wild Nights,” and “Funeral Blues.”

Thursday, August 31 Review poetic terms. Read: “I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing,” “Blood in the Water,” “Homage to My Hips,” “The Girl,” and “Want.”

Tuesday, September 5 Review poetic terms. Read: “Non Sum Qualis Eram Bonae sub Regno Cynarae,” “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer,” “Morning Ride on the Yamanote Line,” “Long Walk Home,” and “What Grief Does.”

Thursday, September 7 Quiz on poetic terms and class readings.

Tuesday, September 12 Read: “Writing and Knowing” (page 19) and “The Family: Inspiration and Obstacle” (page 30) in *The Poet’s Companion* and the following five poems by Yusef Komunyakaa: “Tunnels” (page 5), “Somewhere Near Phu Bai” (page 7), “One More Loss to Count” (page 22), “Nude Pictures” (page 25) and “A Break from the Bush” (page 27).

Special Event: Tuesday, September 12: Fiction writers Kevin Oderman and Priscilla Rodd will read at 7 p.m. in E. Moore Hall.

Thursday, September 14: Read: “Death and Grief” (page 39) and “The Shadow” (page 56) in *The Poet’s Companion* and the following five poems by Kim Addonizio: “Virgin Spring” (page 31), “The Divorcee and Gin” (page 45), “The Revered Poet Instructs...” (page 57), “Fine” (page 82) and “One Night Stands” (page 85).

Tuesday, September 19 Read: “Witnessing” (page 64) and “Poetry of Place” (page 74) in *The Poet’s Companion* and the following five poems by Naomi Shihab Nye: “Headache” (page 30), “Please Describe How You Became a Writer” (page 31), “Bucket” (page 32), “Tell Me About Yourself When You Were 17” (page 35), and “The Day” (page 52).

Thursday, September 21 Read: “Images” (page 85) and “Simile and Metaphor” (page 94) in *The Poet’s Companion* and the following five poems by Faith Shearin: “Piano Lesson” (page 5), “Desire” (page 24), “Hunger” (page 46), “Becoming Mother” (page 49) and “On Halloween” (page 53).

Special Event: Thursday, September 21: Fiction writer Tony Grooms will be reading at 7:30 in the Gold Ballroom of the Mountainlair.

Tuesday, September 26 Read: “The Music of the Line” (page 104), “Voice and Style” (page 115), “Meter, Rhyme, and Form” (page 138), “Repetition, Rhythm, and Blues” (page 151), “More Repetition: Villanelle, Pantoum, Sestina” (page 161), “A Grammatical Excursion” (page 171) and “The Energy of Revision” (page 186) in *The Poet’s Companion*.

Thursday, September 28 Quiz on *The Poet’s Companion* as well as the four poets we discussed (Addonizio, Komunyakaa, Shihab Nye, and Shearin).

Tuesday, October 3 Due: an analysis of one of the following five poems by Yusef Komunyakaa (or a poem of your own modeled after one of his five poems): “Communiq  ” (page 30), “The Edge” (page 32), “Prisoners” (page 35), “Eyeball Television” (page 39), and “Facing It” (page 63). Note: An analysis should be between one and five typed, double-spaced pages. It should have a title. If you write a poem modeled after a Komunyakaa poem, it can be any length but should imitate the style and/or address the subject matter of the poem you are modeling it after. Give your poem a title. Please note: You must write a total of two analyses and two imitation poems relating to the four poets (Komunyakaa, Addonizio, Shihab Nye, and Shearin) we are studying. So if, for example, you write an analysis of a Komunyakaa poem, you have one analysis and two imitation poems to go.

Thursday, October 5 Due: an analysis of one of the following five poems by Kim Addonizio (or a poem of your own modeled after one of her five poems): “Siamese” (page 30), “The Embers” (page 53), “What Do Women Want?” (page 74), “Getting Older” (page 86), and “For Desire” (page 87).

