CHAPTER

18

Lyric Poetry

For the ancient Greeks, a **lyric** was a song accompanied by a lyre. It was short, and it usually expressed a single emotion, such as joy or sorrow. The word is now used more broadly, referring to a poem that, neither narrative (telling a story) nor strictly dramatic (performed by actors), is an emotional or reflective soliloquy. Still, it is rarely very far from a singing voice. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), James Joyce describes the lyric as the "verbal vesture of an instant of emotion, a rhythmical cry such as ages ago cheered on the man who pulled at the oar." Such lyrics, too, were sung more recently than "ages ago." Here is a song that American slaves sang when rowing heavy loads.

ANONYMOUS

Michael Row the Boat Ashore

Michael row the boat ashore, Hallelujah!
Michael's boat's a freedom boat, Hallelujah!
Sister, help to trim the sail, Hallelujah!
Jordan stream is wide and deep, Hallelujah!
Freedom stands on the other side, Hallelujah! 5

We might pause for a moment to comment on why people sing at work. There are at least three reasons: (1) work done rhythmically goes more efficiently; (2) the songs relieve the boredom of the work; and (3) the songs—whether narrative or lyrical—provide something of an outlet for the workers' frustrations.

Speaking roughly, we can say that whereas a narrative (whether in prose or poetry) is set in the past, telling what happened, a lyric is set in the present, catching a speaker in a moment of expression. But a lyric can, of course, glance backward or forward, as in this folk song, usually called "Careless Love."

ANONYMOUS

Careless Love

Love, O love, O careless love,
You see what careless love can do.

When I wore my apron low,
Couldn't keep you from my do,° 5
Fare you well, fare you well.
Now I wear my apron high,
Scarce see you passin' by,
Fare you well, fare you well.

---

4 **do** door.

Notice, too, that a lyric, like a narrative, can have a plot: "Michael" moves toward the idea of freedom, and "Careless Love" implies a story of desertion—something has happened between the time that the singer could not keep the man from her door and now, when she "scarce" sees him passing by—but, again, the emphasis is on a present state of mind.

Lyrics are sometimes differentiated among themselves. For example, if a lyric is melancholy or mournfully contemplative, especially if it laments a death, it may be called an **elegy.** If a lyric is rather long, elaborate, and on a lofty theme such as immortality or a hero's victory, it may be called an **ode** or a **hymn.** Distinctions among lyrics are often vague, and one person's ode may be another's elegy. Still, when writers use one of these words in their titles, they are inviting the reader to recall the tradition in which they are working. Of the poet's link to tradition T. S. Eliot said:

> No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead.

Although the lyric is often ostensibly addressed to someone (the "you" in "Careless Love"), the reader usually feels that the speaker is really talking to himself or herself. In "Careless Love," the speaker need not be in the presence of her man; rather, her heart is overflowing (the reader senses) and she pretends to address him.

A comment by the nineteenth-century english philosopher John Stuart Mill on poetry is especially true of the lyric:

> Eloquence is *heard,* poetry is *over*heard. Eloquence supposes an audience; the peculiarity of poetry appears to us to lie in the poet's utter unconsciousness of a listener. Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude.

This is particularly true in work songs such as "Michael Row the Boat Ashore," where there is no audience: the singers sing for themselves, participating rather than performing. As one prisoner in Texas said: "They really be singing about the way they feel inside. Since they can't say it to nobody, they sing a song about it." The sense of "feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude" or of "singing about the way they feel inside" is strong and clear in this short cowboy song.

ANONYMOUS

The Colorado Trail

Eyes like the morning star,
Cheeks like a rose,
Laura was a pretty girl
God Almighty knows.

Weep all ye little rains,
Wail winds wail,
All along, along, along
The Colorado trail.

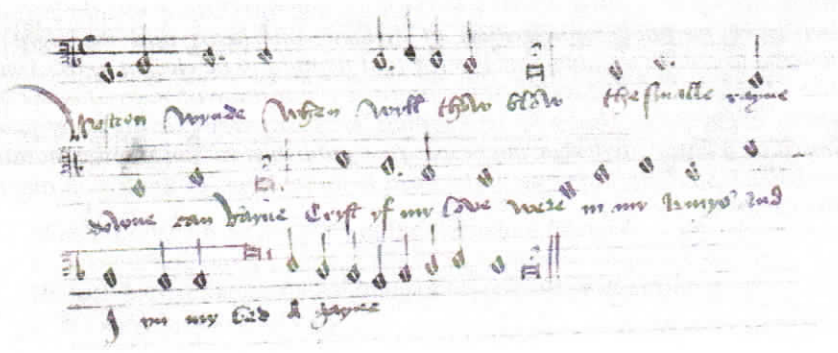
When we read a lyric poem, no matter who the speaker is, for a moment—while we recite or hear the words—we become the speaker. That is, we get into the speaker's mind, or, perhaps more accurately, the speaker takes charge of our mind, and we undergo (comfortably seated in a chair or sprawled on a bed) the mental experience that is embodied in the words.

Next, another anonymous poem, this one written in England, probably in the early sixteenth century. Aside from modern reprintings, it survives in only one manuscript, a song book, the relevant portion of which we reproduce here. But first, here is the poem in modern typography.

ANONYMOUS

Western Wind

Westron wind, when will thou blow?
The small rain down can rain.
Christ, that my love were in my arms,
And I in my bed again.



Westron wynde when wilt thou blow. Musical setting in a tenor part-book; early sixteenth century. (Reproduced by permission of the British Library Royal Appendix 58 f.5. © British Library Board. All rights reserved.)

