

Poetry Circle

Hosted by
Pima County Public Library
The University of Arizona Poetry Center



Elizabeth Acevedo

Spoken Word /
Performance Poetry

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UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA POETRY CENTER

The Poetry Center is a leading literary institution and a living archive of poetry. As a premier example of a thriving public/private partnership, the Poetry Center connects the University of Arizona with the greater literary community in Tucson and beyond. We have amassed one of the finest and largest print/digital collections of contemporary poetry in America, with an active schedule of acquisitions. We've welcomed over one thousand poets to Tucson to read. Our education programs annually serve Arizona school children, college students, and adults with poetry experiences. Our public/private partnership has invested in a permanent landmark home for poetry in the American Southwest, and this underscores our ongoing commitment to the future of poetry, poetics, literary arts, and the ever-growing diverse community that we serve and cherish.

Our Mission:

To advance a diverse and robust literary culture that serves a local-to-global spectrum of writers, readers, and new audiences for poetry and the literary arts.

The Poetry Center website: <http://poetry.arizona.edu/visit/about-poetry-center>

Your docent leader for this Poetry Circle is:
Bonnie Wehle – bonwehle@gmail.com



Logan Phillips

Spoken-word poetry is written for the purpose of performance. It is characterized by poetic devices such as rhyme, alliteration, assonance, repetition, and word play. It frequently refers to issues of social justice, politics, race, and community—something the poet feels passionate about. It is personal, often written to provoke a reaction. The performances are focused on the aesthetics of recitation, such as intonation and voice inflection. They are filled with emotion, passion and attitude, as well as body language, eye contact, facial expression and gestures. The poems are memorized, but often include improvisation.

Contents:

1. *59* by Harry Baker
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cxGWWGohlXiw>
2. *Your Life* by Andrea Gibson
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gsUp6Wd_o8I
3. *Touchscreen* by Marshall Davis Jones
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GAx845QaOck&list=PLZ6ilGdntSABVHAh1ZwhAa5n-GNb0-gA&index=3>
4. *Hair* by Elizabeth Acevedo
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0svS78Nw_yY
5. *History Reconsidered* by Clint Smith
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEVowYqRAJE>
6. *Why am I not good enough?* by Olivia Vella
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eu_Gl0woeOw
7. *Jakarta, January* by Sarah Kay
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OemkJy0y0b0>
8. *Epic Tale of Love in Tucson* by Logan Phillips
<https://voca.arizona.edu/readings-list/373/771>
9. *The Miracle of Morning* by Amanda Gorman
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOieGJl6g4s>
10. *Allegory of the Black Man at Work in a Synagogue* by Roger Bonair Agard
<https://vimeo.com/266771118>

Harry Baker

Harry Baker is a British spoken word artist, author and poet. Born in Ealing in 1992, Harry Baker grew up as part of a Christian community in west London. After switching from studying medicine to allow his pursuit of poetry.

Baker studied mathematics with German at Bristol University. Baker has won the London and UK Slam Poetry Championships. In 2012, he won the World Slam Poetry Competition, becoming the youngest ever winner.

Harry Baker is also half of the 'world's greatest comedy-rap-jazz-duo' Harry and Chris. Harry and Chris have performed in multiple places such as The Edinburgh Fringe Festival and The Russell Howard Hour.

59

59 wakes up on the wrong side of the bed.
Realizes all his hair is on one side of his head.
Takes just under a minute to work out that it's because of the way that he slept.
He finds some clothes and gets dressed.
He can't help but look in the mirror and be subtly impressed
How he looks rough around the edges and yet casually messed.
And as he glances out the window, he sees the sight that he gets blessed with of 60 from across the street.

Now 60 was beautiful.
With perfectly trimmed cuticles, dressed in something suitable.
Never rude or crude at all.
Unimprovable, right on time as usual, more on cue than a snooker ball but liked to play it super cool.
59 wanted to tell her that he knew her favorite flower.
He thought of her every second, every minute, every hour.
But he knew it wouldn't work, he'd never get the girl.
Because although she lived across the street they came from different worlds.
While 59 admired 60's perfectly round figure, 60 thought 59 was odd.
One of his favorite films was "101 Dalmatians."
She preferred the sequel.

He romanticized the idea they were star-crossed lovers.
They could overcome the odds and evens because they had each other.
While she maintained the strict views imposed on her by her mother
That separate could not be equal.
And though at the time he felt stupid and dumb
For trying to love a girl controlled by her stupid mum,
He should have been comforted by the simple sum.

