

### **Unit 3: Space & Place**

**Reading Due Tues, February 17th**

**Poem #2 Due Thurs, February 19th**

25+ lines, Typed

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time

-T.S. Eliot, "Little Gidding"

In this unit, we will be reading poems by poets whose passions (both love & hate) have been evoked by places, oftentimes the places they identify as their homes. As you write your own poem, you will use the following models to create a passionate ode, a harsh critique, a quiet observation—or a poem that encompasses all three. The key to this assignment is to use language that appeals to the senses, so that the reader can visualize the place you describe.

Enid Dame, "Riding the D Train"

Miguel Piñero, "A Lower East Side Poem"

Linton Kwesi Johnson, "Inglan is a Bitch"

David Trinidad, "Plasticville, USA"

Cornelius Eady, "Dread"

Lucille Clifton, "at the cemetery, walnut grove plantation, South Carolina, 1989"

Goran Simic, "The Sorrow of Sarajevo"

Langston Hughes, "Let America Be America Again"

#### **Option #1: Honest Ode**

Use Miguel Piñero's honest description of his home to create a poem about your own home, about your own origins, using language that contains the same passion and power.

#### **Option #2 Walking Description**

Take a twenty minute walk around your neighborhood or another neighborhood. As you walk, jot down what you see. Use your notes to create a poem. Like Enid Dame, use the subway, the bus, or your own neighborhood streets for inspiration. Notice and think about things you've never seen before. Describe both the people and places you see.

#### **Option #3 Poetry in Motion**

So many poems have been written about the experience of public transportation. Take a trip on the subway or bus or during your ordinary commute, jot down some notes about what you see and hear. Feel free to move beyond the literal and into the figurative and the imaginative. Another option is to write a narrative poem (a poem that tells a story) about a particularly interesting moment on the bus or train.

#### **Option #4 Historical Reflection**

Write a poem about a place, incorporating its history to provide the reader with a deeper understanding of the significance of this place and the struggle that has occurred on its soil. For instance, you could write a poem about a closed-down factory or an abandoned mining town. See "Sarajevo" and "at the cemetery, walnut grove plantation, South Carolina, 1989."

**Option #5 Let America Be America**

Using Langston Hughes' iconic American poem, write a work envisioning the America you want to see.

## **Riding the D-Train**

**Enid Dame**

Notice the rooftops,  
the wormeaten Brooklyn buildings.  
Houses crawl by,  
each with its private legend.  
In one, a mother  
is punishing her child  
slowly, with great enjoyment.  
In one, a daughter  
is writing a novel  
she can't show to anyone.

Notice your fellow riders:  
the Asian girl chewing a toothpick,  
the boy drawing trees on his hand,  
the man in a business suit  
whose shoes don't match.

Everything is important:  
that thing girl, for instance,  
in flowered dress, golden high heels.  
How did her eyes get scarred?  
Why is that old man crying?  
Why does that woman carry  
a cat in her pocketbook?

Don't underestimate  
any of it.

Anything you don't see  
will come back to haunt you.

(1991)

## **A Lower East Side Poem**

**Miguel Piñero**

Just once before I die  
I want to climb up on a  
tenement sky  
to dream my lungs out till  
I cry  
then scatter my ashes thru  
the Lower East Side.

So let me sing my song tonight  
let me feel out of sight  
and let all eyes be dry  
when they scatter my ashes thru  
the Lower East Side.

From Houston to 14th Street  
from Second Avenue to the mighty D  
here the hustlers & suckers meet  
the faggots & freaks will all get  
high  
on the ashes that have been scattered  
thru the Lower East Side.

There's no other place for me to be  
there's no other place that I can see  
there's no other town around that  
brings you up or keeps you down  
no food little heat sweeps by  
fancy cars & pimps' bars  
& juke saloons  
& greasy spoons make my spirits fly  
with my ashes scattered thru the  
Lower East Side . . .

