

## TP-CASTT: A Method for Poetry Analysis

**T** – **Title** – Examine the title before reading the poem. Consider allusions and connotations.

**P** – **Paraphrase** – Translate the poem into your own words. Resist the urge to jump to interpretation. A failure to understand what happens in the poem *inevitably* leads to misinterpretation. Look for syntactical units (complete sentences) rather than line-by-line units. Look for enjambment (run-on lines) *and* end-stopped lines.

**C** – **Connotation** – Examine the poem for meaning beyond the literal. Identify words that build emotional responses. Look at imagery, figurative language, sound devices, rhythm, and so on.

**A** – **Attitude** – Or tone. Examine both the speaker's and the poet's attitudes. Do not confuse the speaker (persona or character) with the poet (author). Look for: speaker's attitude toward self, other characters, subject; attitudes of characters other than the speaker; attitudes of poet toward characters, subject, and reader.

**S** – **Shifts** – Note shifts (changes) in speaker and attitude. Shifts can be signaled by: transition words (but, yet, however, although); punctuation (dashes, periods, colons, ellipsis); stanza divisions; changes in line/stanza length; irony (sometimes irony disguises a shift); a change in diction; a change in sound (rhyme, rhythm, sound devices).

**T** – **Title** – Examine the title again, this time on an interpretive level.

**T** – **Theme** – First list what the poem is about (subjects), then determine what the poet is saying about each of those subjects. Remember, theme must be expressed as a complete sentence with a universal message.



## Poetry (1935)

### Marianne Moore

I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle.  
Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers in  
it after all, a place for the genuine.

Hands that can grasp, eyes  
that can dilate, hair that can rise  
if it must, these things are important not because a  
high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because they are  
useful. When they become so derivative as to become unintelligible,  
the same thing may be said for all of us, that we  
do not admire what  
we cannot understand: the bat  
holding on upside down or in quest of something to

at, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll, a tireless wolf under  
a tree, the immovable critic twinkling his skin like a horse that feels a flea, the base-  
ball fan, the statistician –  
nor is it valid  
to discriminate against 'business documents and school-books';  
all these phenomena are important. One must make a distinction  
however: when dragged into prominence by half poets, the result is not poetry,  
nor till the poets among us can be  
'literalists of the imagination-' above

insolence and triviality and can present

for inspection, 'imaginary gardens with real toads in them,' shall we have  
it. In the meantime, if you demand on one hand,  
the raw material of poetry in  
all its rawness, and  
that which is on the other hand  
genuine, then you are interested in poetry.

Robinson  
Jeffers

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## **The Beaks of Eagles**

An eagle's nest on the head of an old redwood on one of the  
precipice-footed ridges  
Above Ventana Creek, that jagged country which nothing but a  
falling meteor will ever plow; no horseman  
Will ever ride there, no hunter cross this ridge but the winged  
ones, no one will steal the eggs from this fortress.  
The she-eagle is old, her mate was shot long ago, she is now mated  
with a son of hers.  
When lightning blasted her nest she built it again on the same  
tree, in the splinters of the thunderbolt.  
The she-eagle is older than I; she was here when the fires of  
eighty-five raged on these ridges,  
She was lately fledged and dared not hunt ahead of them but ate  
scorched meat. The world has changed in her time;  
Humanity has multiplied, but not here; men's hopes and thoughts  
and customs have changed, their powers are enlarged,  
Their powers and their follies have become fantastic,  
The unstable animal never has been changed so rapidly. The  
motor and the plane and the great war gone over him,  
And Lenin has lived and Jehovah died: while the mother-eagle  
Hunts her same hills, crying the same beautiful and lonely cry and  
is never tired; dreams the same dreams,  
And hears at night the rock slides rattle and thunder in the throats  
of these living mountains.  
It is good for man  
To try all changes, progress and corruption, powers, peace and  
anguish, not to go down the dinosaur's way  
Until all his capacities have been explored; and it is good for him  
To know that his needs and nature are no more changed in fact  
in ten thousand years than the beaks of eagles!

