

In a Station of the Metro

BY EZRA POUND

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Late Lights in Minnesota

BY TED KOOSER

At the end of a freight train rolling away,
a hand swinging a lantern.
The only lights left behind in the town
are a bulb burning cold in the jail,
and high in one house,
a five-battery flashlight
pulling an old woman downstairs to the toilet
among the red eyes of her cats.

from **“As I Walked Out One Evening”**

BY W. H. AUDEN

O plunge your hands in water,
Plunge them in up to the wrist;
Stare, stare in the basin
And wonder what you've missed.

The glacier knocks in the cupboard,
The desert sighs in the bed,
And the crack in the tea-cup opens
A lane to the land of the dead.

Introduction to Poetry

BY BILLY COLLINS

I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski
across the surface of a poem
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means.

Why We Tell Stories

BY LISEL MUELLER

For Linda Foster

1

Because we used to have leaves
and on damp days
our muscles feel a tug,
painful now, from when roots
pulled us into the ground

and because our children believe
they can fly, an instinct retained
from when the bones in our arms
were shaped like zithers and broke
neatly under their feathers

and because before we had lungs
we knew how far it was to the bottom
as we floated open-eyed
like painted scarves through the scenery
of dreams, and because we awakened

and learned to speak

2

We sat by the fire in our caves,
and because we were poor, we made up a tale
about a treasure mountain
that would open only for us

and because we were always defeated,
we invented impossible riddles
only we could solve,
monsters only we could kill,
women who could love no one else

and because we had survived
sisters and brothers, daughters and sons,
we discovered bones that rose

from the dark earth and sang
as white birds in the trees

3

Because the story of our life
becomes our life

Because each of us tells
the same story
but tells it differently

and none of us tells it
the same way twice

Because grandmothers looking like spiders
want to enchant the children
and grandfathers need to convince us
what happened happened because of them

and though we listen only
haphazardly, with one ear,
we will begin our story
with the word *and*

Future Tense

BY CHARLES WRIGHT

All things in the end are bittersweet—
An empty gaze, a little way-station just beyond silence.

If you can't delight in the everyday,
you have no future here.

And if you can, no future either.

And time, black dog, will sniff you out,
and lick your lean cheeks,
And lie down beside you—warm, real close—and will not move.

Little Father

BY LI-YOUNG LEE

I buried my father
in the sky.
Since then, the birds
clean and comb him every morning
and pull the blanket up to his chin
every night.

I buried my father underground.
Since then, my ladders
only climb down,
and all the earth has become a house
whose rooms are the hours, whose doors
stand open at evening, receiving
guest after guest.
Sometimes I see past them
to the tables spread for a wedding feast.

I buried my father in my heart.
Now he grows in me, my strange son,
my little root who won't drink milk,
little pale foot sunk in unheard-of night,
little clock spring newly wet
in the fire, little grape, parent to the future
wine, a son the fruit of his own son,
little father I ransom with my life.

Threshold

BY OCEAN VUONG

In the body, where everything has a price,
I was a beggar. On my knees,

I watched, through the keyhole, not
the man showering, but the rain

falling through him: guitar strings snapping
over his globed shoulders.

He was singing, which is why
I remember it. His voice—

it filled me to the core
like a skeleton. Even my name

knelt down inside me, asking
to be spared.

He was singing. It is all I remember.
For in the body, where everything has a price,

I was alive. I didn't know
there was a better reason.

That one morning, my father would stop
—a dark colt paused in downpour—

& listen for my clutched breath
behind the door. I didn't know the cost

of entering a song--was to lose
your way back.

So I entered. So I lost.
I lost it all with my eyes

wide open.