The angular handwriting is in a style quite different from modern writing, but when you are told that the first three words are "Westron [i.e., western] wynde when," you can probably see some connections. And you can probably make out the last handwritten word on the second line ("And"), and all of the third line: "I yn my bed A gayne" ("I in my bed again").

Incidentally—we hope we are not boring you with trifles—some controversy surrounds the transcription of one of the words—the fifth word in the second line of writing, the word that looks like a *y* followed by an *f* (just after "Chryst" and just before "my"). The issue is this: Is the letter a *y*, in which case the word is "if," or is it a letter we no longer have, a letter called *thorn*, which was pronounced "th," as in either "thin" or "this"? If indeed it is a thorn, the next letter is a *t*, not an *f*, and the word therefore is not "if" but "that." (Incidentally, signs that say "Ye Olde Antique Shoppe" make no sense; "Ye" was never used as a definite article. What these signs are reproducing is a thorn, and the word really is "The," not "Ye.")

YOUR TURN

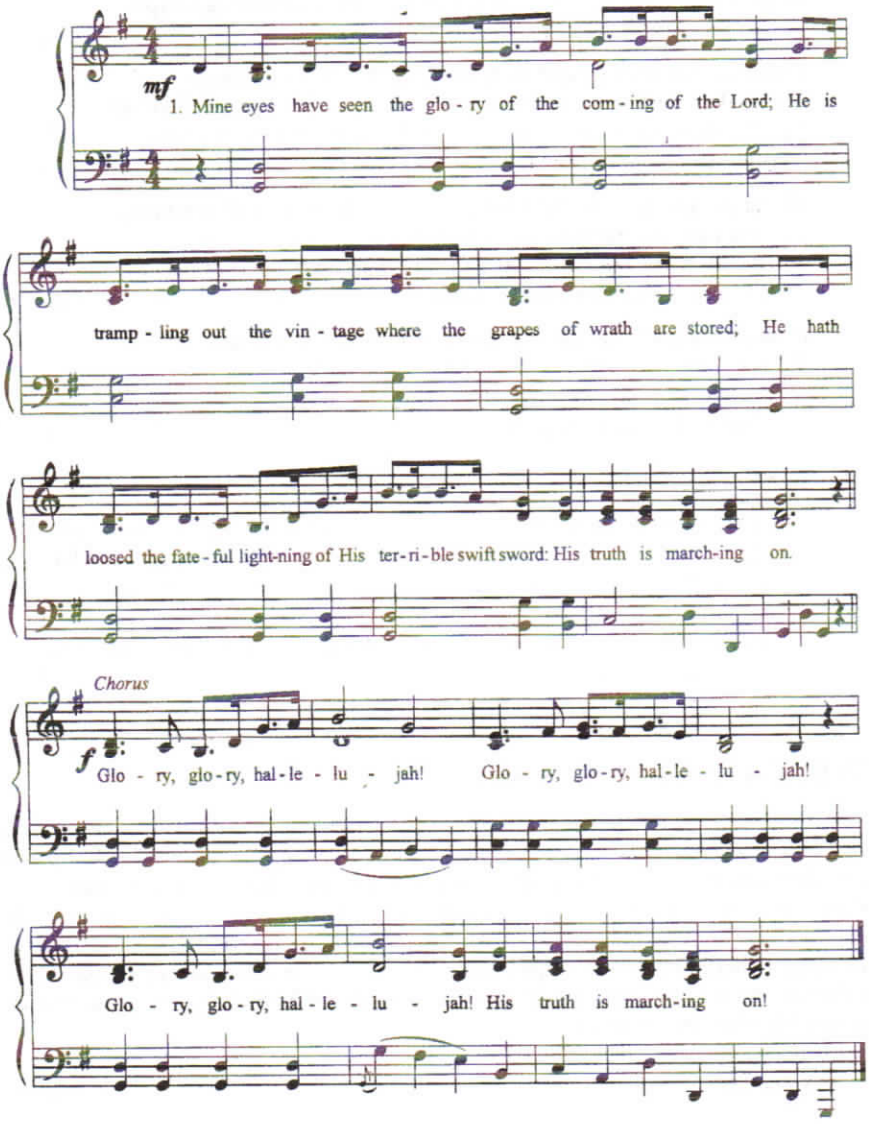
1. In "Western Wind," what do you think is the tone of the speaker's voice in the first two lines? Angry? Impatient? Supplicating? Be as precise as possible. What is the tone in the next two lines?
2. In England the west wind, warmed by the Gulf Stream, rises in the spring. What associations link the wind and rain of lines 1 and 2 with lines 3 and 4?
3. Should we have been told why the lovers are separated? Explain.

Love poems are by no means all the same—to take an obvious point, some are happy and some are sad—but those that are about the loss of a beloved or about the pains of love seem to be especially popular.

JULIA WARD HOWE

Julia Ward Howe (1819–1910) was born in New York City. A social reformer, her work for the emancipation of African Americans and the right of women to vote is notable. She was the first woman to be elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Howe is the author of many poems, including "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," set to already-existing music composed by William Steffe. The poem was first published in The Atlantic Monthly *in 1862. It soon became one of the most popular songs of the Union during the Civil War.*

Battle Hymn of the Republic [1861]



Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord:
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword;
His truth is marching on. 4

Chorus

Glory! glory! Hallelujah!
Glory! glory! Hallelujah!
Glory! glory! Hallelujah!
His truth is marching on! 8

I have seen him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps;
They have builded him an altar in the evening dews and damps;
I can read his righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps;
His day is marching on.