## Paradoxes and Oxymorons by John Ashbery

This poem is concerned with language on a very plain level.

Look at it talking to you. You look out a window  
Or pretend to fidget. You have it but you don't have it.  
You miss it, it misses you. You miss each other.

The poem is sad because it wants to be yours, and cannot.

What's a plain level? It is that and other things,  
Bringing a system of them into play. Play?  
Well, actually, yes, but I consider play to be

A deeper outside thing, a dreamed role-pattern,  
As in the division of grace these long August days  
Without proof. Open-ended. And before you know  
It gets lost in the stream and chatter of typewriters.

It has been played once more. I think you exist only  
To tease me into doing it, on your level, and then you aren't there  
Or have adopted a different attitude. And the poem  
Has set me softly down beside you. The poem is you.

## Stations by Audre Lorde

Some women love  
to wait  
for life for a ring  
in the June light for a touch  
of the sun to heal them for another  
woman's voice to make them whole  
to untie their hands  
put words in their mouths  
form to their passages sound  
to their screams for some other sleeper  
to remember their future their past.

Some women wait for their right  
train in the wrong station  
in the alleys of morning  
for the noon to holler  
the night come down.

Some women wait for love  
to rise up  
the child of their promise  
to gather from earth  
what they do not plant  
to claim pain for labor  
to become  
the tip of an arrow to aim  
at the heart of now  
but it never stays.

Some women wait for visions  
That do not return  
Where they were not welcome  
Naked  
For invitations to places  
They always wanted  
To visit  
To be repeated.

Some women wait for themselves  
Around the next corner  
And call the empty spot peace  
But the opposite of living  
Is only not living  
And the stars do not care.

Some women wait for something  
To change and nothing  
Does change  
So they change

Themselves.

## A Woman Mourned by Daughters

Now, not a tear begun,  
we sit here in your kitchen,  
spent, you see, already.  
You are swollen till you strain  
this house and the whole sky.  
You, whom we so often  
succeeded in ignoring!  
You are puffed up in death  
like a corpse pulled from the sea;  
we groan beneath your weight.  
And yet you were a leaf,  
a straw blown on the bed,  
you had long since become  
crisp as a dead insect.  
What is it, if not you,  
that settles on us now  
like satin you pulled down  
over our bridal heads?  
What rises in our throats  
like food you prodded in?  
Nothing could be enough.  
You breathe upon us now  
through solid assertions  
of yourself: teaspoons, goblets,  
seas of carpet, a forest  
of old plants to be watered,  
an old man in an adjoining  
room to be touched and fed.  
And all this universe  
dares us to lay a finger  
anywhere, save exactly  
as you would wish it done.

ADRIENNE RICH

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Paul Zimmer (b. 1934)

THE DAY ZIMMER LOST RELIGION

The first Sunday I missed Mass on purpose  
I waited all day for Christ to climb down  
Like a wiry flyweight from the cross and  
Club me on my irreverent teeth, to wade into  
My blasphemous gut and drop me like a  
Red hot thurible, the devil roaring in  
Reserved seats until he got the hiccups.

It was a long cold way from the old days  
When cassocked and surpliced I mumbled Latin  
At the old priest and rang his obscure bell.  
A long way from the dirty wind that blew  
The soot like venial sins across the school yard  
Where God reigned as a threatening,  
One-eyed triangle high in the fleecy sky.

The first Sunday I missed Mass on purpose  
I waited all day for Christ to climb down  
Like the playground bully, the cuts and mice  
Upon his face a gleam, and pound me  
Till my irreligious tongue hung out,  
But of course He never came, knowing that  
I was grown up and ready for Him now.



Gary Soto (b. 1952)

BLACK HAIR

At eight I was brilliant with my body.  
In July, that ring of heat  
We all jumped through, I sat in the bleachers  
Of Romain Playground, in the lengthening  
Shade that rose from our dirty feet.  
The game before us was more than baseball.  
It was a figure — Hector Moreno  
Quick and hard with turned muscles,  
His crouch the one I assumed before an altar  
Of worn baseball cards, in my room.