Take 59 away from 60, and you're left with the one.
Sure enough after two months of moping around,
61 days later, 61 was who he found,
He had lost his keys and his parents were out.
So one day after school he went into a house
As he noticed the slightly wonky numbers on the door,
He wondered why he'd never introduced himself before,
As she let him in, his jaw dropped in awe.
61 was like 60, but a little bit more.
She had prettier eyes, and an approachable smile,
And like him, rough around the edges, casual style,
And like him, everything was in disorganized piles,
And like him, her mum didn't mind if friends stayed a while.

Because she was like him, and he liked her.
He reckoned she would like him if she knew he was like her,
And it was different this time. I mean, this girl was wicked,
So he plucked up the courage and asked for her digits.
She said, "I'm 61." He grinned, said, "I'm 59."
Today I've had a really nice time,
So tomorrow if you wanted you could come over to mine?
She said, "Sure."
She loved talking to someone just as quirky,
She agreed to this unofficial first date.
In the end he was only ready one minute early,
But it didn't matter because she arrived one minute late.
And from that moment on there was nonstop chatter,
How they loved "X Factor," how they had two factors,
How that did not matter, distinctiveness made them better,
By the end of the night they knew they were meant together.
And one day she was talking about stuck-up 60,
She noticed that 59 looked a bit shifty.
He blushed, told her of his crush:
"The best thing that never happened because it led to us."

61 was clever, see, not prone to jealousy,
She looked him in the eyes and told him quite tenderly,
"You're 59, I'm 61, together we combine to become twice what 60 could ever be."
At this point 59 had tears in his eyes,
Was so glad to have this one-of-a-kind girl in his life.
He told her the very definition of being prime
Was that with only one and himself could his heart divide,
And she was the one he wanted to give his heart to,
She said she felt the same and now she knew the films were half true
Because that wasn't real love, that love was just a sample,
When it came to real love, they were a prime example.'

Andrea Gibson

Andrea Gibson is an American poet and activist from Calais, Maine, who has lived in Boulder, Colorado since 1999. Their poetry focuses on gender norms, politics, social reform, and the struggles LGBTQ people face in today's society.

A four-time Denver Grand Slam Champion, Gibson finished fourth at the 2004 National Poetry Slam, and third at both the 2006 and 2007 Individual World Poetry Slam. In 2008, Gibson became the first poet ever to win the Women of the World Poetry Slam (WOWps) in Detroit.

In 2008, Gibson published their first book, *Pole Dancing To Gospel Hymns*. This was followed by *The Madness Vase and Pansy*, all published by Write Bloody Publishing. Gibson has also written and published *Take Me With You*, a book of quotes and phrases and illustrated by Sarah J. Coleman. Most recently, they came out with *Lord of the Butterflies*.

The album *Yellowbird* incorporates music with spoken word. Confronting fear was a theme in poems of the following album, *Flower Boy*. Gibson also released *Truce* in 2013, followed by *Hey Galaxy* in 2018.

Gibson cites Sonya Renee Taylor, Derrick Brown, Anis Mojgani, Patricia Smith, and Mary Oliver as influences. Throughout the year, Gibson tours universities and other venues across the country.

Your Life

It isn't that you don't like boys.
It's just that you only like boys you want to be.
David with his jaw carved out of the side of a cliff.
Malcolm, who doesn't have secrets, just stories.
He owes no one.
Chris, the basketball hero with the tic, blinks fifteen times when he makes a shot.
You spend hours blinking in the mirror, pretending you're a star like him.
Mary Lavine calls you a dyke.
You don't have the language to tell her she's wrong and right.
So you just show up to her house, promising to paint her fingernails red with what will gush from her busted face if she ever says it again.
You're in the seventh grade.
You don't even know you want a girlfriend.
You still believe too much in the people who believe in Jesus to even feel desire to its hell threat.
You just want to kick your desk on the way to the principal's office, slouch in detention, want to cut your hair and spit out whatever you don't want in your mouth, your own name, even.
Skirting around the truth.
You don't yet know the boys are built in their confidence on stolen land,
but you do worry the girls might be occupied with things you will never understand.
Won't ever, ever be good at.
You take one pretty step and feel, like you're pouring bubbles into your own bloodbath.