Tuesday, October 10 Due: an analysis of one of the following five poems by Naomi Shihab Nye (or a poem of your own modeled after one of her five poems): “Your Weight, at Birth” (page 53), “For Mohammed Zeid of Gaza, Age 15” (page 54), “The Sweet Arab, the Generous Arab” (page 57), “Why I Could Not Accept Your Invitation” (page 58), and “Interview, Saudi Arabia” (page 65).

Thursday, October 12 Due: an analysis of one of the following five poems by Faith Shearin (or a poem of your own modeled after one of her five poems): “Childhood” (page 8), “What I Like” (page 14), “Retriever” (page 17), “The Unexpectant” (page 27), and “My Portrait” (page 39).

Special Event: Monday, October 16: Fiction writer Patricia Henley will be reading at 7:30 in the Gold Ballroom of the Mountainlair.

Tuesday, October 17 Due: First poem. (Bring enough copies for everyone in the class plus a copy for the professor).

Thursday, October 19 Workshop

Tuesday, October 24 Workshop

Thursday, October 26 Workshop

Special Event: Friday, October 27: “Ghosts: A Haunting, Before-Halloween Reading of Poetry and Prose” featuring James Harms, Gail Galloway Adams, Mark Brazaitis, and David Hassler, 6 p.m., Barnes and Noble in Granville (near Target, Dick’s, and Giant Eagle)

Tuesday, October 31 Workshop Due: Second poem. (Bring enough copies for everyone in the class plus a copy for the professor).

Thursday, November 2 Workshop

Tuesday, November 7 No Class – Election Day

Thursday, November 9 Workshop

Tuesday, November 14 Workshop

Thursday, November 16 Workshop Due: Third poem (Bring enough copies for everyone in the class plus the professor).

Thanksgiving Break --- Enjoy

Tuesday, November 28 Workshop Due: Fourth poem (Bring enough copies for everyone in the class plus the professor).

Thursday, November 30 Workshop

Tuesday, December 5 Due: a collection of the six poems you wrote for this class (including the two imitation poems). The poems should be revised based on the comments you received from your classmates and your professor.

Thursday, December 7 Class reading of work

### **Core Values/Social Justice at West Virginia University**

The following core values establish the foundation for Social Justice at West Virginia University.

- Every person has intrinsic worth and dignity;
- Respect for the law is fundamental;
- Freedom from fear is universal;
- A climate of opportunity, mutual respect, and understanding engenders a feeling that the future should be shared by all community members;
- There is an absence of discrimination and harassment based on age, color, disability, ethnic origin, marital status, pregnancy, race, religious beliefs, sex, sexual orientation, and veteran status; and
- The rich diversity of people, their cultures, and the bonds that tie people together are appreciated and celebrated.

## Poems

### Shall I Compare Thee to A Summer's Day

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
 Thou art more lovely and more temperate:  
 Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
 And summer's lease hath all too short a date;  
 Sometimes too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
 And often is his gold complexion dimmed;  
 And every fair from fair sometimes declines,  
 By chance or nature's changing course untrimmed;  
 But thy eternal summer shall not fade,  
 Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;  
 Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,  
 When in eternal lines to Time thou grow'st:  
 So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,  
 So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

—William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

### What Lips My Lips Have Kissed, and Where, and Why

What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why,  
 I have forgotten, and what arms have lain  
 Under my head till morning; but the rain  
 Is full of ghosts tonight, that tap and sigh  
 Upon the glass and listen for reply,  
 And in my heart there stirs a quiet pain  
 For unremembered lads that not again  
 Will turn to me at midnight with a cry.  
 Thus in the winter stands the lonely tree,  
 Nor knows what birds have vanished one by one,  
 Yet knows its boughs more silent than before:  
 I cannot say what loves have come and gone,

I only know that summer sang in me  
A little while, that in me sings no more.

—Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950)

### **To My Mother**

Most near, most dear, most loved and most far,  
Under the window where I often found her  
Sitting as huge as Asia, seismic with laughter,  
Gin and chicken helpless in her Irish hand,  
Irresistible as Rabelais, but most tender for  
The lame dogs and hurt birds that surround her—  
She is a procession no one can follow after  
But be like a little dog following a brass band.

She will not glance up at the bomber, or condescend  
To drop her gin and scuttle to a cellar,  
But lean on the mahogany table like a mountain  
Whom only faith can move, and so I send  
O all of my faith, and all my love to tell her  
That she will move from mourning into morning.

—George Baker (b. 1913)

### **Tonight I Can Write**

Tonight I can write the saddest lines.

Write, for example, ‘The night is starry  
and the stars are blue and shiver in the distance.’

The night wind revolves in the sky and sings.

Tonight I can write the saddest lines.  
I loved her, and sometimes she loved me too.

Through nights like this one I held her in my arms.  
I kissed her again and again under the endless sky.

She loved me, sometimes I loved her too.  
How could one not have loved her great still eyes.

Tonight I can write the saddest lines.  
To think that I do not have her. To feel that I have lost her.

To hear the immense night, still more immense without her.  
And the verse falls to the soul like dew to the pasture.

What does it matter that my love could not keep her.  
The night is starry and she is not with me.

This is all. In the distance someone is singing. In the distance.  
My soul is not satisfied that it has lost her.

My sight tries to find her as though to bring her closer.  
My heart looks for her, and she is not with me.

The same night, whitening the same trees.  
We, of that time, are no longer the same.

I no longer love her, that's certain, but how I loved her.  
My voice tried to find the wind to touch her hearing.

Another's. She will be another's. As she was before my kisses.  
Her voice, her bright body. Her infinite eyes.

I no longer love her, that's certain, but maybe I love her.  
Love is so short, forgetting is so long.

Because through nights like this one I held her in my arms  
my soul is not satisfied that it has lost her.

Though this be the last pain that she makes me suffer  
and these the last verses that I write for her.

—Pablo Neruda (1904-1973)

## **I, Too**

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.

—Langston Hughes (1902-1967)

### **We Real Cool**

The Pool Players.  
Seven at the Golden Shovel.

We real cool. We  
Left school. We

Lurk late. We  
Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We  
Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We  
Die soon.

—Gwendolyn Brooks (1917-2000)

### **Let Evening Come**

Let the light of late afternoon  
shine through chinks in the barn, moving  
up the bales as the sun moves down.

Let the cricket take up chafing  
as a woman takes up her needles  
and her yarn. Let evening come.

Let dew collect on the hoe abandoned  
in long grass. Let the stars appear  
and the moon disclose her silver horn.



Let the fox go back to its sandy den.  
Let the wind die down. Let the shed  
go black inside. Let evening come.

To the bottle in the ditch, to the scoop  
in the oats, to air in the lung  
let evening come.

Let it come, as it will, and don't  
be afraid. God does not leave us  
comfortless, so let evening come.

—Jane Kenyon (1947-1995)

### **Tiara**

Peter died in a paper tiara  
cut from a book of princess paper dolls;  
he loved royalty, sashes

and jewels. I don't know,  
he said, when he woke in the hospice,  
I was watching the Bette Davis film festival

on Channel 57 and then—  
At the wake, the tension broke  
when someone guessed

the casket closed because  
he was in there in a big wig  
and heels, and someone said,

You know he's always late,  
he probably isn't here yet—  
he's still fixing his makeup.