I came here because I was Mexican, a stick  
Of brown light in love with those  
Who could do it — the triple and hard slide.  
The gloves eating balls into double plays.  
What could I do with 50 pounds, my shyness,  
My black torch of hair, about to go out?  
Father was dead, his face no longer  
Hanging over the table or our sleep,  
And mother was the terror of mouths  
Twisting hurt by butter knives.

In the bleachers I was brilliant with my body,  
Waving players in and stomping my feet,  
Growing sweaty in the presence of white shirts.

I chewed sunflower seeds. I drank water  
And bit my arm through the late innings.  
When Hector lined balls into deep  
Center, in my mind I rounded the bases  
With him, my face flared, my hair lifting  
Beautifully, because we were coming home  
To the arms of brown people.

For My Father by Janice Mirikitani

He came over the ocean  
carrying Mt. Fuji  
on his back/Tule Lake on his chest  
hacked through the brush  
of deserts  
and made them grow  
strawberries

we stole berries  
from the stem  
we could not afford them  
for breakfast

his eyes held  
nothing  
as he whipped us  
for stealing.

the desert had dried  
his soul.

wordless  
he sold  
the rich,  
full berries  
to hakujines  
whose children  
pointed at our eyes

they ate fresh  
strawberries  
with cream.

Father,  
I wanted to scream  
at your silence.  
Your strength  
was a stranger  
I could never touch.  
iron  
in your eyes  
to shield  
the pain  
to shield desert-like wind  
from patches  
of strawberries  
grown  
from  
tears.

Rod McKuen (b. 1933)

THOUGHTS ON CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

There ought to be capital punishment for cars  
that run over rabbits and drive into dogs  
and commit the unspeakable, unpardonable crime  
of killing a kitty cat still in his prime.

Purgatory, at the very least  
should await the driver  
driving over a beast.

Those hurrying headlights coming out of the dark  
that scatter the scampering squirrels in the park  
should await the best jury that one might compose  
of fatherless chipmunks and husbandless does.

And then found guilty, after too fair a trial  
should be caged in a cage with a hyena's smile  
or maybe an elephant with an elephant gun  
should shoot out his eyes when the verdict is done.

There ought to be something, something that's fair  
to avenge Mrs. Badger as she waits in her lair  
for her husband who lies with his guts spilling out  
cause he didn't know what automobiles are about.

Hell on the highway, at the very least  
should await the driver  
driving over a beast.

Who kills a man kills a bit of himself  
But a cat too is an extension of God.

## Keats's Phrase

BY ALBERT GOLDBARTH

My father's been dead for thirty years  
 but when he appears behind my shoulder  
 offering advice, or condemnation, or a quiet pride  
 in something I've done that isn't even thistledown  
 or tiny shavings of balsa wood in the eyes of the world  
 —"Albie, grip in the middle and turn  
 with a steady pressure"—it's measurable,  
 if not the way the wind is in a sock,  
 or ohms, or net-and-gross, it registers the way  
 an absence sometimes does, and I listen to him  
 with a care I never exhibited when he was a presence,  
 alive, in his undershirt, chewing his tiny licorice pellets  
 and radiating a rough-hewn love. "Negative  
 capability"—the phrase of course is Keats's,

from his letters, but we make it ours a hundred times  
 a day. A hundred times we do our own pedestrian  
 version of early maritime cartography: the known world  
 stops, and over its edge the fuddled mapmaker writes  
*Here There Be Monsters* and then illustrates  
 their non-existing coiled lengths and hell-breath  
 with a color-splotted vivacity he wouldn't waste  
 on inhabited shores. Or: "Don't think  
 of a polar bear!"...the game one plays  
 with a child. But I say with adult certainty that  
 when Eddie's wife Fiona went back to stripping  
 he couldn't stand to be at the club and see, and yet  
 those empty hours in his mind were populated just  
 as unbearably—and indeed, yes, there