I have read a fiery gospel, writ in burnished rows of steel:
"As ye deal with my contemners, so with you my grace shall deal;
Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his heel,
Since God is marching on."

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before his judgment seat;
Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer him! be jubilant, my feet!
Our God is marching on.

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me:
As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
While God is marching on.

YOUR TURN

1. This poem of the Civil War, draws some of its militant imagery from the Bible, especially from Isaiah 63.1–6 and Revelation 19.11–15. Do you think the lines about Christ are inappropriate here? Explain.
2. If you know the tune to which "Battle Hymn of the Republic" is sung, think about the interplay between the music and the words. Do you think people have a different response to Howe's words when they read her text as a poem, rather than experience it as a song?

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare (1564–1616) is best known as the writer of sonnets and of plays, but he also wrote lyrics for songs in some of the plays. The following two lyrics are sung at the end of an early comedy, Love's Labor's Lost. *Conflict is essential in drama, and in these two poems we get a sort of melodious conflict, a song in praise of spring, juxtaposed against a song in praise of winter. But notice that within each song there are elements of conflict. For other works by Shakespeare* (Hamlet, a Midsummer Night's Dream, *and several sonnets*), *consult the index.*

[c. 1595]

Spring

When daisies pied and violets blue
And lady-smocks° all silver-white
And cuckoo-buds° of yellow hue
Do paint the meadows with delight,
The cuckoo then, on every tree,
Mocks married men; for thus sings he,
"Cuckoo,
Cuckoo, cuckoo!" O word of fear,

2 lady-smocks also called cuckooflowers. **3 cuckoo-buds** buttercups.

Unpleasing to a married ear!
When shepherds pipe on oaten straws,°
And merry larks are ploughmen's clocks,
When turtles tread,° and rooks, and daws,
And maidens bleach their summer smocks,
The cuckoo then, on every tree,
Mocks married men; for thus sings he,
"Cuckoo,
Cuckoo, cuckoo!" O word of fear,
Unpleasing to a married ear!

10 oaten straws musical instruments. **12 turtles tread** turtledoves mate.

Winter [c. 1595]

When icicles hang by the wall,
And Dick the shepherd blows his nail,°
And Tom bears logs into the hall,
And milk comes frozen home in pail,
When blood is nipped, and ways° be foul,
Then nightly sings the staring owl,
"Tu-whit, tu-who!"
A merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel° the pot.
When all aloud the wind doth blow,
And coughing drowns the parson's saw,°
And birds sit brooding in the snow,
And Marian's nose looks red and raw,
When roasted crabs° hiss in the bowl,
Then nightly sings the staring owl,
"Tu-whit, tu-who!"
A merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

2 blows his nail breathes on his fingernails to warm them. **5 ways** roads. **9 keel** cool, by skimming. **11 coughing . . . saw** wise saying. **14 crabs** crab apples.

YOUR TURN

1. Why is the cuckoo appropriate to spring? The owl to winter?
2. Did you expect a poem on spring to bring in infidelity? Is the poem bitter? Explain. (If in doubt, check the word "cuckold" in a dictionary.)
3. Does "Winter" describe only the hardships of the season, or does it communicate also the joys?

Here is another song from one of Shakespeare's plays, a comedy called *Much Ado about Nothing* (1598–99). The song (2.3.62–79) is about male infidelity, and it seems to be addressed to women ("Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more") but in fact it is sung by a male singer and, in the play, his listeners are all males.

Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more

Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more;
Men were deceivers ever;
One foot in sea and one on shore,
To one thing constant never;
Then sigh not so,
But let them go,
And be you blithe and bonny;°
Converting all your sounds of woe
Into Hey nonny, nonny.

Sing no more ditties, sing no mo,°
Of dumps° so dull and heavy;
The fraud of men was ever so,
Since summer first was leavy.°
Then sigh not so,
But let them go,
And be you blithe and bonny,
Converting all your sounds of woe
Into Hey, nonny, nonny.

7 bonny carefree. **10 mo** more. **11 dumps** mournful songs. **13 leavy** leafy.

YOUR TURN

1. Is the song offensive? Trivial? Engaging? Probably true in its assertion about males?
2. Given that the subject of this lyric is "the fraud of men," and the advice to women is "sigh not so / But let them go, / And be you blithe and bonny," do you think that the female response to the lyric is very different from the male response? Please explain.
3. The two stanzas are pretty similar—in fact, each stanza ends with the same four lines—but do you agree that there is, in a very quiet way, a sort of plot, or narrative? Our thought is that although the first stanza says that "Men were deceivers ever," in the next stanza the word "fraud" goes a step further, thereby justifying the advice to "let them go." Do you agree that if the stanzas were reversed, the poem would not be equally satisfactory?

In a later chapter you will find an even shorter poem on this topic, Dorothy Parker's "General Review of the Sex Situation." (Skipping ahead is permissible; the poem appears on page 651. You may want to compare the *tone—the* attitude of each speaker as you detect it from the printed words.)

W. H. AUDEN

Wystan Hugh Auden (1907–1973) was born in York, England, and educated at Oxford. In the 1930s his left-wing poetry earned him wide acclaim as the leading poet of his generation. In 1939 Auden came to the United States, and in 1946 he became an American citizen, though he spent his last years in

England. In addition to being a prolific poet, Auden also wrote many essays on literature and other subjects.