You don't want a soft death.
You want a hard life that is your life.
Your life at the locker room that doesn't stop demanding to keep your eyes on the floor.
Your life at the prom, where you run home and a snowstorm, chugging your last pair of heels in a snowbank, realizing you are the only boy you want ever wanted to tear your dress off for.
Your life, the first Christmas you spend alone.
The years you learn to build your family out of scratch.
Your life when someone drags you from a restroom but the color of your coat.
Your life every time, airport security screams "pink or blue, pink or blue," trying to figure out what machine setting to run you through choosing your life and how that made you to.
Someone often finds it easy to explain your gender by saying you are happiest on the road when you're not here or there, but in between.
That yellow line running down the center of it all like a goddamn sunbeam.
Your name is not a song you will sing under your breath.
Your pronouns haven't even invented yet.
You're gonna shave your head, drive through Texas.
You're gonna kill your own God so you can fall in love for the first time.
They're gonna keep telling your heartbeat is a pre-existing condition.
They're gonna keep telling you are a crime of nature
and you're gonna look at all your options, and choose conviction,
choose to carve your own heart out of a side of a cliff,
choose to spend your whole life telling secrets you owe no one till everyone, till there isn't anyone who can insult you by calling you what you are.
You Holy blinking star.
You highway streak of light,
falling over and over for your hard life,
your perfect life, your sweet, beautiful life.

Marshall Davis Jones

Marshall Davis Jones believes in connection. As a traveling teaching artist and speaker he can be found between worlds. He can be at your local high school or a conference hosted by Will.I.Am. At a poetry bar in your neighborhood or a NASA test launch.

Marshall has performed for numerous colleges, high schools and universities and has participated in think tanks for companies large and small and is often brought on as a communications expert.

Marshall has been a voice over talent, a narrative consultant on two documentaries (one winning the Kaiser Permanente Thrive Award) and has appeared on National TV with TV Ones Verses and Flow, and has also hosted workshops across the states and abroad in other countries. Defying language barriers, he believes that there is a poem in everyone, if they know where to look.

From Barcelona, to Trinidad, El Salvador and beyond, Marshall wants to open the world to the craft. Now, here on the beautiful Island No Barrier stage he has the opportunity to share this gift with you.

Touchscreen

Introducing the new Apple iPerson
complete with multitouch and volume control
doesn't it feel good to touch?
doesn't it feel good to touch?
doesn't it feel good to touch?

my world is so digital
that I have forgotten what that feels like
it used to be hard to connect when friends formed cliques
but it's even more difficult to connect now that clicks form friends
But who am I to judge?
I face Facebook
more than books face me
hoping to
book face-to-faces
I update my status
420 spaces
to prove that I am still breathing
failure to do this daily
means my whole web wide world will forget that I exist
but with 3,000 friends online
only five I can count in real life
why wouldn't I spend more time in a world where there are more people that 'like' me
Wouldn't you?
Here, it doesn't matter
if I'm an amateur person
as long as I have a 'pro' file
my smile is 50% genuine
and 50% genuine HD
You would need blu-rays to see the white on my teeth
but I'm not that focused
ten tabs open
hopin'
my problems can be resolved with a 1600 by 1700 resolution
this is a problem with this evolution
doubled over we used to sit in tree tops
till we swung down and stood upright
then someone slipped a disc
now we are doubled over at desktops
from the Garden of Eden
to the branches of Macintosh
apple picking has always come at a great cost
iPod iMac iPhone iChat
I can do all of these things without making eye contact

We used to sprint to pick and store blackberries
Now we run to the Sprint Store to pick Blackberries
it's scary
I can't hear the sound of mother nature speaking over all this tweeting
and along with it is our ability to feel as it's fleeting
you would think these headphone jacks inject in the flesh
the way we connect to disconnect
power on
but we are powerless
they got us love drugged
Like e-pills
so we E*TRADE
email
e-motion
like e-commerce
because now money can buy love
for \$9.95 a month
click
to proceed the checkout
click
to x out where our hearts once where
click
I've uploaded this hug I hope she gets it
click
I'm making love to my wife I hope she's logged in
click
I'm holding my daughter over a Skype conference call
while she's crying in the crib in the next room
click
so when my phone goes off in my hip iTouch and iTouch and iTouch
because in a world
where there are voices that are only read
and laughter is never heard
or I'm so desperate to feel
that I hope the Technologic can reverse the universe
so the screen can touch me back
and maybe it will
When our technology is advanced enough...
to make us human again

Elizabeth Acevedo

Elizabeth Acevedo is a Dominican-American poet and author. She is the author of *The Poet X*, *With the Fire on High* and *Clap When You Land*. *The Poet X* is a New York Times Bestseller, National Book Award Winner, and Carnegie Medal winner. She is also the winner of the 2019 Michael L. Printz Award, the 2018 Pura Belpre Award, and the Boston-Globe Hornbook Award Prize for Best Children's Fiction of 2018. She lives in Washington, DC.