were monsters in that void, and the vigilant bears  
 of insecurity and jealousy padded hungrily behind  
 his eyes each night until her return. For Keats,  
 however, the force that emptiness makes kinetic is  
 a positive one, the way that the invisible, unknowable  
 "dark energy" is seminal, a kind of funding agency  
 or sugar daddy powering the universe in all  
 its spangled beauty and veiled mystery  
 from behind the scenes. Last night, a woozy few of us  
 were mourning the demise of The Dusty Bookshelf.  
 "Well I *tried* to support it," I said, "by stopping in from time  
 to time." And B, the king of local kleptobibliomania, with  
 his nimble touch and expando-capacious overalls, said  
 "I tried to support it by *not* going in."

Why I Am Not a Painter

I am not a painter, I am a poet.  
Why? I think I would rather be  
a painter, but I am not. Well,

for instance, Mike Goldberg  
is starting a painting. I drop in.  
"Sit down and have a drink" he  
says. I drink; we drink. I look  
up. "You have sardines in it."  
"Yes, it needed something there."  
"Oh." I go and the days go by  
and I drop in again. The painting  
is going on, and I go, and the days  
go by. I drop in. The painting is  
finished. "Where's sardines?"  
All that's left is just  
letters. "It was too much," Mike says.

But me? One day I am thinking of  
a color: orange. I write a line  
about orange. Pretty soon it is a  
whole page of words, not lines.  
Then another page. There should be  
so much more, not of orange, of  
words, of how terrible orange is  
and life. Days go by. It is even in  
prose, I am a real poet. My poem  
is finished and I haven't mentioned  
orange yet. It's twelve poems, I call  
it oranges. And one day in a gallery  
I see Mike's painting, called sardines.

Frank O'Hara

## Advent 1966

by Denise Levertov

Because in Vietnam the vision of a Burning Babe  
is multiplied, multiplied,

the flesh on fire  
not Christ's, as Southwell saw it, prefiguring  
the Passion upon the Eve of Christmas,

but wholly human and repeated, repeated,  
infant after infant, their names forgotten,  
their sex unknown in the ashes,  
set alight, flaming but not vanishing,  
not vanishing as his vision but lingering,

cinders upon the earth or living on  
moaning and stinking in hospitals three abed;

because of this my strong sight,  
my clear caressive sight, my poet's sight I was given  
that it might stir me to song,  
is blurred.

There is a cataract filming over  
my inner eyes. Or else a monstrous insect  
has entered my head, and looks out  
from my sockets with multiple vision,

seeing not the unique Holy Infant  
burning sublimely, an imagination of redemption,  
furnace in which souls are wrought into new life,  
but, as off a beltline, more, more senseless figures aflame.

And this insect (who is not there—  
it is my own eyes do my seeing, the insect  
is not there, what I see is there)  
will not permit me to look elsewhere,

or if I look, to see except dulled and unfocused  
the delicate, firm, whole flesh of the still unburned.

"Advent 1966" By Denise Levertov, from *To Stay Alive*, copyright 1971 by Denise Levertov.  
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## The Cement Plant

BY JOSHUA MEHIGAN

The cement plant was like a huge still  
nailed in gray corrugated panels  
and left out forty-five years ago  
in the null center of a meadow  
to tax itself to remorseless death  
near a black stream and briars, where  
from the moment it began to breathe,  
it began falling apart and burning.  
But it still went, and the men were paid.

The plant made dust. Impalpably fine,  
hung in a tawny alkaline cloud,  
swept into drifts against mill room piers,  
frozen by rain on silo ledges,  
dust was its first and its final cause.  
Pinups were traced on their car windshields.  
Dust gave them jobs, and killed some of them.  
Late into evening their teeth grated.  
Its product was dust, its problem dust.

The thing was blind to all its own ends  
but the one. Men's ordinary lives,  
measured out on a scale alien  
to that on which its life was measured,  
were spent in crawling the junk machine,  
fitting new gaskets, screws, and bearings,  
deceiving it towards the mood required  
for it to avail and pay. Somehow  
it did. None cheered it. It sustained them.