A thief, a junkie I've been  
committed every known sin  
Jews and Gentiles . . . Bums & Men  
of style . . . run away child  
police shooting wild . . .  
mother's futile wails . . . pushers  
making sales . . . dope wheelers  
& cocaine dealers . . . smoking pot  
streets are hot & feed off those who bleed to death . . .

all that's true  
all that's true  
all that is true

but this ain't no lie  
when I ask that my ashes be scattered thru  
the Lower East Side.

So here I am, look at me  
I stand proud as you can see  
pleased to be from the Lower East  
a street fighting man  
a problem of this land  
I am the Philosopher of the Criminal Mind  
a dweller of prison time  
a cancer of Rockefeller's ghettocide  
this concrete tomb is my home  
to belong to survive you gotta be strong  
you can't be shy less without request  
someone will scatter your ashes thru  
the Lower East Side.

I don't wanna be buried in Puerto Rico  
I don't wanna rest in Long Island Cemetery  
I wanna be near the stabbing shooting  
gambling fighting & unnatural dying  
& new birth crying  
so please when I die . . .  
don't take me far away  
keep me near by  
take my ashes and scatter them thru out  
the Lower East Side . . .

## Inglan Is a Bitch

Linton Kwesi Johnson

w'en mi jus' come to Landan toun  
mi use to work pan di andahgroun  
but workin' pan di andahgroun  
y'u don't get fi know your way aroun'

Inglan is a bitch  
dere's no escapin' it  
Inglan is a bitch  
dere's no runnin' whey fram it

mi get a lickle jab in a big 'otell  
an' awftah a while, mi woz doin' quite well  
dem staat mi aaf as a dish-washah  
but w'en mi tek a stack, mi noh tun clack-watchah!

Inglan is a bitch  
dere's no escapin it  
Inglan is a bitch  
noh baddah try fi hide fram it

w'en dem gi' you di lickle wage packit  
fus dem rab it wid dem big tax rackit  
y'u haffi struggle fi mek en's meet  
an' w'en y'u goh a y'u bed y'u jus' cant sleep

Inglan is a bitch  
dere's no escapin it  
Inglan is a bitch fi true  
a noh lie mi a tell, a true

mi use to work dig ditch w'en it cowl noh bitch  
mi did strang like a mule, but, bwoy, mi did fool  
den awftah a while mi jus' stap dhu ovahtime  
den aftah a while mi jus' phu dung mi tool

Inglan is a bitch  
dere's no escapin it  
Inglan is a bitch  
y'u haffi know how fi suvvive in it

well mi dhu day wok an' mid dhu nite wok  
mi dhu clean wok an' mid dhu dutty wok  
dem seh dat black man is very lazy  
but it y'u si how mi wok y'u woulda sey mi crazy

Inglan is a bitch  
dere's no escapin it

Inglan is a bitch  
y'u bettah face up to it

dem have a lickle facktri up inna Brackly  
inna disya facktri all dem dhu is pack crackry  
fi di laas fifteen years dem get mi laybah  
now awftah fiteen years mi fall out a fayvah

Inglan is a bitch  
dere's no escapin it  
Inglan is a bitch  
dere's no runnin' whey fram it

mi know dem have work, work in abundant  
yet still, dem mek mi redundant  
now, at fifty-five mi gettin' quite ol'  
yet still, dem sen' mi fi goh draw dole

Inglan is a bitch  
dere's no escapin it  
Inglan is a bitch fi true  
is whey wi a goh dhu 'bout it?

## Plasticville

David Trinidad

*The train goes round and round  
Our tiny little town*

The milkman drives his truck  
Up and down the block

The housewife pushes her cart  
Through the supermart

The girl holds her doll  
The boy catches the ball

*The train goes round and round  
Our quiet little town*

The mailman hoists his sack  
And carries it on his back

The gardener tends the lawn  
Till all the weeds are gone

The mechanic works on cars  
The grocer straightens jars

*The train goes round and round  
Our simple little town*

The engineer waves hello  
And lets his whistle blow

The policeman extends his arm  
To protect us all from harm

The gentleman tips his hat  
The neighbors stop to chat

*The train goes round and round  
Our perfect little town*

The couple strolls through the park  
As it begins to grow dark

The streetlights go on one by one  
As the businessman hurries home

And the stores close for the day  
Here In Plasticville, U.S.A.