Acevedo identifies as Afro-Latina. Although raised Catholic, she no longer practices the religion. Currently, she lives in Washington, D.C. with her husband, Shakir Cannon-Moye. Acevedo grew up in a conservative and devout household of Catholicism. She went to church every Sunday with her mother and participated in every sacrament. Acevedo doesn't practice her religion anymore, though she still considers her relationship with her religion to be developing. She questions the teaching of religion because she says her book *With the Fire on High* is influenced by the fact that religion is empowering but "sometimes makes women and young girls question their selves."

Hair

My mother tells me to fix my hair.

And by "fix," she means straighten. She means whiten.

But how do you fix this ship-wrecked history of hair?

The true meaning of stranded, when trusses held tight like African cousins in ship bellies, did they imagine that their great-grand-children would look like us, and would hate them how we do? Trying to find ways to erase them out of our skin, iron them out of our hair, this wild tangle of hair that strangles air.

You call them wild curls. I call them breathing. Ancestors spiraling.

Can't you see them in this wet hair that waves like hello?

They say Dominicans can do the best hair.

I mean they wash, set, flatten the spring in any loc — but what they mean is we're the best at swallowing amnesia, in a cup of morisoñando, die dreaming because we'd rather do that than live in this reality, caught between orange juice and milk, between reflections of the sun and whiteness.

What they mean is, "Why would you date a black man?" What they mean is, "a prieto cocolo"

What they mean is, "Why would two oppressed people come together? It's two times the trouble."

What they really mean is, "Have you thought of your daughter's hair?"

And I don't tell them that we love like sugar cane, brown skin, pale flesh, meshed in pure sweetness. The children of children of fields. Our bodies curve into one another like an echo, and I let my curtain of curls blanket us from the world, how our children will be beautiful. Of dust skin, and diamond eyes. Hair, a reclamation.

How I will break pride down their back so from the moment they leave the womb they will be born in love with themselves.

Momma that tells me to fix my hair, and so many words remain unspoken. Because all I can reply is, "You can't fix what was never broken."

Clint Smith

Clint Smith is an American writer, poet and scholar. He is the author of *Counting Descent*, a 2017 poetry collection that was a finalist for the NAACP Image Awards and won Best Poetry Book from the Black Caucus of the American Library Association. Smith is also a doctoral candidate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He is a regular contributor to the Pod Save the People podcast, where he discusses the week's news with a panel of other activists.

History Reconsidered

... "When you sing that this country was founded on freedom, don't forget the duet of shackles dragging against the ground my entire life. I had been taught how perfect this country was, but no one ever told me about the pages torn out of my textbooks. How black and brown bodies have been bludgeoned for three centuries and find no place in the curriculum. Oppression doesn't disappear just because you decided not to teach us that chapter."

Olivia Vella

Olivia Vella, who just completed seventh grade at Queen Creek Middle School, is by her English teacher's estimation "the greatest student I've ever come into contact with."

The 13-year-old's talent for oratory is by now well-known across the country. In the past week, a video of Olivia delivering an original poem in class has received more than 27 million views — and counting.

But seventh-grade English teacher Brett Cornelius was stunned when he first read a draft. Not by the student's skill, but by the message.

"Here I was looking at the greatest student I've ever come into contact with," Cornelius said, teary-eyed. "And I'm reading about her being so insecure and so unhappy with who she is, and sadness is the first word I could feel."

Olivia's poem is "slam poetry," a form that includes a demonstrative in-person performance. Hers detailed her personal struggles with society's perception of beauty and popularity, its central theme being, "Why am I not good enough?"