Source: *Poetry* (October 2012).

# Mending Wall

by Robert Frost

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,  
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;  
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.  
The work of hunters is another thing:  
I have come after them and made repair  
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,  
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,  
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,  
No one has seen them made or heard them made,  
But at spring mending-time we find them there.  
I let my neighbour know beyond the hill;  
And on a day we meet to walk the line  
And set the wall between us once again.  
We keep the wall between us as we go.  
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.  
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls  
We have to use a spell to make them balance:  
"Stay where you are until our backs are turned!"  
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.  
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,  
One on a side. It comes to little more:  
There where it is we do not need the wall:  
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.  
My apple trees will never get across  
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.  
He only says, "Good fences make good neighbours."  
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder  
If I could put a notion in his head:  
"Why do they make good neighbours? Isn't it  
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.  
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know  
What I was walling in or walling out,  
And to whom I was like to give offence.  
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That wants it down." I could say "Elves" to him,  
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather  
He said it for himself. I see him there  
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top  
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.  
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,  
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.  
He will not go behind his father's saying,  
And he likes having thought of it so well  
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbours."



## CROSSROADS

Joyce Sutphen

The second half of my life will be black  
to the white rind of the old and fading moon.

The second half of my life will be water  
over the cracked floor of these desert years.

I will land on my feet this time,  
knowing at least two languages and who  
my friends are. I will dress for the  
occasion, and my hair shall be  
whatever color I please.

Everyone will go on celebrating the old  
birthday, counting the years as usual,  
but I will count myself new from this  
inception, this imprint of my own desire.

The second half of my life will be swift,  
past leaning fenceposts, a gravel shoulder,  
asphalt tickets, the beckon of the open road.  
The second half of my life will be wide-eyed,  
fingers shifting through fine sands,  
arms loose at my sides, wandering feet.  
There will be new dreams every night,  
and the drapes will never be closed.  
I will toss my string of keys into a deep  
well and old letters into the grate.

The second half of my life will be ice  
breaking up on the river, rain  
soaking the fields, a hand  
held out, a fire,  
and smoke going  
upward, always up.

Irving Layton (b. 1912)

THE BULL CALF

The thing could barely stand. Yet taken  
from his mother and the barn smells  
he still impressed with his pride,  
with the promise of sovereignty in the way  
his head moved to take us in.  
The fierce sunlight tugging the maize from the ground  
licked at his shapely flanks.  
He was too young for all that pride.  
I thought of the deposed Richard II.

"No money in bull calves," Freeman had said.  
The visiting clergyman rubbed the nostrils  
now snuffing pathetically at the windless day.  
"A pity," he sighed.  
My gaze slipped off his hat toward the empty sky  
that circled over the black knot of men,  
over us and the calf waiting for the first blow.

Struck,  
the bull calf drew in his thin forelegs  
as if gathering strength for a mad rush . . .  
tottered . . . raised his darkening eyes to us;  
and I saw we were at the far end  
of his frightened look, growing smaller and smaller  
till we were only the ponderous mallet  
that flicked his bleeding ear  
and pushed him over on his side, stiffly,  
like a block of wood.

Below the hill's crest  
the river snuffled on the improvised beach.  
We dug a deep pit and threw the dead calf into it.  
It made a wet sound, a sepulchral gurgle;  
as the warm sides bulged and flattened.  
Settled, the bull calf lay as if asleep,  
one foreleg over the other,  
bereft of pride and so beautiful now,  
without movement, perfectly still in the cool pit,  
I turned away and wept.

## Cinderella

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by Sylvia Plath

The prince leans to the girl in scarlet heels,  
Her green eyes slant, hair flaring in a fan  
Of silver as the rondo slows; now reels  
Begin on tilted violins to span

The whole revolving tall glass palace hall  
Where guests slide gliding into light like wine;  
Rose candles flicker on the lilac wall  
Reflecting in a million flagons' shine,

And glided couples all in whirling trance  
Follow holiday revel begun long since,  
Until near twelve the strange girl all at once  
Guilt-stricken halts, pales, clings to the prince

As amid the hectic music and cocktail talk  
She hears the caustic ticking of the clock.

