

Attention All Poets!

Announcing the Read & Response Poetry Contest

In conjunction with

Poetry Society of Texas 2025 Summer Conference, July 17-19 in Denton, TX.

The contest is open now to registered attendees of the 2025 PST Summer Conference only. Deadline for contest entries coincides with conference registration deadline, Saturday, July 12, 2025. It is offered and judged by Susan Maxwell Campbell and Christine Irving, editors of Denton Poet Assembly's anthology *When Poets Meet*.

Submission Guidelines:

Write a response poem inspired by a title, line, or poetic phrase or image from one of the following poems. Poems must be original, unpublished, and written specifically for this contest.

- You may submit only one response poem, taken from any one of the given target poems included below.
- Your poem must include an epigraph quoting the line(s) that inspire you, the author, and the title. The expressions "after" or "in the style of" are not acceptable substitutions for epigraph.
- Prizes for the contest: 1st Prize \$100; 2nd Prize \$50; and 3rd Prize \$25.
- 40 line limit; this includes your epigraph. Line count does not include title or single line breaks between verses. Lines must not exceed 60 characters including spaces and punctuation. If needed, print front and back of one sheet of paper.
- Do not identify yourself on your submission. Winners will be announced by their titles.
- Denton Poets' Assembly participants are eligible to submit but must enter a new, original unpublished poem.
- There is no entry fee for the contest. Include your poem in the envelope with your registration for PST 2025 Summer Conference. On the registration form for the conference, be sure to place your title on the space provided.
- Winning poems will be read at the conference and included in DPA's second anthology of R& R poems—coming in November 2025.

Read and Response Poems

The Heaven of Animals

James Dickey

(American, 1923-1997)

Poet Laureate 1966)

Here they are. The soft eyes open.
If they have lived in a wood
It is a wood.
If they have lived on plains
It is grass rolling
Under their feet forever.

Having no souls, they have come,
Anyway, beyond their knowing.
Their instincts wholly bloom
And they rise.
The soft eyes open.

To match them, the landscape flowers,
Outdoing, desperately
Outdoing what is required:
The richest wood,
The deepest field.

For some of these,
It could not be the place
It is, without blood.
These hunt, as they have done,
But with claws and teeth grown perfect,

More deadly than they can believe.

They stalk more silently,
And crouch on the limbs of trees,
And their descent
Upon the bright backs of their prey

May take years
In a sovereign floating of joy.
And those that are hunted
Know this as their life,
Their reward: to walk

Under such trees in full knowledge
Of what is in glory above them,
And to feel no fear,
But acceptance, compliance.
Fulfilling themselves without pain

At the cycle's center,
They tremble, they walk
Under the tree,
They fall, they are torn,
They rise, they walk again.

Dog

Lawrence Ferlinghetti

(American, 1919-2021)

The dog trots freely in the street
and sees reality
and the things he sees
are bigger than himself
and the things he sees
are his reality
Drunks in doorways
Moons on trees
The dog trots freely thru the street
and the things he sees
are smaller than himself
Fish on newsprint
Ants in holes

Chickens in Chinatown windows
their heads a block away
The dog trots freely in the street
and the things he smells
smell something like himself
The dog trots freely in the street
past puddles and babies
cats and cigars
poolrooms and policemen
He doesn't hate cops
He merely has no use for them
and he goes past them
and past the dead cows hung up whole
in front of the San Francisco Meat Market
He would rather eat a tender cow
than a tough policeman
though either might do
And he goes past the Romeo Ravioli Factory
and past Coit's Tower
and past Congressman Doyle
He's afraid of Coit's Tower
but he's not afraid of Congressman Doyle
although what he hears is very discouraging
very depressing
very absurd
to a sad young dog like himself
to a serious dog like himself
But he has his own free world to live in
His own fleas to eat
He will not be muzzled
Congressman Doyle is just another
fire hydrant
to him
The dog trots freely in the street
and has his own dog's life to live
and to think about

and to reflect upon
touching and tasting and testing everything
investigating everything
without benefit of perjury
a real realist
with a real tale to tell
and a real tail to tell it with
a real live
 barking
 democratic dog
engaged in real
 free enterprise
with something to say
 about ontology
something to say
 about reality
 and how to see it
 and how to hear it
with his head cocked sideways
 at streetcorners
as if he is just about to have
 his picture taken
 for Victor Records
 listening for
 His Master's Voice
and looking
 like a living questionmark
 into the
 great gramophone
 of puzzling existence
with its wondrous hollow horn
 which always seems
just about to spout forth
 some Victorious answer
 to everything