Funeral Blues

[1936]

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

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message He Is Dead,
Put crêpe 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 and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought that love would last for ever: 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 wood.
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

YOUR TURN

1. Let's assume that poems are rooted in real-life situations—that is, they take their origin from responses to experience, whether the experience is falling in love or losing a loved one, or praising God or losing one's faith, or celebrating a war (as in "Battle Hymn of the Republic") or lamenting the tragic destruction of war. But of course the poet then shapes the experience into a memorable statement and somehow makes a distinctive work on a traditional theme. Cite some phrases in Auden's poem that you would *not* expect to find in a poem on the death of the beloved. (For example, would you expect to find a reference to a dog eating "a juicy bone" in a poem on this theme?) Do you think these passages are effective, or do you think they are just silly? Explain.
2. Perhaps another way of getting at the question we have just asked is this: Can you imagine reading this at the funeral of someone you love? Or would you want a lover to read it at your funeral? Why?
3. The words of the last line of the poem are simple, almost a cliché. Yet we find them very powerful, and we wonder if you agree. What is the relationship of this line to the preceding lines of the stanza, with its images of mighty actions and cosmic gestures, and to the poem as a whole?

EMILY BRONTË

Emily Brontë (1818–1848) spent most of her short life (she died of tuberculosis) in an English village on the Yorkshire moors. The sister of Charlotte Brontë (author of Jane Eyre, *1847) and of Anne Brontë (author of* Agnes Grey, *1847), Emily is best known for her novel* Wuthering Heights *(1847), but she was a*

considerable poet, and her first significant publication (1846) was in a volume of poems by the three sisters.

Spellbound

[1837]

The night is darkening round me,
The wild winds coldly blow;
But a tyrant spell has bound me
And I cannot, cannot go.

The giant trees are bending
Their bare boughs weighed with snow.
And the storm is fast descending,
And yet I cannot go.

Clouds beyond clouds above me,
Wastes beyond wastes below;
But nothing drear can move me;
I will not, cannot go.

YOUR TURN

1. What exactly is a "spell," and what does it mean to be "spellbound"?
2. What difference, if any, would it make if the first line said "has darkened" instead of "is darkening"?
3. What difference would it make, if any, if lines 4 and 12 were switched?
4. What does "drear" (line 11) mean? Is this word too unusual? Should the poet have used a more familiar word?
5. Describe the speaker's state of mind. Have you ever experienced anything like this yourself? What was the situation and how did you move beyond it?

Spirituals, or Sorrow Songs

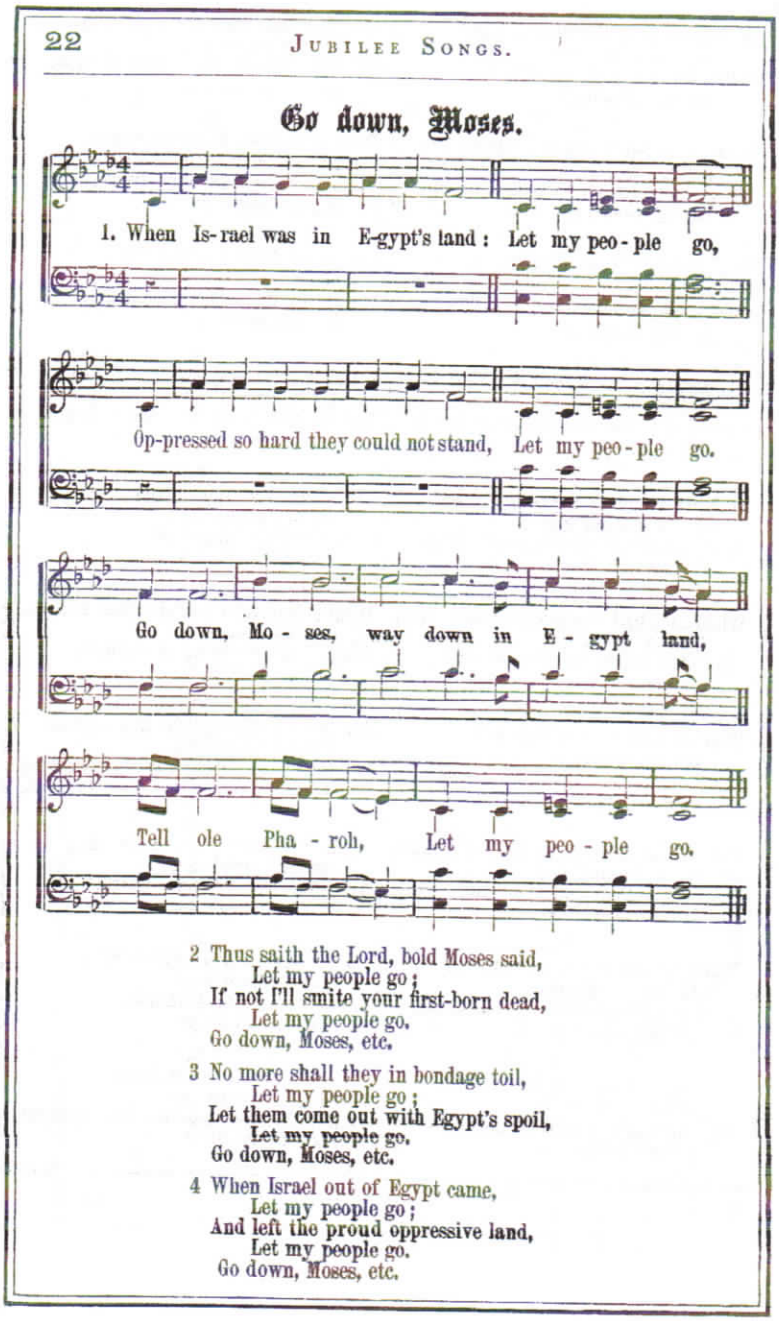
We have already mentioned that the lyric can range from expressions of emotion focused on personal matters to expressions of emotion focused on public matters, and the latter are sometimes characterized as odes or hymns. Among the most memorable hymns produced in the United States are the spirituals, or Sorrow Songs, created by black slaves in the United States, chiefly in the first half of the nineteenth century. The origins of the spirituals are still a matter of some dispute, but most specialists agree that the songs represent a distinctive fusion of African rhythms with European hymns.