And someone said he asked for it.  
Asked for it—  
when all he did was go down

into the salt tide  
of wanting as much as he wanted,  
giving himself over so drunk

or stoned it almost didn't matter who,  
though they were beautiful,

stampeding into him in the simple,  
ravishing music of their hurry.  
I think heaven is perfect stasis  
poised over the realms of desire,  
where dreaming and waking men lie  
on the grass while wet horses  
roam among them, huge fragments  
of the music we die into  
in the body's paradise.  
Sometimes we wake not knowing  
how we came to lie here,  
or who has crowned us with these temporary,  
precious stones. And given  
the world's perfectly turned shoulders,  
the deep hollows blued by longing,  
given the irreplaceable silk  
of horses rippling in orchards,  
fruit thundering and chiming down,  
given the ordinary marvels of form  
and gravity, what could he do,  
what could any of us ever do  
but ask for it?

—Mark Doty (b. 1953)

### **Wild Nights**

Wild Nights—Wild Nights!  
Were I with thee  
Wild Nights should be  
Our luxury!

Futile—the Winds—  
To a Heart in port—  
Done with the Compass—  
Done with the Chart!

Rowing in Eden—  
Ah, the Sea!

Might I but moor—Tonight—  
In Thee!

—Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

### **Funeral Blues**

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,  
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,  
Silence the pianos and muffled drum  
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead  
Scribbling on the sky the message He is Dead,  
Tie crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,  
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East, my West,  
My working week and my Sunday rest,  
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;  
I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now: put out every one,  
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun,  
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the woods;  
For nothing now can come to any good.

— W.H. Auden (1907-1973)

### **I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing**

I saw in Louisiana a live-oak growing,  
All alone stood it and the moss hung down from the branches,  
Without any companion it grew there uttering joyous leaves of dark green,  
And its look, rude, unbending, lusty, made me think of myself,  
But I wonder'd how it could utter joyous leaves standing alone there with-  
out its friend near, for I knew I could not,  
and I broke off a twig with a certain number of leaves upon it, and twined  
around it a little moss,  
and brought it away, and I have placed it in sight in my room,  
It is not needed to remind me as of my own dear friends,  
(For I believe lately I think of little else than of them,)  
Yet it remains to me a curious token, it makes me think of manly love;  
For all that, and though the live-oak glistens there in Louisiana solitary in  
a wide flat space,  
Uttering joyous leaves all its life without a friend a lover near,  
I know very well I could not.

—Walt Whitman (1819-1892)

## **Blood in the Water**

A Fiction

written after learning about a presidential affair

My granddaddy told me a man is nothing but appetite  
sandwiched between his wife and mean lust.  
I have a deep affection for my wife,  
but also for the sweet, big-haired girls I'm partial to,  
who never complain of tired jaws.  
For a few stolen moments, I give them the deed to my heart,  
signed and sealed with the only part of me  
I've come to think is real.  
At home, my wife telephones her friends  
for advice about our marriage she never takes  
and when I'm hot for her (not often)  
makes me wait so long while she is in the bathroom  
doing God knows what  
I must take my own pleasure  
and by the time she gets n bed,  
I'm half asleep, my body depleted by the sheer effort  
of keeping my desire for her alive.  
We've been together well past the time  
when couples find each other sexually attractive.  
We have our child and our shared interests  
which carry us forward each year,  
without concern, or fear that one of us  
will hear and heed the call of the wild  
and seek permanent freedom in the arms of a warmer body.  
No, there's comfort in a hot toddy  
with an old friend beside the fire.  
We're more like cousins,  
who grew up together now  
and when the feather of desire tickles us,  
we smile and resume our separate lives  
within the cocoon of malice, known as husband and wife,  
having already experienced too much of kinship.  
Doesn't everyone need to escape  
from family business now and again?  
Why then are my enemies and even some of my friends  
beginning to shake their heads  
and send me faxes about morality