## En Mis Ojos No Hay Dias by Judith Ortiz Cofer

Back before the fire burned in his eyes ,  
In the blast furnace which finally consumed him,  
Father told us about the reign of little terrors  
of his childhood beginning

at birth with a father who cursed him  
for being the twelfth and the fairest  
too blond and pretty to be from his loins,  
so he named him the priest's pauper son.  
He said the old man kept

a mule for labor

a horse for sport

wine in his cellar

a mistress in town

and a wife to bear him daughters,

to send to church

to pray for his soul.

And sons,

to send to the fields

to cut the cane

and raise the money

to buy his rum.

He was only ten when he saw his father

split a man in two with his machete

and walk away proud to have rescued his honor

like a true "hombre."

Father always wrapped these tales  
in the tissue paper of his humor  
and we'd listen at his knees rapt,  
warm and safe,  
by the blanket of his caring,  
but he himself could not be saved,  
"What on earth drove him mad?"  
his friends still ask,  
remembering Prince Hamlet, I reply,  
"Nothing on earth,"  
but no one listens to ghost stories anymore.

## The Author to Her Book

Thou ill-formed offspring of my feeble brain,  
 Who after birth did'st by my side remain,  
 Til snatched from thence by friends, less wise than true,  
 Line Who thee abroad exposed to public view;  
 (5) Made thee in rags, halting, to the press to trudge,  
 Where errors were not lessened, all may judge.  
 At thy return my blushing was not small,  
 My rambling brat (in print) should mother call,  
 I cast thee by, as one unfit for light,  
 (10) Thy visage was so irksome in my sight;  
 Yet being mine own, at length affection would  
 Thy blemishes amend, if so I could.  
 I washed thy face, but more defects I saw,  
 And rubbing off a spot, still made a flaw.  
 (15) I stretched thy joints to make thee even feet,  
 Yet still thou run'st more hobbling than is meet;  
 In better dress to trim thee was my mind,  
 But nought save homespun cloth in the house I find.  
 In this array, 'mongst vulgars may'st thou roam;  
 (20) In critics' hands beware thou dost not come;  
 And take thy way where yet thou are not known.  
 If for thy Father asked, say thou had'st none;  
 And for thy Mother, she alas is poor,  
 Which caused her thus to send thee out of door.

(1678)

**Claude McKay**  
**(1891-1948)**

**Flame-Heart**

So much have I forgotten in ten years,  
So much in ten brief years! I have forgot  
What time the purple apples come to juice,  
And what month brings the shy forget-me-not.  
I have forgot the special, startling season  
Of the pimento's flowering and fruiting;  
What time of year the ground doves brown the fields  
And fill the noonday with their curious fluting.  
I have forgotten much, but still remember  
The poinsettia's red, blood-red in warm December.

I still recall the honey-fever grass,  
But cannot recollect the high days when  
We rooted them out of the ping-wing path  
To stop the mad bees in the rabbit pen.  
I often try to think in what sweet month  
The languid painted ladies used to dapple  
The yellow by-road mazing from the main,  
Sweet with the golden threads of the rose-apple.  
I have forgotten--strange--but quite remember  
The poinsettia's red, blood-red in warm December.

What weeks, what months, what time of the mild year  
We cheated school to have our fling at tops?  
What days our wine-thrilled bodies pulsed with joy  
Feasting upon blackberries in the copse?  
Oh some I know! I have embalmed the days,  
Even the sacred moments when we played,  
All innocent of passion, uncorrupt,  
At noon and evening in the flame-heart's shade.  
We were so happy, happy, I remember,  
Beneath the poinsettia's red in warm December.

## FORECLOSURE

Father Missouri takes his own.  
 These are the fields he loaned them,  
 Out of hearts' fullness; gratuitously;  
 Here are the banks he built up for his children —  
 Here are the fields; rich, fertile silt.

