

## Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

### Episode 13: National Poetry Month

(Brief intro music)

Rachel: Hello, and welcome to Not Your Mother's Library, a reader's advisory podcast from the Oak Creek Public Library. I'm Rachel, and things are kind of weird. At time of recording, we are in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic. If you weren't aware of that, I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news, I guess, but I'm also flattered and confused that you use this podcast to get your news updates. Anyway, because of the scary, unhappy, no-good fun times we are living in, we've had to alter our plans. Originally, my co-host Leah and I were going to drive to the Racine Public Library and interview librarian and local poet Nick Demske to celebrate National Poetry Month, which is April. It would have been our first out-of-building recording, and with an award-winning poet who has strong ties to both the Racine/Kenosha poet laureate program and the Wisconsin Poet Laureate Commission, to boot. Alas, the world decided that we were not ready for this endeavor, so you're stuck with just me, again. The original idea we had of reading listener-submitted poems was also a bust since, uh, no one submitted anything. Which is fine! I get it. Poetry is difficult to write, let alone share with the world. No worries. So anyway, staff at OCPL are currently allowed to come into work, but because we need to maintain a safe enough distance from each other, Leah is actually going to record her parts of the podcast separately, and I am going to magic them together with my elite editing skills. It's all going to come together, and I am not worried about it at all. So, we are still going to celebrate National Poetry Month, but in a much more relaxed—dare I say, 'lame'?—manner. That's right, everyone: we are going to read some of our favorite poems. The funny thing about this podcast as a whole is that I have no professional experience with voice work—as if it weren't obvious—and I am very much aware of the fact that my voice is neither smooth nor sonorous. But I am dedicated to entertaining all of you while you're stuck at home, and I like poetry enough to want to share the experience with other people. We are going to do our best at something we're not very good at, and we hope you enjoy it enough to read up on some poetry yourself to while away the long hours of the day. Let's start things off with a short one. This is "The Ruined Garden" by Charles Baudelaire, translated by Robert Lowell. "My childhood was only a menacing shower, cut now and then by hours of brilliant heat. All the top soil was killed by rain and sleet, my garden hardly bore a standing flower. From now on, my mind's autumn! I must take the field and dress my beds with spade and rake and restore order to my flooded grounds. There the rain raised mountains like burial mounds. I throw fresh seeds out. Who knows what survives? What elements will give us life and food? This soil is irrigated by the tides. Time and nature sluice away our lives. A virus eats the heart out of our sides, digs in and multiplies on our lost blood." That, uh, is kind of dark. But that's Baudelaire for you. Next up, let's hear from Leah.

Leah: That was a great poem, Rachel. At least, I assume it was since we're recording separately. Yes, we're practicing the social distancing, folks. But Rachel has impeccable taste, guys. I'm sure it was a great poem. I'll be the first to admit that I don't have a lot of experience with poetry. But there is one poem that I grew up hearing. My dad would recite parts of it, and my grandma had an illustration in her house that always—always—reminded me of it. Come to think of it, I think we had a picture book of this poem illustrated. That would certainly explain why I had such clear childhood memories and love it so much. This poem is entitled "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" by Robert Frost, and I'd like to

recite it for you. "Whose woods these are I think I know. His house is in the village though; He will not see me stopping here To watch his woods fill up with snow. My little horse must think it queer To stop without a farmhouse near Between the woods and frozen lake The darkest evening of the year. He gives his harness bells a shake To ask if there is some mistake. The only other sound's the sweep Of easy wind and downy flake. The woods are lovely, dark and deep, But I have promises to keep, And miles to go before I sleep, And miles to go before I sleep." I think I liked this poem so well because I've always loved nature, hiking, and being in the woods. Now, generally I don't venture out in the deep of winter, but perhaps I would if I could take a rad sleighride through the woods with hot cocoa and a fuzzy blanket. I'll have to keep that in mind of next winter.