Eagle Poem

Joy Harjo

(Mvskoke, born 1951

Poet Laureate 2019)

To pray you open your whole self
To sky, to earth, to sun, to moon
To one whole voice that is you.
And know there is more
That you can't see, can't hear,
Can't know except in moments
Steadily growing, and in languages
That aren't always sound but other
Circles of motion.
Like eagle that Sunday morning
Over Salt River. Circled in blue sky
In wind, swept our hearts clean
With sacred wings.
We see you, see ourselves and know
That we must take the utmost care
And kindness in all things.
Breathe in, knowing we are made of
All this, and breathe, knowing
We are truly blessed because we
Were born, and die soon within a
True circle of motion,
Like eagle rounding out the morning
Inside us.
We pray that it will be done
In beauty.
In beauty.

Those Winter Sundays

Robert Hayden

(American, 1913-1980)

Poet Laureate 1976)

Sundays too my father got up early
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,
then with cracked hands that ached
from labor in the weekday weather made
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
and slowly I would rise and dress,
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him,
who had driven out the cold
and polished my good shoes as well.
What did I know, what did I know
of love's austere and lonely offices?

Otherwise

Jane Kenyon

(American, 1947-1995)

I got out of bed
on two strong legs.
It might have been
otherwise. I ate
cereal, sweet
milk, ripe, flawless
peach. It might
have been otherwise.
I took the dog uphill
to the birch wood.
All morning I did

the work I love.
At noon I lay down
with my mate. It might
have been otherwise.
We ate dinner together
at a table with silver
candlesticks. It might
have been otherwise.
I slept in a bed
in a room with paintings
on the walls, and
planned another day
just like this day.
But one day, I know,
it will be otherwise.

Anastasia & Sandman

Larry Levis

(American, 1946-1996)

The brow of a horse in that moment when
The horse is drinking water so deeply from a trough
It seems to inhale the water, is holy.

I refuse to explain.

When the horse had gone the water in the trough,
All through the empty summer,

Went on reflecting clouds & stars.

The horse cropping grass in a field,
And the fly buzzing around its eyes, are more real
Than the mist in one corner of the field.

Or the angel hidden in the mist, for that matter.

Members of the Committee on the Ineffable,
Let me illustrate this with a story, & ask you all
To rest your heads on the table, cushioned,
If you wish, in your hands, &, if you want,
Comforted by a small carton of milk
To drink from, as you once did, long ago,
When there was only a curriculum of beach grass,
When the University of Flies was only a distant humming.

In Romania, after the war, Stalin confiscated
The horses that had been used to work the fields.
"You won't need horses now," Stalin said, cupping
His hand to his ear, "Can't you hear the tractors
Coming in the distance? I hear them already."

The crowd in the Callea Victoria listened closely
But no one heard anything. In the distance
There was only the faint glow of a few clouds.
And the horses were led into boxcars & emerged
As the dimly remembered meals of flesh
That fed the starving Poles
During that famine, & part of the next one--
In which even words grew thin & transparent,
Like the pale wings of ants that flew
Out of the oldest houses, & slowly
What had been real in words began to be replaced
By what was not real, by the not exactly real.
"Well, not exactly, but. . ." became the preferred
Administrative phrasing so that the man
Standing with his hat in his hands would not guess
That the phrasing of a few words had already swept
The earth from beneath his feet. "That horse I had,
He was more real than any angel,
The housefly, when I had a house, was real too,"
Is what the man thought.
Yet it wasn't more than a few months

Before the man began to wonder, talking
To himself out loud before the others,
"Was the horse real? Was the house real?"
An angel flew in and out of the high window
In the factory where the man worked, his hands
Numb with cold. He hated the window & the light
Entering the window & he hated the angel.
Because the angel could not be carved into meat
Or dumped into the ossuary & become part
Of the landfill at the edge of town,
It therefore could not acquire a soul,
And resembled in significance nothing more
Than a light summer dress when the body has gone.

The man survived because, after a while,
He shut up about it.

Stalin had a deep understanding of the *kulaks*,
Their sense of marginalization & belief in the land;

That is why he killed them all.