Sarah Kay

Sarah Kay is an American poet. Known for her spoken word poetry, Kay is the founder and co-director of Project V.O.I.C.E. (founded 2004), a group dedicated to using spoken word as an educational and inspirational tool. Kay was born in New York City, New York, to a Japanese American mother and a Jewish American father. She has a Master of Arts in teaching from Brown University, and an honorary doctorate in humane letters from Grinnell College. She began performing poetry at the Bowery Poetry Club in the East Village at the age of 14, joining their Slam Team in 2006.

Jakarta, January

It is the last class of the day, and I am teaching a classroom of 6th graders about poetry, and across town a man walks into a Starbucks and blows himself up, while other men throw grenades in the street, and shoot into a crowd of civilians.

And I am 27 years old, which means I am the only person in this room who was alive when this happened in New York City, and I was in 8th grade, sitting in my classroom for the first class of the day. And I made a joke about how mad everyone was gonna be at the pilot that messed up. And later added how stupid you have to be for it to happen twice.

And the 6th graders are practising listing sensory details, and someone calls out blue skies as a sight that they love, and nobody in this classroom knows what has happened yet. And they do not know that we are in lockdown, which is a word they did not have when I was in 6th grade. And the whole class is laughing, because a boy has called out dog poop as a smell he does not like. And what is a boy if not a glowing thing learning what he can get away with?

And I was once a girl sitting in a classroom on the lucky side of town who did not know what had happened yet. And I did not know electrical fire was a smell I did not like until my whole neighbourhood smelled that way for weeks. And blue skies was a sight I never trusted again. And poetry is what I reached for in the days the ash would not stop falling.

And there is a 6th grade girl inside this class whose father was inside that Starbucks, and she does not know what has happened yet. And what is a girl but a pulsing thing learning what the world will take from her?

And what if I am still a girl, sitting in a classroom on the lucky side of town making a careless joke, looking up at my teacher for some kind of answer? And what if I am also the teacher with no answers looking back at myself? And what is being an adult if not a terrified thing desperate to protect something you cannot save? And how lucky do you have to be for it to miss you twice?

And tomorrow, a 6th grade girl will come to class while her father has the shrapnel pulled from his body. And maybe she will reach for poetry. And the sky outside the classroom is so terribly blue. And the students are quiet, and looking at me, and waiting for a poem, or an answer, or a grown up, or a bell to ring. And the bell rings, and they float up from their seats are tiny ghosts, and are gone.

Logan Phillips

“Poetry is holding the center, not hiding in the margins: we construct our world through words. Poetry is the art of putting into words all that which is otherwise unsayable, of constructing other ways of knowing.

No matter where I’m working—the DJ booth, the classroom, the art studio, the stage—I’m creating a poem; stringing together disparate elements to say something new, creating connections in collaboration with everyone in the room—

ee cummings said he was ‘overly fond of that precision which creates movement.’ Poetry is word precision, poetry moves the world forward.”

Amanda Gorman

Amanda Gorman is the youngest inaugural poet in U.S. history, as well as an award-winning writer and cum laude graduate of Harvard University, where she studied Sociology. She has written for the New York Times and has three books forthcoming with Penguin Random House.

Born and raised in Los Angeles, she began writing at only a few years of age. Now her words have won her invitations to the Obama White House and to perform for Lin-Manuel Miranda, Al Gore, Secretary Hillary Clinton, Malala Yousafzai, and others. Amanda has performed multiple commissioned poems for CBS This Morning and she has spoken at events and venues across the country, including the Library of Congress and Lincoln Center.

She has received a Genius Grant from OZY Media, as well as recognition from Scholastic Inc., YoungArts, the Glamour magazine College Women of the Year Awards, and the Webby Awards. She has written for the New York Times newsletter The Edit and penned the manifesto for Nike’s 2020 Black History Month campaign.

In 2017, Amanda Gorman was appointed the first-ever National Youth Poet Laureate by Urban Word – a program that supports Youth Poets Laureate in more than 60 cities, regions and states nationally. She is the recipient of the Poets & Writers Barnes & Noble Writers for Writers Award, and is the youngest board member of 826 National, the largest youth writing network in the United States.

The Miracle of Morning

I thought I'd awaken to a world in mourning.
Heavy clouds crowding, a society storming.
But there's something different on this golden morning.
Something magical in the sunlight, wide and warming.

I see a dad with a stroller taking a jog.
Across the street, a bright-eyed girl chases her dog.
A grandma on a porch fingers her rosaries.
She grins as her young neighbor brings her groceries.