## Dread

Cornelius Eady

I'm going to tell you something  
It's a simple fact of life.  
If you're a young man in East New York,  
Here's a simple fact of life:  
If they don't shoot you with a gun,  
They'll cut you with a knife.

I'm standing at the grave  
Of a just-buried friend,  
Staring at the fresh mound  
Of a just-buried friend.  
Don't know how it got started,  
Can't see where it'll end.

Looked for a glass of water  
But they gave me turpentine  
You can ask for a glass of water  
All you'll get is turpentine  
I don't know why this life  
Is like askin' a brick for wine.

I've lost eight friends already,  
Who'll make number nine?  
Lord, buried eight friends already,  
Who'll be number nine?

I'd love to make plans with you, Sugar,  
But I don't believe we'll have the time.

I sleep with the bullet  
That didn't have my name  
Say *good morning* to the bullet  
That didn't have my name  
So when my number comes up, baby,  
It'll be the one thing you can't blame.

(1997)

at the cemetery, walnut grove plantation, South Carolina, 1989

Lucille Clifton

among the rocks  
at walnut grove  
your silence drumming  
in my bones,  
tell me your names.  
nobody mentioned slaves  
and yet the curious tools  
shine with your fingerprints.  
nobody mentioned slaves  
but somebody did this work  
who had no guide, no stone,  
who moulders under rock.  
tell me your names,  
tell me your bashful names  
and i will testify.  
*the inventory lists ten slaves  
but only men were recognized.*  
among the rocks  
at walnut grove  
some of these honored dead  
were dark  
some of these dark  
were slaves  
some of these slaves  
were women  
some of them did this  
honored work.  
tell me your names  
foremothers, brothers,  
tell me your dishonored names.  
here lies  
here lies  
here lies  
here lies  
hear

Lucille Clifton in an Interview with Bill Moyers

CLIFTON: Well, let me tell you what happened with that poem. I went to Walnut Grove Plantation in South Carolina in 1989 and I was the only person of color on the tour. It's a wonderful two thousand acres, but on the tour there was no mention of slaves. The plantation had the original furniture, and the guide talked about the difficulty of the work for a small family, but there was no mention of slavery. Now I'm very nosy--I want to know everything when I travel to give readings, all the gossip, everything. I like to know what happened here, so I always ask about the people who were here before *these* people? And then the uncomfortable question always is "Where are they now?"

Well, Walnut Grove Plantation has the family burying ground, and on the sides of the roped-off path leading to that burying ground there are crosses and rocks and other things sitting on edge that to me clearly mark the graves of slaves. So I asked, "Why don't you mention slaves?" The first answer was "Maybe the guide didn't want to embarrass you." "Well," I said, "I'm not a slave. I don't know why he would think I'd be embarrassed." Then I asked again, and the answer was, "Maybe they didn't have any." Well, they had two thousand acres in South Carolina in the early part of the nineteenth century. Be serious!

When I suggested that the guide check the inventory--because slaves were considered property and were often inventoried--they discovered that the plantation had an inventory of ten slaves, but they might have had more because women weren't counted. Now, well, I had to find out about that! I mean, some things say, hey, like "No!" Then when I learned that the women were not considered valuable enough to inventory, I definitely wanted to write about that.

MOYERS: What do you want the readers to do at the end of the poem when you change the word "here" to "hear"?

CLIFTON: I want them to recognize that only half the truth was being told. At that time schoolchildren were taken there on field trips to Walnut Grove, and half the children in the town were denied the knowledge that their ancestors had helped to build that plantation. That is unjust, and I'm into justice big-time.