and how the free love movement of the sixties  
lead to these public and humiliating revelations  
of my supposed liaison with a young woman  
I swear I do not know in the biblical sense,  
although she presented herself to me  
as if on a plate,  
surrounded by French fries?  
I saw in her eyes as she lay there  
not submission to my will  
but two hamburger patties sizzling on a grill.  
They said, "Eat your fill,"  
and God I wanted to, God I willed myself  
to refuse that generous offering  
that now is being used  
to justify the attempt by my rivals  
to make me lose everything.  
Now I stand as if naked on the evening news,  
my chances of survival discussed  
with no more care  
than if I were dust,  
beneath the heals of the righteous,  
who are just as capable as I am  
of falling from their high perches  
into the muck that will suck them under  
as it is doing me  
once they are revealed to be human,  
with human frailty.  
My wife trusts me within the boundaries  
we've set for each other;  
yet the media and the other sharks,  
who get off on seeing lives destroyed,  
won't accept that this is nothing  
but another attempt to trap me in a lie.  
Will a semen stain on a dress match my DNA?  
Will I pay for my indiscretion? They ask,  
as if it is a question that should be answered.  
Damn them. Damn their eyes  
and pass me the tortilla chips, salsa  
and the latest polls,  
so I can see what the public thinks of me.  
They're not fooled.  
They are forgiving  
in spite of the jokes made at my expense  
during monologues by TV hosts.  
Although my rivals say if I'm not impeached  
I'll lead the country into the twenty-first century

with my fly open, the electorate has spoken,  
so subpoena me, subpoena everyone I know.  
I am the captain of this ship of state  
and I will sail us through the stormy seas of sleaze,  
or we will all go down together  
on our knees.

—Ai (b. 1947)

### **Homage to My Hips**

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

—Lucille Clifton (b. 1936)

### **The Girl**

They chased her and her friend through the woods  
and caught them in a small clearing, broken  
random bracken, a couple of old mattresses,  
the dry ochre of foam rubber,  
as if the place had been prepared.  
The thin one with black hair  
started raping her best friend,  
and the blond one stood above her,  
thrust his thumbs back inside her jaws, she was 12,  
stuck his penis in her mouth and throat  
faster and faster and faster.  
Then the black-haired one stood up—  
they lay like pulled-up roots at his feet,  
two naked 12-year-old girls, he said  
Now you're going to know what it's like  
to be shot 5 times and slaughtered like a pig,

and they switched mattresses,  
the blond was raping and stabbing her friend,  
the black-haired one sticking inside her  
in one place and then another,  
the point of his gun pressed deep into her waist,  
she felt a little click in her spine and a  
sting like 7-Up in her head and then he  
pulled the tree-branch across her throat  
and everything went dark,  
the gym went dark, and her mother's kitchen,  
even the globes of light on the rounded  
lips of her mother's nesting bowls went dark.

When she woke up she was lying in the cold  
iron-smelling earth, she was under the mattress,  
pulled up over her like a  
blanket at night,  
she saw the body of her best friend  
and she began to run,  
she came to the edge of the woods and she stepped  
out from the trees, like a wound debriding,  
She walked across the field to the tracks  
and said to the railway brakeman Please, sir. Please, sir.

At the trial she had to say everything—  
her big sister taught her the words—  
she had to sit in the room with them and  
point to them. Now she goes to parties  
but does not smoke, she is a cheerleader,  
she throws her body up in the air  
and kicks her legs and comes home and does the dishes  
and her homework, she has to work hard in math,  
the night over the roof of her bed  
filled with white planets. Every night she  
prays for the soul of her best friend and  
then thanks God for life. She knows  
what all of us want never to know  
and she does a cartwheel, the splits, she shakes the  
shredded pom-poms in her fists.

— Sharon Olds (b. 1942)

## **Want**

I want nothing more than this:

to hear the blood in your hands when they touch my face;  
to listen at the edge of sleep to your breath grown steady;  
to fix the torn hem in your favorite dress before you return  
from a day of errands;  
to never seek your notice of the small ways, the slight repairs  
of love;  
to sear red pepper on a grill, the strips of steak, to pour the drinks  
and hear through the kitchen window the phone ring,  
your laughter;  
to love from a distance as you laugh;  
to fear truthfully, like a sparrow in the dark weeds, instead  
of hopelessly as I do when your image, for whole seconds,  
flickers loosely and vanishes, my mind a lit theatre,  
the film on fire;  
to smile quietly when your back is turned, because it isn't time yet  
to say it again;  
to ache a little less in your absence;  
to feel the hush that follows rain as silence and not a figure for loss;  
to find your fingerprints in the soil of a house plant, to fill them  
with water;  
to want for all things but not for you;  
to know my wanting is a way of holding;  
to hold without hurting;  
to leave the windows open, to find a room filled with pear  
blossoms, to leave them there for days, to find them  
in your hair.

