

Finding the Sacred through Poetry

A time of reflection on Spirituality--
with great poets as our guides



(Image: Brocken Inaglory via Wikimedia Commons)

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Materials developed by Kim Langley, M.Ed. for WordSPA ministry

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Introduction to Poetry

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 water-ski
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.

By Billy Collins, from *Sailing Alone Around the Room*. © Random House, 2001.

Having Come This Far

I've been through what my through was to be
I did what I could and couldn't
I was never sure how I would get there

I nourished an ardor for thresholds
for stepping stones and for ladders
I discovered detour and ditch

I swam in the high tides of greed
I built sandcastles to house my dreams
I survived the sunburns of love

No longer do I hunt for targets
I've climbed all the summits I need to
and I've eaten my share of lotus

Now I give praise and thanks
for what could not be avoided
and for every foolhardy choice



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I cherish my wounds and their cures
and the sweet enervations of bliss
My book is an open life

I wave goodbye to the absolutes
and send my regards to infinity
I'd rather be blithe than correct

Until something transcendent turns up
I splash in my poetry puddle
and try to keep God amused

By James Broughton, from *Packing up for Paradise*. © Black Sparrow Press, 1997.

Diner

The time has come to say goodbye, our plates empty except for our greasy napkins. Comrades, you on my left, balding, middle-aged guy with a ponytail, and you, Lefty, there on my right, though we barely spoke I feel our kinship. You were steadfast in passing the ketchup, the salt and pepper, no man could ask for better companions. Lunch is over, the cheeseburger and fries, the Denver sandwich, the counter nearly empty. Now we must go our separate ways. Not a fond embrace, but perhaps a hearty handshake. No? Well then, farewell. It is unlikely I'll pass this way again. Unlikely we will all meet again on this earth, to sit together beneath the neon and fluorescent calmly sipping our coffee, like the sages sipping their tea underneath the willow, sitting quietly, saying nothing.

By Louis Jenkins, from *Sea Smoke*. © Holy Cow! Press, 2004.

The Journey

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice—
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
"Mend my life!"
each voice cried.
But you didn't stop.
You knew what you had to do,

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though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy
was terrible.
It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do—
determined to save
the only life you could save.

By Mary Oliver, from *Dream Work*. © Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986.

Pied Beauty

Glory be to God for dappled things --
For skies of couple-color as a brindled cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim.
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced -- fold, fallow and plow
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange:
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how).
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim.
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change.
Praise him.

By Gerard Manley Hopkins. Public domain, 1918.



(Image: John Holliger)

Arbor

As a child she planted
these roses, these vines
heavy with trumpets and honey.

Now at the end of her life
she asks for an arbor. At night
she sees roses rooted in heaven,

wisteria hanging its vineyards
over her head, all green things
climbing, climbing.

She wants to walk through this door,
not as she walks to the next
room but to another place

altogether. She will leave her cane
at the door but the door is
necessary. She knows how the raw
space in a wall nearly burned or
newly born makes children pause
or step in. It leads somewhere.

They look out on another country.

By Nancy Willard, from *Swimming Lessons*. © Brighton, 2001.



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God's Grandeur

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

 It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
 It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
 And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
 And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And, for all this, nature is never spent;
 There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
 Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs --
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
 World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

By Gerard Manley Hopkins. Public domain, 1918.

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