

### *Contemporary American Poetry*

Read all of the poems in this sampling of Contemporary American Poetry. Select two that speak to you the most. Answer the following questions in your Poetry Journal. Responses should not be answered numerically.

1. Why does this poem “speak” to you? In other words, why do you enjoy or relate to this poem more than the others?
2. How does the title relate to the meaning of the poem?
3. What is the *tone* of the poem?
4. List a couple of lines, images, or figures of speech that you feel are particularly well-written. What do you like about the choices the poet made?
5. Is there anything about the poem you don’t understand?
6. What is this poem really about? How do you think the reader is supposed to feel?

#### **Hate Poem ~ Julie Sheehan**

I hate you truly. Truly I do.  
Everything about me hates everything about you.  
The flick of my wrist hates you.  
The way I hold my pencil hates you.  
The sound made by my tiniest bones were they trapped in  
the jaws of a moray eel hates you.  
Each corpuscle singing in its capillary hates you.

Look out! Fore! I hate you.

The little blue-green speck of sock lint I’m trying to dig  
from under my third toe-nail, left foot, hates you.  
The history of this keychain hates you.  
My sigh in the background as you pick out the cashews hates you.  
The goldfish of my genius hates you.  
My aorta hates you. Also my ancestors.

A closed window is both a closed window and an obvious  
symbol of how I hate you.

My voice curt as a hairshirt: hate.  
My hesitation when you invite me for a drive: hate.  
My pleasant “good morning”: hate.  
You know how when I’m sleepy I nuzzle my head under  
your arm? Hate.

The whites of my target-eyes articulate hate. My wit practices it.  
My breasts relaxing in their holster from morning to night hate you.  
Layers of hate, a parfait.  
Hours after our latest row, brandishing the sharp glee of hate,  
I dissect you cell by cell, so that I might hate each one individually  
and at leisure.  
My lungs, duplicitous twins, expand with the utter validity of  
my hate, which can ever have enough of you,  
Breathlessly, like two idealists in a broken submarine.

#### **Gee, You’re So Beautiful That It’s Starting to Rain ~ Richard Brautigan**

Oh, Marcia,  
I want your long blonde beauty  
to be taught in high school,  
so kids will learn that God  
lives like music in the skin

and sounds like a sunshine harpsichord.  
I want high school report cards  
to look like this:

Play with Gentle Glass Things  
A

Computer Magic  
A

Writing Letter to Those You Love  
A

Finding out about Fish  
A

Marcia's Long Blonde Beauty  
A+!

**Notice** ~ Steve Kowit

This evening, the sturdy Levi's  
I wore every day for over a year  
& which seemed to the end  
in perfect condition,  
suddenly tore.  
How or why I don't know,  
but there it was: a big rip at the crotch.  
A month ago my friend Nick  
walked off a racquetball court,  
showered,  
got into his street clothes,  
& halfway home collapsed & died.  
Take heed, you who read this,  
& drop to your knees now & again  
like the poet Christopher Smart,  
& kiss the earth & be joyful,  
& make much of your time,  
& be kindly to everyone,  
even to those who do not deserve it.  
For although you may not believe  
it will happen,  
you too will one day be gone,  
I, whose Levi's ripped at the crotch  
for no reason,  
assure you that such is the case.  
Pass it on.

**note, passed to superman** ~ Lucille Clifton

sweet jesus, superman,  
if i had seen you  
dressed in your blue suit  
i would have known you.  
maybe that choirboy clark  
can stand around  
listening to stories  
but not you, not with

metropolis to save  
and every crook in town  
filthy with kryptonite.  
lord, man of steel,  
i understand the cape,  
the leggings, the whole  
ball of wax.  
you can trust me,  
there is no planet stranger  
than the one i'm from.

**The Facebook Sonnet** ~ Sherman Alexie

Welcome to the endless high-school  
Reunion. Welcome to past friends  
And lovers, however kind or cruel.  
Let's undervalue and unmend

The present. Why can't we pretend  
Every stage of life is the same?  
Let's exhume, resume, and extend  
Childhood. Let's all play the games

That occupy the young. Let fame  
And shame intertwine. Let one's search  
For God become public domain.  
Let church.com become our church.

Let's sign up, sign in, and confess  
Here at the altar of loneliness.

**Dancing** ~ Margaret Atwood

It was my father taught my mother  
how to dance.  
I never knew that.  
I thought it was the other way.  
Ballroom was their style,  
a graceful twirling,  
curved arms and fancy footwork,  
a green-eyed radio.

There is always more than you know.  
There are always boxes  
put away in the cellar,  
worn shoes and cherished pictures,  
notes you find later,  
sheet music you can't play.

A woman came on Wednesdays  
with tapes of waltzes.  
She tried to make him shuffle  
around the floor with her.  
She said it would be good for him.  
He didn't want to.