Members of the Committee on Solitude, consider
Our own impoverishment & the progress of that famine,
In which, now, it is becoming impossible
To feel anything when we contemplate the burial,
Alive, in a two-hour period, of hundreds of people.
Who were not clichés, who did not know they would be
The illegible blank of the past that lives in each
Of us, even in some guy watering his lawn

On a summer night. Consider

The death of Stalin & the slow, uninterrupted
Evolution of the horse, a species no one,
Not even Stalin, could extinguish, almost as if

What could not be altered was something
Noble in the look of its face, something

Incapable of treachery.

Then imagine, in your planning proposals,
The exact moment in the future when an angel
Might alight & crawl like a fly into the ear of a horse,
And then, eventually, into the brain of a horse,
And imagine further that the angel in the brain
Of this horse is, for the horse cropping grass
In the field, largely irrelevant, a mist in the corner
Of the field, something that disappears,
The horse thinks, when weight is passed through it,
Something that will not even carry the weight
Of its own father
On its back, the horse decides, & so demonstrates
This by swishing at a fly with its tail, by continuing
To graze as the dusk comes on & almost until it is night.

Old contrivers, daydreamers, walking chemistry sets,
Exhausted chimneysweeps of the spaces
Between words, where the Holy Ghost tastes just
Like the dust it is made of,
Let's tear up our lecture notes & throw them out
The window.

Let's do it right now before wisdom descends upon us
Like a spiderweb over a burned-out theater marquee,
Because what's the use?

I keep going to meetings where no one's there,
And contributing to the discussion;
And besides, behind the angel hissing in its mist
Is a gate that leads only into another field,
Another outcropping of stones & withered grass, where
A horse named Sandman & a horse named Anastasia
Used to stand at the fence & watch the traffic pass.

Where there were outdoor concerts once, in summer,
Under the missing & innumerable stars.

[lady in brown] "de library waz right down from de trolly tracks"

Ntozake Shange

(American, 1948-2018)

de library waz right down from de trolly tracks
cross from de laundry-mat
thru de big shinin floors & granite pillars
ol st. louis is famous for
i found toussaint
but not til after months uv
cajun katie/ pippi longstockin
christopher robin/ eddie heyward & a pooh bear
in the children's room
only pioneer girls & magic rabbits
& big city white boys
i knew i waznt sposedta
but i ran into the ADULT READING ROOM
& came across

TOUSSAINT•

my first blk man
(i never counted george washington carver
cuz i didnt like peanuts)
still
TOUSSAINT waz a blk man a negro like my mama say
who refused to be a slave
& he spoke french
& didnt low no white man to tell him nothin
not napolean
not maximilien

• https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toussaint_Louverture

not robespierre

TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE

waz the beginnin uv reality for me
in the summer contest for
who colored child can read
15 books in three weeks
i won & raved abt TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE
at the afternoon ceremony
waz disqualified

 cuz Toussaint
 belonged in the ADULT READING ROOM
 & i cried

& carried dead Touissant home in the book
he waz dead & livin to me
cuz TOUSSAINT & them
they held the citadel gainst the french
wid the spirits of ol dead africans from outta the ground
TOUSSAINT led they army of zombies
walkin cannon ball shootin spirits to free Haiti
& they waznt slaves no more

TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE

became my secret lover at the age of 8
i entertained him in my bedroom
widda flashlight under my covers
way into the night/ we discussed strategies
how to remove white girls from my hopscotch games
& etc.

TOUSSAINT

waz laying in bed wit me next to raggedy ann
the night i decided to run away from my
 integrated home

 integrated street

 integrated school

1955 waz not a good year for lil blk girls

Toussaint said 'lets go to haiti'
i said 'awright'
& packed some very important things in a brown paper bag
so i wdnt haveta come back
then Toussaint & i took the hodiament streetcar
to the river
last stop
only 15¢
cuz there waznt nobody cd see Toussaint cept me
& we walked all down thru north st. louis
where the french settlers usedta live
in tiny brick houses all huddled together
wit barely missin windows & shingles uneven
wit colored kids playin & women on low porches sippin beer

i cd talk to Toussaint down by the river
like this waz where we waz gonna stow away
on a boat for new orleans
& catch a creole fishin-rig for port-au-prince
then we waz just gonna read & talk all the time
& eat fried bananas

we waz just walkin & skippin past ol drunk men
when dis ol young boy jumped out at me sayin
'HEY GIRL YA BETTAH COME OVAH HEAH N TALK TO
ME'
well
i turned to TOUSSAINT (who waz furious)
& i shouted
'ya silly old boy
ya bettah leave me alone
or TOUSSAINT'S gonna get yr ass'
de silly ol boy came round de corner laughin all in my face
'yellah gal
ya sure must be somebody to know my name so quick'
i waz disgusted