While we might feel small, separate, and all alone,
Our people have never been more closely tethered.
The question isn't if we will weather this unknown,
But how we will weather this unknown together.

So on this meaningful morn, we mourn and we mend.
Like light, we can't be broken, even when we bend.

As one, we will defeat both despair and disease.
We stand with healthcare heroes and all employees;
With families, libraries, schools, waiters, artists;
Businesses, restaurants, and hospitals hit hardest.

We ignite not in the light, but in lack thereof,
For it is in loss that we truly learn to love.
In this chaos, we will discover clarity.
In suffering, we must find solidarity.

For it's our grief that gives us our gratitude,
Shows us how to find hope, if we ever lose it.
So ensure that this ache wasn't endured in vain:
Do not ignore the pain. Give it purpose. Use it.

Read children's books, dance alone to DJ music.
Know that this distance will make our hearts grow fonder.
From a wave of woes our world will emerge stronger.

We'll observe how the burdens braved by humankind
Are also the moments that make us humans kind;
Let every dawn find us courageous, brought closer;
Heeding the light before the fight is over.
When this ends, we'll smile sweetly, finally seeing
In testing times, we became the best of beings.

Roger Bonair Agard

Roger Bonair-Agard is a native of Trinidad and Tobago, Brooklyn, and author of *tarnish & masquerade*, (Cypher Books, 2006), *GULLY* (Cypher Books, 2010), *Bury My Clothes* (Haymarket Books, 2013), which was long listed for the National Book Award, and *Where Brooklyn At?!* (2016 from Willow Books/Aquarius Press). Roger is Writer-in-Residence at Brooklyn's National Sawdust, co-founder of NYC's LouderARTS Project, and frontman for the band Miyamoto is Black Enough. Founding member of NYC's Vision Into Art, and creator and facilitator of The Baldwin Protocols: Reading Series, he is Program Director with Free Write Arts & Literacy at Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center.

Allegory of the Black Man at Work in a Synagogue

My name is Roger Anthony Bonair-Agard
My name is a myth of its own creation
its syllables conjured by fear
My name is given me by an anxious history
The meat of it is always about loss
and return always loss and return
I was born between two rivers
in a valley of a shadow of blackness

My name means Famous Spear It is old
German It is the purview of warriors
My name means Priceless It is old
Latin It is the purview of kings
My name means Beautiful One It is old
French I wear it like a sixth finger

When I was 23 I managed the records
of membership and death Membership
and death bear their own names
They keep mine locked in the safe
of their own mythology The old man says
Fuck You I say My name means free
to go about my own business

They came to me with solemn voices
to purchase plots
to give them seats in the temple
They did not recognize my name
or sometimes they did Are you French
Are you a Jew Are you Black
May I speak to someone white

They came to me with celebration
This is my son David
This is my daughter Rebecca
This is their child Noah
Rosenbaum Miller Tisch Mandel
They brought me their tithings
of laughter history wine hubris hate
I gathered them onto me
to make myself new armor

My name is the first born son
of a single mother She is always
a basket on a river She is named
after a beautiful boy We cup the irony
like a river Her name is the purview
of gods She holds onto me like a promise
She gave me literature and the love
of all things holy And rum is holy
and dominoes are holy and the smell
of night-blooming jasmine is holy
She adorns her walls with the crawl
of bougainvillea and these too are holy

During the High Holy days they come
to me for seats in the temple They come
to me without knowing my name They come
to me without knowing the meanings
of likeness and image But they offer me
bottles of wine and good legal advice
They offer me tickets to the Knicks and the Rangers
They do not speak to me if I do not
have a name tag They do not
look long enough to see the name tag
My name means invisible It does not belong
to me My name means holder of seats
which are closest to God My name means
holder of land which is closest to death
I am 23 years old I am a litany
of violence I am moon
on a dancefloor I am drunken
promise behind the wheel of a car
They advise me like their own
son They urge me back to school
they urge me back into the carapace
of my own mind My name means
Guardian It is old Norman French

It is the purview of Lords My name
means elaborate caskets and endowments
for the temple

I am 26 years old I do not know
my name I am untethered as a cloud
They come to me with new ways
to talk about race They come to me
with words and new literatures
My mother's name means music
means builder of things She gave
me fists and a fencer's tongue
My name means builder of things
They come to me with poetry
It is the purview of the lost Thank God
they have come My name means
hunger My body means Hunger
I am a litany of Hunger
This new poem means Hunger