Many of the texts derive ultimately from biblical sources: One of the chief themes, the desire for release, is sometimes presented with imagery drawn from ancient Israel. Examples include references to crossing the river Jordan (which runs from north of the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea), the release of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt (Exodus), Jonah's release from the whale (Book of Jonah), and Daniel's deliverance from a fiery furnace and from the lions' den (Book of Daniel, chapters 3 and 6).

Texts were collected and published during the 1860s in such books as *Slave Songs of the United States* (1867).

ANONYMOUS AFRICAN AMERICAN SPIRITUAL

Go Down, Moses



22 JUBILEE SONGS.

Go down, Moses.

1. When Is-rael was in E-gypt's land: Let my peo-ple go,

Op-pressed so hard they could not stand, Let my peo-ple go.

Go down, Mo-ses, way down in E-gypt land,

Tell ole Pha-roh, Let my peo-ple go.

2 Thus saith the Lord, bold Moses said,
Let my people go;
If not I'll smite your first-born dead,
Let my people go.
Go down, Moses, etc.

3 No more shall they in bondage toil,
Let my people go;
Let them come out with Egypt's spoil,
Let my people go.
Go down, Moses, etc.

4 When Israel out of Egypt came,
Let my people go;
And left the proud oppressive land,
Let my people go.
Go down, Moses, etc.

Two pages from *Jubilee Songs* (1872), an early printed collection of spirituals.

(continued)

5.
O, 'twas a dark and dismal night,
Let my people go;
When Moses led the Israelites,
Let my people go.

6.
'Twas good old Moses and Aaron, too,
Let my people go;
'Twas they that led the armies through,
Let my people go.

7.
The Lord told Moses what to do,
Let my people go;
To lead the children of Israel through,
Let my people go.

8.
O come along Moses, you'll not get lost,
Let my people go;
Stretch out your rod and come across,
Let my people go.

9.
As Israel stood by the water side,
Let my people go;
At the command of God it did divide,
Let my people go.

10.
When they had reached the other shore,
Let my people go;
They sang a song of triumph o'er,
Let my people go.

11.
Pharaoh said he would go across,
Let my people go;
But Pharaoh and his host were lost,
Let my people go.

12.
O Moses the cloud shall cleave the way,
Let my people go;
A fire by night, a shade by day,
Let my people go.

13.
You'll not get lost in the wilderness,
Let my people go;
With a lighted candle in your breast,
Let my people go.

14.
Jordan shall stand up like a wall,
Let my people go;
And the walls of Jericho shall fall
Let my people go.

15.
Your foes shall not before you stand,
Let my people go;
And you'll possess fair Canaan's land,
Let my people go.

16.
'Twas just about in harvest time,
Let my people go;
When Joshua led his host divine,
Let my people go.