—James Harms (b. 1960)

### **Non Sum Qualis Eram Bonae Sub Regno Cynarae**

Last night, ah, yesternight, betwixt her lips and mine  
There fell thy shadow, Cynara! thy breath was shed  
Upon my soul between the kisses and the wine;  
And I was desolate and sick of an old passion,  
Yea, I was desolate and bow'd by head:  
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.

All night upon mine heart I felt her warm heart beat,  
Night-long within mine arms in love and sleep she lay;  
Surely the kisses of her bought red mouth were sweet;  
But I was desolate and sick of an old passion,  
When I awoke and found the dawn was gray:  
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fasion.

I have forgot much, Cynara! gone with the wind,



Flung roses, roses, riotously with the throng,  
Dancing, to put thy pale lost lilies out of mind;  
But I was desolate and sick of an old passion,  
Yea, all the time, because the dance was long:  
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.

I cried for madder music and for stronger wine,  
But when the feast is finish'd and the lamps expire,  
Then falls thy shadow, Cynara! the night is thine;  
And I am desolate and sick of an old passion,  
Yea, hungry for the lips of my desire:  
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.

—Ernest Dowson (1867-1900)

**\*\*When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer\*\***

When I heard the learn'd astronomer;  
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me;  
When I was shown the charts and the diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them;  
When I, sitting, heard the astronomer, where he lectured with much applause  
in the lecture-room,  
How soon, unaccountable, I became tired and sick;  
Till rising and gliding out, I wander'd off by myself,  
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,  
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

—Walt Whitman (1819-1892)

### **Morning Ride on the Yamanote Line**

The conductor's voice  
glides over the drowsy heads,  
like a familiar hand  
smoothing unruly hair.  
A schoolgirl in uniform  
falls asleep on my shoulder  
as the train tilts and sways.  
She's forgotten about her satchel,  
what she's carrying to school,  
and sleeps in this brief lapse  
of time before the day begins.  
For a moment I have a sister, a child,  
someone for whom I must be still.

—David Hassler (b. 1964)

## **Long Walk Home**

Mother, I was late for your death.  
But I know you have forgiven me.  
You knew how easily I lost  
track of time, hovering above a puddle.  
That day I walked the half mile home  
in two and a half hours, you were cross.  
I threw away the stick that kept time  
on trees and sidewalks, that led me astray  
to poke and stir puddles,  
where I divined long legged striders  
skating across the surface.

I can't say what I discovered that day,  
what feather or stone I pulled  
from the water. But I know  
you would have listened, if I had told  
its story. Just as now I want  
to explain where I've been,  
why I'm late to speak of you,  
who are the story I'm telling.

—David Hassler (b. 1964)

## **What Grief Does**

Like the ivy in my bedroom that climbs steadily from the red pot out the window, grief is the power of certain madness. And one dreams of bodies. They rise up from beneath blue blankets and expose themselves. They fly under the fluorescent lights and grow long fingernails; they never speak. The language of grief is silence.

This will never go away. It is your middle name; how you hate it. Grief grows with you, against you, forever; a movie title you can almost remember, or a friend's phone number. Like the ham bone from the party that the black dog buries and reburies under the forsythia bush, grief only becomes more yellow, a bright fire at the center of the earth. And it keeps showing up, again and again, on the living room floor.

—Maggie Anderson (b. 1948)