Rachel: Nice poem! I assume. Does it make it worse if I periodically point out that we're recording these separately, or are all of you okay with that? Whatever. Let's try another poem. This is Seamus Heaney's "Blackberry-Picking." "Late August, given heavy rain and sun For a full week, the blackberries would ripen. At first, just one, a glossy purple clot Among others, red, green, hard as a knot. You ate that first one and its flesh was sweet Like thickened wine: summer's blood was in it Leaving stains upon the tongue and lust for Picking. Then red ones inked up and that hunger Sent us out with milk cans, pea tins, jam-pots Where briars scratched and wet grass bleached our boots. Round hayfields, cornfields and potato-drills We trekked and picked until the cans were full, Until the tinkling bottom had been covered With green ones, and on top big dark blobs burned Like a plate of eyes. Our hands were peppered With thorn pricks, our palms sticky as Bluebeard's. We hoarded the fresh berries in the byre. But when the bath was filled we found a fur, A rat-grey fungus, glutting on our cache. The juice was stinking too. Once off the bush The fruit fermented, the sweet flesh would turn sour. I always felt like crying. It wasn't fair That all the lovely canfuls smelt of rot. Each year I hoped they'd keep, knew they would not." That one is also kind of dark now that I think about it, but let's move onto another poem from Leah.

Leah: Wow, Rachel! What a great selection. I think there's a strong case to be made for song lyrics as poetry, and the next selections I'd like to discuss come from a brilliant songwriter. In fact, he won a Nobel Prize for literature in 2016 for his songwriting. Can you guess who it is? If you guessed Bob Dylan, you'd be right. He has so many brilliant songs. I'd just like to highlight a few the lyrics for you. Not full songs—we'll certainly list them in the show notes so you can search them out if you haven't heard of them for some reason. The first lyric is from his song "Shelter from the Storm, and it reads: "Now there's a wall between us, somethin' there's been lost I took too much for granted, I got my signals crossed Just to think that it all began on an uneventful morn Come in, she said I'll give ya shelter from the storm." The second I'd like to highlight is from his song "Blowin' in the Wind." "Yes, 'n' how many times must a man look up Before he can see the sky? Yes, 'n' how many ears must one man have Before he can hear people cry? Yes, 'n' how many deaths will it take 'til he knows That too many people have died? The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind The answer is blowin' in the wind." And the last is from probably my favorite Dylan song: "The Times They Are a-Changin'." "Come gather 'round, people Wherever you roam And admit that the waters Around you have grown And accept it that soon You'll be drenched to the bone If your time to you is worth savin' And you better start swimmin' Or you'll sink like a stone For the times they are a-changin'." I just want to be clear: I didn't sing the lyrics because nobody wants to hear that. These are just a few of Dylan's absolutely amazing songs. He has a huge discography spanning from 1962 to 2017. He just has such a way with words. I think his son, Jacob Dylan, is also a brilliant musician. What a talented family they have. And if you'll excuse me, I clearly need to go and binge-listen to some Bob Dylan.