17.
O let us all from bondage flee,
Let my people go;
And let us all in Christ be free,
Let my people go

18.
We need not always weep and moan,
Let my people go;
And wear these slavery chains forlorn,
Let my people go.

19.
This world's a wilderness of woe,
Let my people go;
O, let us on to Canaan go,
Let my people go.

20.
What a beautiful morning that will be,
Let my people go;
When time breaks up in eternity,
Let my people go.

21.
The Devil he thought he had me fast,
Let my people go;
But I thought I'd break his chains at last,
Let my people go.

22.
O take yer shoes from off yer feet,
Let my people go;
And walk into the golden street,
Let my people go.

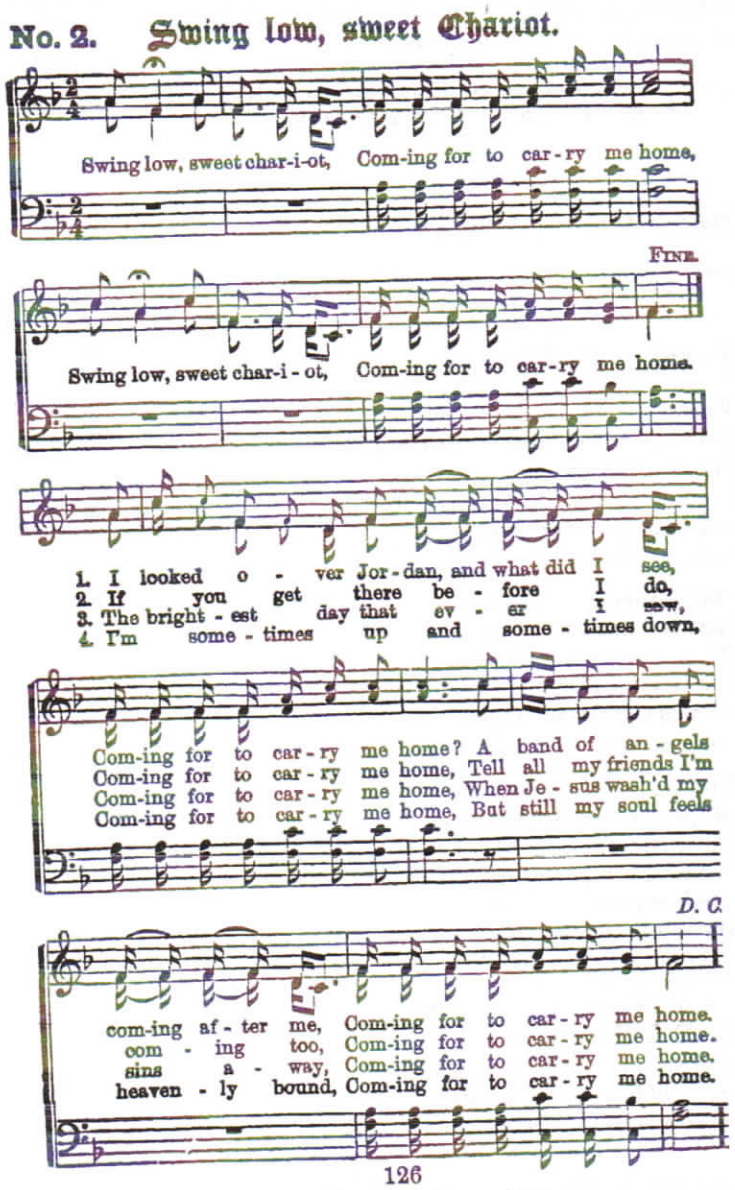
23.
I'll tell you what I likes de best,
Let my people go;
It is the shouting Methodist,
Let my people go.

24.
I do believe without a doubt,
Let my people go;
That a Christian has the right to shout,
Let my people go.

ANONYMOUS

Swing Low, Sweet Chariot

We reprint here a song from J. B. T. March's The Story of the Jubilee Singers *(1881).*



From J. B. T. March, *The Story of the Jubilee Singers*, 1881.

"Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" derives its basic images from the geography of ancient Israel (the Jordan River flows north from the Sea of Galilee to the

Dead Sea) and from a book in the Hebrew Bible (2 Kings 2.11 reports that Elijah and his friend Elisha were walking by the Jordan, when "there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder, and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven"). There may also be some influence of the New Testament, Luke 16.22, which reports that a rich man named Dives and a poor man were "carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." Further, the line "I'm sometimes up and sometimes down," from a secular song, "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen," often found its way into "Swing Low," as in this version, where the fourth verse goes:

> *I'm sometimes up and sometimes down.*
> *But still my soul feels heavenly bound.*

LANGSTON HUGHES

For a biographical note, see page 761.

Evenin' Air Blues [1942]

Folks, I come up North
Cause they told me de North was fine.
I come up North
Cause they told me de North was fine.
Been up here six months—
I'm about to lose my mind.

This mornin' for breakfast
I chawed de mornin' air.
This mornin' for breakfast
Chawed de mornin' air.
But this evenin' for supper,
I got evenin' air to spare.

Believe I'll do a little dancin'
Just to drive my blues away—
A little dancin'
To drive my blues away,
Cause when I'm dancin'
De blues forgets to stay.

But if you was to ask me
How de blues they come to be,
Says if you was to ask me
How de blues they come to be—
You wouldn't need to ask me:
Just look at me and see!

YOUR TURN

In what ways (subject, language) does this poem resemble blues you may have heard? Does it differ in any way? If so, how?

LI-YOUNG LEE

Li-Young Lee was born in 1957 in Jakarta, Indonesia, of Chinese parents. In 1964 his family brought him to the United States. He was educated at the University of Pittsburgh, the University of Arizona, and the State University of New York, Brockport. He now lives in Chicago. Lee's books of poetry include Book of My Nights *(2001) and* Behind My Eyes *(2008).*

I Ask My Mother to Sing [1986]

She begins, and my grandmother joins her.
Mother and daughter sing like young girls.
If my father were alive, he would play
his accordion and sway like a boat.

I've never been in Peking, or the Summer Palace,
nor stood on the great Stone Boat to watch
the rain begin on Kuen Ming Lake, the picnickers
running away in the grass.

But I love to hear it sung:
how the waterlilies fill with rain until
they overturn, spilling water into water,
then rock back, and fill with more.

Both women have begun to cry.
But neither stops her song.

YOUR TURN

1. Why might the speaker ask the women to sing?
2. Why do the women cry? Why do they continue to sing?

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892–1950) was born in Rockland, Maine. Even as a child she wrote poetry, and by the time she graduated from Vassar College (1917) she had achieved some notice as a poet. Millay settled for a while in Greenwich Village, a center of Bohemian activity in New York City, where she wrote, performed in plays, and engaged in feminist causes. In 1923, the year she married, she became the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. Numerous other awards followed. Though she is best known as a lyric poet—especially as a writer of sonnets—she also wrote memorable political poetry and nature poetry as well as short stories, plays, and a libretto for an opera.

The Spring and the Fall [1923]

In the spring of the year, in the spring of the year,
I walked the road beside my dear.
The trees were black where the bark was wet.
I see them yet, in the spring of the year.
He broke me a bough of the blossoming peach
That was out of the way and hard to reach.

In the fall of the year, in the fall of the year,
I walked the road beside my dear.
The rooks went up with a raucous trill.
I hear them still, in the fall of the year.
He laughed at all I dared to praise,
And broke my heart, in little ways.