I read that poem in South Carolina a lot, and someone in the audience--I think she was the director of the group which has restored the plantation--wrote me a letter saying that she just didn't realize. Two years ago they began building a model slave cabin, and now they are going to include all the people who lived there in the tour. So that's one poem doing something, making a difference. Then once when I did a reading at the nearby town a woman came up and told me that her family had owned Walnut Grove, but she had never gone back--she was ashamed--so I said the next time I come here, we must go together. You see, we cannot ignore history. History doesn't go away. The past isn't back there, the past is *here* too.

MOYERS: Is it part of poetry's job to recover history, to proclaim it, and to correct it when necessary?

CLIFTON: Yes. All that may be needed is that the injustice in the world be mentioned so that nobody can ever say, "Nobody told me."

## The Sorrow of Sarajevo

Goran Simic

The Sarajevo wind  
leafs through newspapers  
that are glued by blood to the street;  
I pass with a loaf of bread under my arm.

The River carries the corpse of a woman.  
as I run across the bridge  
with my canisters of water,  
I notice her wristwatch, still in place.

Someone lobs a child's shoe  
into the furnace. Family photographs spill  
from the back of a garbage truck;  
they carry inscriptions:  
Love from . . . love from . . . love

There's no way of describing these things,  
not really. Each night I wake  
and stand by the window to watch my neighbor  
who stands by the window to watch the dark.

### Note:

The Siege of Sarajevo is the longest siege of a capital city in the history of modern warfare.<sup>1</sup> Serb forces of the Republika Srpska and the Yugoslav People's Army besieged Sarajevo, the capital city of Bosnia and Herzegovina, from April 5, 1992 to February 29, 1996 during the Bosnian War.

## Let America Be America Again

Langston Hughes

Let America be America again.  
Let it be the dream it used to be.  
Let it be the pioneer on the plain  
Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed--  
Let it be that great strong land of love  
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme  
That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where Liberty  
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,  
But opportunity is real, and life is free,  
Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There's never been equality for me,  
Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")

*Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?  
And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?*

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,  
I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.  
I am the red man driven from the land,  
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek--  
And finding only the same old stupid plan  
Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

I am the young man, full of strength and hope,  
Tangled in that ancient endless chain  
Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!  
Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need!  
Of work the men! Of take the pay!  
Of owning everything for one's own greed!

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.  
I am the worker sold to the machine.  
I am the Negro, servant to you all.  
I am the people, humble, hungry, mean--  
Hungry yet today despite the dream.  
Beaten yet today--O, Pioneers!  
I am the man who never got ahead,  
The poorest worker bartered through the years.

Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream  
In the Old World while still a serf of kings,  
Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,  
That even yet its mighty daring sings  
In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned  
That's made America the land it has become.  
O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas  
In search of what I meant to be my home--  
For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore,  
And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea,  
And torn from Black Africa's strand I came  
To build a "homeland of the free."

The free?

Who said the free? Not me?  
Surely not me? The millions on relief today?  
The millions shot down when we strike?  
The millions who have nothing for our pay?  
For all the dreams we've dreamed  
And all the songs we've sung  
And all the hopes we've held  
And all the flags we've hung,  
The millions who have nothing for our pay--  
Except the dream that's almost dead today.

O, let America be America again--  
The land that never has been yet--  
And yet must be--the land where *every* man is free.  
The land that's mine--the poor man's, Indian's, Negro's, ME--  
Who made America,  
Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,  
Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,  
Must bring back our mighty dream again.

Sure, call me any ugly name you choose--  
The steel of freedom does not stain.  
From those who live like leeches on the people's lives,  
We must take back our land again,  
America!

O, yes,  
I say it plain,  
America never was America to me,  
And yet I swear this oath--  
America will be!

Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,  
The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,  
We, the people, must redeem  
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.  
The mountains and the endless plain--  
All, all the stretch of these great green states--  
And make America again!