Father Missouri, in his dotage  
 Whimsical and drunkenly turbulent,  
 Cuts away the banks; steals away the loam;  
 Washes the ground from under wire fences,  
 Leaves fenceposts grotesquely dangling in the air;  
 And with doddering steps approaches the shanties.

Father Missouri; far too old to be so evil.  
 Uncle Dan, seeing his garden lopped away,  
 Seeing his manured earth topple slowly in the stream,  
 Seeing his cows knee-deep in yellow water,  
 His pig-sties flooded, his flower beds drowned,  
 Seeing his white leghorns swept down the stream —

Curses Father Missouri, impotently shakes  
 His fist at the forecloser, the treacherous skinflint;  
 Who takes what was loaned so very long ago,  
 And leaves puddles in his parlor, and useless lakes  
 In his fine pasture land.

Sees years of work turned to nothing —  
 Curses, and shouts in his hoarse old voice,  
 "Ain't got no right to act dat way at all"  
 And the old river rolls on, slowly to the gulf.

Sterling A. Brown

## My Grandmother's Love Letters by Hart Crane

There are no stars tonight  
But those of memory.  
Yet how much room for memory there is  
In the loose girdle of soft rain.

There is even room enough  
For the letters of my mother's mother,  
Elizabeth,  
That have been pressed so long  
Into a corner of the roof  
That they are brown and soft,  
And liable to melt as snow.

Over the greatness of such space  
Steps must be gentle.  
It is all hung by an invisible white hair.  
It trembles as birch limbs webbing the air.

And I ask myself:

"Are your fingers long enough to play  
Old keys that are but echoes:  
Is the silence strong enough  
To carry back the music to its source  
And back to you again  
As though to her?"

Yet I would lead my grandmother by the hand  
Through much of what she would not understand;  
And so I stumble. And the rain continues on the roof  
With such a sound of gently pitying laughter.

Source: *The Complete Poems of Hart Crane* (2000)



Adrienne Rich (b. 1929)

SONG

1973

You're wondering if I'm lonely:  
OK then, yes, I'm lonely  
as a plane rides lonely and level  
on its radio beam, aiming  
across the Rockies  
for the blue-strung aisles  
~~of an airfield on the ocean~~

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You want to ask, am I lonely?  
Well, of course, lonely  
as a woman driving across country  
day after day, leaving behind  
mile after mile  
little towns she might have stopped  
and lived and died in, lonely

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If I'm lonely  
it must be the loneliness  
of waking first, of breathing  
dawn's first cold breath on the city  
of being the one awake  
in a house wrapped in sleep

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If I'm lonely  
it's with the rowboat ice-fast on the shore  
in the last red light of the year  
that knows what it is, that knows it's neither  
ice nor mud nor winter light  
but wood, with a gift for burning

20

25

## The Writer

BY RICHARD WILBUR

In her room at the prow of the house  
Where light breaks, and the windows are tossed with linden,  
My daughter is writing a story.

I pause in the stairwell, hearing  
From her shut door a commotion of typewriter-keys  
Like a chain hauled over a gunwale.

Young as she is, the stuff  
Of her life is a great cargo, and some of it heavy:  
I wish her a lucky passage.

But now it is she who pauses,  
As if to reject my thought and its easy figure.  
A stillness greatens, in which

The whole house seems to be thinking,  
And then she is at it again with a bunched clamor  
Of strokes, and again is silent.

I remember the dazed starling  
Which was trapped in that very room, two years ago;  
How we stole in, lifted a sash

And retreated, not to affright it;  
And how for a helpless hour, through the crack of the door,  
We watched the sleek, wild, dark

And iridescent creature  
Batter against the brilliance, drop like a glove  
To the hard floor, or the desk-top,

And wait then, humped and bloody,  
For the wits to try it again; and how our spirits  
Rose when, suddenly sure,

It lifted off from a chair-back,  
Beating a smooth course for the right window  
And clearing the sill of the world.

It is always a matter, my darling,  
Of life or death, as I had forgotten. I wish  
What I wished you before, but harder.