Year be springing or year be falling,
The bark will drip and the birds be calling.
There's much that's fine to see and hear
In the spring of a year, in the fall of a year.
'Tis not love's going hurts my days,
But that it went in little ways.

YOUR TURN

1. The first stanza describes the generally happy beginning of a love story. Where do you find the first hint of an unhappy ending?
2. Describe the rhyme scheme of the first stanza, including internal rhymes. Do the second and third stanzas repeat the pattern, or are there some variations? What repetition of sounds other than rhyme do you note?
3. Put the last two lines into your own words. How do you react to them; that is, do you find the conclusion surprising, satisfying, recognizable from your own experience, anticlimactic, or what?
4. In two or three paragraphs, explain how the imagery of the poem (drawn from the seasons of the year) contributes to its meaning.

WILFRED OWEN

Wilfred Owen (1893–1918) was born in Shropshire, in England, and studied at London University. He enlisted in the army at the outbreak of World War I and fought in the Battle of the Somme in July–December 1916, in which 1.5 million men were killed or wounded, until he was hospitalized with shell shock. After his recuperation in England, he returned to the front, only to be killed in action one week before the end of the war. His collected poems were published posthumously.

For another poem by Owen, see page 606.

Anthem for Doomed Youth [1920]

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.
No mockeries for them from prayers or bells,
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs—
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed° them all?
Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes
Shall shine the holy glimmers of good-byes.
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

9 **speed** aid.

YOUR TURN

1. What is an anthem? What are some of the words or phrases in this poem that might be found in a traditional anthem? What are some of the words or phrases that you would not expect in an anthem?
2. How would you characterize the speaker's state of mind? (Your response probably will require more than one word.)

WALT WHITMAN

Walt Whitman (1819–1892) was born on Long Island, the son of a farmer. The young Whitman taught school and worked as a carpenter, a printer, a newspaper editor, and, during the Civil War, as a volunteer nurse on the Union side. In Whitman's own day his poetry was highly controversial because of its unusual form (formlessness, many people said) and (though not in the following poem) its abundant erotic implications. Whitman's important book Leaves of Grass, *was first published in 1855 and then revised and greatly expanded it in a number of editions until his death.*

Other poems by Whitman appear on pages 633, 687, 721, and 828.

A Noiseless Patient Spider [1862–1863]

A noiseless patient spider,
I mark'd where on a little promontory it stood isolated,
Mark'd how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,
It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself,
Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.

And you O my soul where you stand,
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them,
Till the bridge you will need be form'd, till the ductile anchor hold,
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul.

YOUR TURN

1. How are the suggestions in "launch'd" (line 4) and "unreeling" (line 5) continued in the second stanza?
2. How are the varying lengths of lines 1, 4, and 8 relevant to their ideas?
3. The second stanza is not a complete sentence. Why? The poem is unrhymed. What effect does the near-rhyme (*hold: soul*) in the last two lines have on you?

DYLAN THOMAS

Dylan Thomas (1914–1953) was born and grew up in Swansea, in Wales. His first volume of poetry, published in 1934, immediately made him famous. Endowed with a highly melodious voice, on three tours of the United States he was immensely successful as a reader of both his own and other poets' work. He died in New York City.

Fern Hill

[1946]

Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,
The night above the dingle starry,
Time let me hail and climb
Golden in the heydays of his eyes,
And honored among wagons I was prince of the apple towns
And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves
Trail with daisies and barley
Down the rivers of the windfall light.

And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns
About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,
In the sun that is young once only,
Time let me play and be
Golden in the mercy of his means,
And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman,
the calves
Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,
And the sabbath rang slowly
In the pebbles of the holy streams.

All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay
Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys,
it was air
And playing, lovely and watery
And fire green as grass.
And nightly under the simple stars
As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away,
All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the night-
jars
Flying with the ricks, and the horses
Flashing into the dark.
And then to awake, and the farm, like a wanderer white
With the dew, come back, the cock on his shoulder: it was all
Shining, it was Adam and maiden,
The sky gathered again
And the sun grew round that very day.
So it must have been after the birth of the simple light
In the first, spinning place, the spellbound horses walking warm
Out of the whinnying green stable
On to the fields of praise.

And honored among foxes and pheasants by the gay house
Under the new made clouds and happy as the heart was long,
In the sun born over and over,
I ran my heedless ways,
My wishes raced through the house high hay
And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows
In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs
Before the children green and golden
Follow him out of grace,

Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me
Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand,
In the moon that is always rising,
Nor that riding to sleep
I should hear him fly with the high fields
And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land.
Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,
Time held me green and dying
Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

YOUR TURN

Evaluate the thesis that Thomas's poem is about nature deceiving the speaker by furnishing him with an unrealistic attitude toward reality.

JOHN KEATS

For a biographical note, see page 559.

Ode on a Grecian Urn [1820]

I

Thou still unravished bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

II

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual° ear, but, more endeared,

13 sensual sensuous.

Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

III

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
For ever piping songs for ever new;
More happy love! more happy, happy love!
For ever warm and still to be enjoyed,
For ever panting, and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloyed,
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

IV

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
What little town by river or sea shore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

V

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede°
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

---

41 brede design.