Rachel: All right, great reading, Leah! Probably. Okay, this next one is my favorite poem. It is called "The Drunken Boat" and is written by Arthur Rimbaud, this version translated by Wallace Fowlie. It's a bit long, fair warning. We're talkin' 25 stanzas. Skip ahead a few minutes if you don't want to stick around for this one. Although it is a shining example of the French Surrealist movement, so I can't imagine why you wouldn't want to hear it. Here we go! "As I was going down impassive Rivers, I no longer felt myself guided by haulers: Yelping redskins had taken them as targets And had nailed them naked to colored stakes. I was indifferent to all crews, The bearer of Flemish wheat or English cottons When with my haulers this uproar stopped The Rivers let me go where I wanted. Into the furious lashing of the tides More heedless than children's brains the other winter I ran! And loosened Peninsulas Have not undergone a more triumphant hubbub The storm blessed my sea vigils Lighter than a cork I danced on the waves That are called eternal rollers of victims, Ten nights, without missing the stupid eye of the lighthouses! Sweeter than the flesh of hard apples is to children The green water penetrated my hull of fir And washed me of spots of blue wine And vomit, scattering rudder and grappling-hook. And from then on I bathed in the Poem Of the Sea, infused with stars and lactescent, Devouring the azure verses; where, like a pale elated Piece of flotsam, a pensive drowned figure sometimes sinks; Where, suddenly dyeing the blueness, delirium And slow rhythms under the streaking of daylight, Stronger than alcohol, vaster than our lyres, The bitter redness of love ferments! I know the skies bursting with lightning, and the waterspouts And the surf and the currents; I know the evening, And dawn as exalted as a flock of doves And at times I have seen what man thought he saw! I have seen the low sun spotted with mystic horrors, Lighting up, with long violet clots, Resembling actors of very ancient dramas, The waves rolling far off their quivering of shutters! I have dreamed of the green night with dazzled snows A kiss slowly rising to the eyes of the sea, The circulation of unknown saps, And the yellow and blue awakening of singing phosphorous! I followed during pregnant months the swell, Like hysterical cows, in its assault on the reefs, Without dreaming that the luminous feet of the Marys Could constrain the snout of the wheezing Oceans! I struck against, you know, unbelievable Floridas Mingling with flowers panthers' eyes and human Skin! Rainbows stretched like bridal reins Under the horizon of the seas to greenish herds! I have seen enormous swamps ferment, fish-traps Where a whole Leviathan rots in the rushes! Avalanches of water in the midst of a calm, And the distances cataracting toward the abyss! Glaciers, suns of silver, nacreous waves, skies of embers! Hideous strands at the end of brown gulfs Where giant serpents devoured by bedbugs Fall down from gnarled trees with black scent! I should have liked to show children those sunfish Of the blue wave, the fish of gold, the singing fish. —Foam of flowers rocked my drifting And ineffable winds winged me at times. At times a martyr weary of poles and zones, The sea, whose sob created my gentle roll, Brought up to me her dark flowers with yellow suckers And I remained, like a woman on her knees... Resembling an island tossing on my sides the quarrels And droppings of noisy birds with yellow eyes And I sailed on, when through my fragile ropes Drowned men sank backward to sleep! Now I, a boat lost in the foliage of caves, Thrown by the storm into the birdless air I whose water-drunk carcass would not have been rescued By the Monitors and the Hanseatic sailboats; Free, smoking, topped with violet fog, I who pierced the reddening sky like a wall, Bearing, delicious jam for good poets Lichens of sunlight and mucus of azure, Who ran, spotted with small electric moons, A wild plank, escorted by black seahorses, When Julys beat down with blows of cudgels The ultramarine skies with burning funnels; I, who trembled, hearing at fifty leagues off The moaning of the Behemoths in heat and the thick Maelstroms, Eternal spinner of the blue immobility I miss Europe with its ancient parapets! I have seen sidereal archipelagos! and islands Whose delirious skies are open to the sea-wanderer: —Is it in these bottomless nights that you sleep and exile yourself, Million golden

birds, o future Vigor? – But, in truth, I have wept too much! Dawns are heartbreaking. Every moon is atrocious and every sun bitter. Acrid love has swollen me with intoxicating torpor O let my keel burst! O let me go into the sea! If I want a water of Europe, it is the black Cold puddle where in the sweet-smelling twilight A squatting child full of sadness releases A boat as fragile as a May butterfly. No longer can I, bathed in your languor, o waves, Follow in the wake of the cotton boats, Nor cross through the pride of flags and flames, Nor swim under the terrible eyes of prison ships.” And that’s the end of that poem. We are going to move onto Leah’s final selection.

Leah: Rachel, I’m running out of synonyms for appreciating the poems you’ve selected to highlight. Luckily, I can pull us a thesaurus. So, here are as few—pick your favorite: Tremendous, remarkable, glorious, grand, outstanding, noteworthy, sublime. The last poem I’d like to feature is a short and sweet one. It’s written by Donna Marie Merritt and is entitled “Not to Self.” “Be like the willow that bends, shade that it sends, peace that it lends. During the breeze its leaves will appease and shift with ease. Enduring, alluring, maturing. Be like the willow that bends.” To me, it’s a poem about being resilient, and that’s so appropriate for where the world is right now. It’s uncertain times, so maybe take this note to self to yourself and remember that we’ll get through this. And now, take it away with your last election, Rachel.

Rachel: For my last selection, I am going to read “After great pain, a formal feeling comes” by Emily Dickenson. “After great pain, a formal feeling comes – The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs – The stiff Heart questions ‘was it He, that bore,’ And ‘Yesterday, or Centuries before’? The Feet, mechanical, go round – A Wooden way Of Ground, or Air, or Ought – Regardless grown, A Quartz contentment, like a stone – This is the Hour of Lead – Remembered, if outlived, As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow – First – Chill – then Stupor – then the letting go –.” If you ask me, that one’s a bit maudlin...but it is one that I chose, so I guess I dig it! That is actually the end of the episode, so please check the show notes for the list of poems that we read today. Also, be sure to subscribe and rate the podcast if you like what you hear. You can always reach us through OCPL’s website or Facebook page. Just use the #notyourmotherslibrary. Thank you for joining us to celebrate National Poetry Month, listeners. We will be back soon with another episode. Until next time, happy reading!

(Brief outro music)