& wanted to get on to haiti
widout some tacky ol boy botherin me
still he kept standin there
kickin milk cartons & bits of brick
tryin to get all in my business
i mumbled to L'OUVERTURE 'what shd I do'

finally
i asked this silly ol boy
'WELL WHO ARE YOU?'
he say
'MY NAME IS TOUSSAINT JONES'
well
i looked right at him
those skidded out cordoroy pants
a striped teashirt wid holes in both elbows
a new scab over his left eye
& i said

'what's yr name again'

he say
'i'm toussaint jones'
'wow
i am on my way to see
TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE in HAITI
are ya any kin to him
he dont take no stuff from white folks
& they gotta country all they own
& there aint no slaves'
that silly ol boy squinted his face all up
looka heah girl
i am TOUSSAINT JONES
& i'm right heah lookin at ya
& i dont take no stuff from no white folks
ya dont see none round heah do ya?'
& he sorta pushed out his chest
then he say
'come on lets go on down to the docks

and bloody rags.

Someone has to drag in a girder
to prop up a wall.
Someone has to glaze a window,
rehang a door.

Photogenic it's not,
and takes years.
All the cameras have left
for another war.

We'll need the bridges back,
and new railway stations.
Sleeves will go ragged
from rolling them up.

Someone, broom in hand,
still recalls the way it was.
Someone else listens
and nods with unsevered head.
But already there are those nearby
starting to mill about
who will find it dull.

From out of the bushes
sometimes someone still unearths
rusted-out arguments
and carries them to the garbage pile.

Those who knew
what was going on here
must make way for
those who know little.
And less than little.
And finally as little as nothing.

In the grass that has overgrown
causes and effects,
someone must be stretched out
blade of grass in his mouth
gazing at the clouds.

The Creation

Mona Van Duyn

(American, 1921-2004)

Poet Laureate 1992)

Now that I know you are gone
I have to try, like Rauschenberg*,
to rub out, line by line,
your picture, feeling as I rub
the maker's most inhuman
joy, seeing as I rub
the paper's slow, awful return
to possibility.
Five times you screamed and won
from your short body a big boy
or a tall girl to join
the rest of us here,
and now let daughter or son
wear all that's left of your face
when this drawing's undone.

Villon's Epitaph (Ballade of the Hanged Men)

François Villon (French, ca 1431-ca 1463)

Translated by Richard Wilbur

* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erased_de_Kooning_Drawing

O brother men who after us remain,
Do not look coldly on the scene you view,
For if you pity wretchedness and pain,
God will the more incline to pity you.
You see us hang here, half a dozen
who Indulged the flesh in every liberty
Till it was pecked and rotted, as you see,
And these our bones to dust and ashes fall.
Let no one mock our sorry company,
But pray to God that He forgive us all.
If we have called you brothers, don't disdain
The appellation, though alas it's true
That not all men are equal as to brain,
And that our crimes and blunders were not few.
Commend us, now that we are dead,
unto The Virgin Mary's son, in hopes that He
Will not be sparing of His clemency,
But save our souls, which Satan would enthrall.
We're dead now, brothers; show your charity
And pray to God that He forgive us all.
We have been rinsed and laundered by the rain,
And by the sunlight dried and blackened too.
Magpie and crow have plucked our eyeballs twain
And cropped our eyebrows and the beards we grew.
Nor have we any rest at all, for to
And fro we sway at the wind's fantasy,
Which has no object, yet would have us be
(Pitted like thimbles) at its beck and call.
Do not aspire to our fraternity,
But pray to God that He forgive us all.

Envoi

Prince Jesus, we implore Your Majesty
To spare us Hell's distress and obloquy;
We want no part of what may there befall.
And, mortal men, let's have no mockery,

But pray to God that He forgive us all.