YOUR TURN

1. If you do not know the meaning of "sylvan," check a dictionary. Why does Keats call the urn a "sylvan" historian (line 3)? As the poem continues, what evidence is there that the urn cannot "express" (line 3) a tale so sweetly as the speaker said?
2. What do you make of lines 11–14?
3. What do you think the urn may stand for in the first three stanzas? In the third stanza, is the speaker caught up in the urn's world or is he sharply aware of his own?
4. Do you take "tease us out of thought" (line 44) to mean "draw us into a realm of imaginative experience superior to that of reason" or to mean "draw us into futile and frustrating questions"? Or both? Or neither? What suggestions do you find in "Cold Pastoral" (line 45)?
5. Do lines 49–50 perhaps mean that imagination, stimulated by the urn, achieves a realm richer than the daily world? Or perhaps that art, the highest earthly wisdom, suggests there is a realm wherein earthly troubles are resolved?

LINDA PASTAN

Linda Pastan was born in New York City in 1932 and educated at Radcliffe College, Simmons College, and Brandeis University. The author of many books of poems, she has won numerous prizes and has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. In the following poem she wittily plays with repetitions and with pauses.

Jump Cabling

[1984]

When our cars
When you lifted the hood
To see the intimate workings
When we were bound
By a pulse of pure
When my car like the
In the tale woke with a
I thought why not ride the rest of the way together?
touched
of mine
underneath,
together
energy,
princess
start,

YOUR TURN

1. Suppose someone argued that this is merely prose broken up into arbitrary units. Would you agree? Explain.
2. As you read the poem aloud, think about the spacing that Pastan designed for it. What is the effect of the space between the first and second parts of the first seven lines? Why does she do something different for the final line?

BILLY COLLINS

"Billy Collins writes lovely poems," the novelist, critic, and poet John Updike has said: "Limpid, gently and consistently startling, more serious than they

seem, they describe all the worlds that are and were and some others besides." ***The recipient of many honors and awards, and a former poet laureate of the United States, Collins was born in New York City in 1941. He has taught at both the City University of New York and Sarah Lawrence College.***

Collins wrote the following poem on the first anniversary of the attack on the United States that took place on September 11, 2001, when al-Qaeda terrorists hijacked four commercial passenger jet airliners, crashing two of them into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City. (For another poem by Collins, see page 680.)

The Names [2002]

Yesterday, I lay awake in the palm of the night.
A soft rain stole in, unhelped by any breeze,
And when I saw the silver glaze on the windows,
I started with A, with Ackerman, as it happened,
Then Baxter and Calabro,
Davis and Eberling, names falling into place
As droplets fell through the dark.

Names printed on the ceiling of the night.
Names slipping around a watery bend.
Twenty-six willows on the banks of a stream.

In the morning, I walked out barefoot
Among thousands of flowers
Heavy with dew like the eyes of tears,
And each had a name—
Fiori inscribed on a yellow petal
Then Gonzalez and Han, Ishikawa and Jenkins.

Names written in the air
And stitched into the cloth of the day.
A name under a photograph taped to a mailbox.
Monogram on a torn shirt,
I see you spelled out on storefront windows
And on the bright unfurled awnings of this city.
I say the syllables as I turn a corner—
Kelly and Lee,
Medina, Nardella, and O'Connor.

When I peer into the woods,
I see a thick tangle where letters are hidden
As in a puzzle concocted for children.
Parker and Quigley in the twigs of an ash,
Rizzo, Schubert, Torres, and Upton,
Secrets in the boughs of an ancient maple.

Names written in the pale sky.
Names rising in the updraft amid buildings.
Names silent in stone
Or cried out behind a door.
Names blown over the earth and out to sea.

In the evening—weakening light, the last swallows.
A boy on a lake lifts his oars.
A woman by a window puts a match to a candle,
And the names are outlined on the rose clouds—
Vanacore and Wallace,
(let X stand, if it can, for the ones unfound)
Then Young and Ziminsky, the final jolt of Z.

Names etched on the head of a pin.
One name spanning a bridge, another undergoing a tunnel.
A blue name needled into the skin.
Names of citizens, workers, mothers and fathers,
The bright-eyed daughter, the quick son.
Alphabet of names in a green field.
Names in the small tracks of birds.
Names lifted from a hat
Or balanced on the tip of the tongue.
Names wheeled into the dim warehouse of memory.
So many names, there is barely room on the walls of the heart.

YOUR TURN

1. In an interview that appeared several years before "The Names" was published, Collins says of his intention as a poet: "By the end of the poem, the reader should be in a different place from where he started." When you finished reading "The Names," did you find yourself in a "different place"? How would you describe this place?
2. Collins has also observed, again in an interview before he wrote "The Names": "Poetry is clearly very serious for me, but without heaviness or a glib sense of spirituality." Do you perceive a "spiritual" dimension to this poem—one that is not "glib"? What does it mean to say that a poem is "spiritual," that it creates a spiritual effect? Is this the same thing as saying that a poem is "religious," or is it something different?
3. Many readers have expressed their high regard for "The Names," referring to it as a "great poem." Do you agree? What defines a great poem? Do you think a poet does or does not face a special challenge in trying to write a poem, great or simply good, about the tragedy of September 11, 2001? Please explain.
4. One critic, who otherwise admires Collins's work, has objected to "The Names" for being "too sentimental." How would you define "sentimentality"? (Clarify your definition with an example.) Can you locate evidence in the text that might support the judgment that Collins's poem is sentimental? Are there other passages you could cite and analyze in order to argue against it? And what's the matter with sentimentality? Is sentimentality something that poets should always avoid?
5. How do you feel about your own name? Is it something you give much thought to? Any thought? Why is that? Now that you have read Collins's poem, has your relationship to your own name changed in any way?