

*Essential
Question:*



What does it mean
to be an aging poet?

Guiding Questions:

Why can't I write about it?

*What am I not listening to?
/ How am I censoring
myself?*

How am I relevant?

Stanley Plumbly “At Night”



When did I know that I'd have to carry it around
in order to have it when I need it, say in a pocket,
the dark itself not dark enough but needing to be
added to, handful by handful if necessary, until
the way my mother would sit all night in a room
without the lights, smoking, until she disappeared?
Where would she go, because I would go there.
In the morning, nothing but a blanket and all her
absence and the feeling in the air of happiness.
And so much loneliness, a kind of purity of being
and emptiness, no one you are or could ever be,
my mother like another me in another life, gone
where I will go, night now likely dark enough
I can be alone as I've never been alone before.

Lucille Clifton “There is a Girl Inside”



There is a girl inside.
She is randy as a wolf.
She will not walk away and leave these bones
to an old woman.

She is a green tree in a forest of kindling.
She is a green girl in a used poet.

She has waited patient as a nun
for the second coming,
when she can break through gray hairs
into blossom

and her lovers will harvest
honey and thyme
and the woods will be wild
with the damn wonder of it.

Warm-Up

“13” ways of looking at an old person from a child’s perspective...



Alicia Ostriker

“The Blessing of the Old Woman, the Tulip, and the Dog”

To be blessed
said the old woman
is to live and work
so hard
God's love
washes right through you
like milk through a cow

To be blessed
said the dark red tulip
is to knock their eyes out
with the slug of lust
implied by
your up-ended skirt

To be blessed
said the dog
is to have a pinch
of God
inside you
and all the other
dogs can smell it



Sharon Olds

“Ode to Wattles”

I want to write about my wattles—oooo, I
lust after it,
I want to hold a mirror under my
chin so I can see the new
events in solid geometry
occurring below my jaw, which was
all bone till now, and now is jam-packed
reticule. I love to be a little
disgusting, to go as far as I can
into the thrilling unloveliness
of an elderwoman’s aging. It is like daring
time, and the ancient laws of eros,
at once. But when I look down,
into the compact’s pool, and see
my face hanging down from the bottom of my face,
like a raft woven of popsicle sticks,
my nursing-home neck,
then, though I’m willing to age and die
for there to be sex and children,
the slackness of the drapery, and the
inside-out pockets of the jowls shock me.
I thought it wouldn’t go so far with me
that I would be geology,
my throat a rippling of synclines and anticlines
back when the crust was warm, and I
was hot. Secretly, I don’t know yet
that I’m not, but I bow my head to time,
and count my withered chins, three five seven
nine, my muses, my truth which is not
beauty—my crone beauty, in its first youth.



Prompt one:

Talking to your body / the body talking to you.



Jane Hirshfield

“The Hand”



A hand is not four fingers and a thumb.

Nor is it palm and knuckles,
not ligaments or the fat's yellow pillow,
not tendons, star of the wristbone, meander of veins.

A hand is not the thick thatch of its lines
with their infinite dramas,
nor what it has written,
not on the page,
not on the ecstatic body.

Nor is the hand its meadows of holding, of shaping—
not sponge of rising yeast-bread,
not rotor pin's smoothness,
not ink.

The maple's green hands do not cup
the proliferant rain.
What empties itself falls into the place that is open.

A hand turned upward holds only a single, transparent
question.

Unanswerable, humming like bees, it rises, swarms,
departs.

Prompt two:

Take a metaphor and run with it. Draw from the writing you did. Or pick something else entirely.

Jean Valentine “My Old Body”



My old body:
a ladder of sunlight,
mercury dust floating through--

My forgivenesses,
how you have learned to love me in my sleep.

Losing Solomon

Sean Nevin

We estimate a man by how much he remembers.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

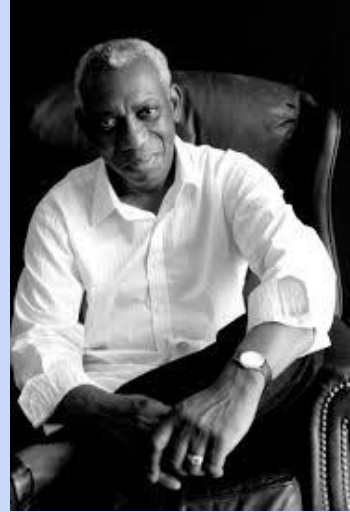
Things seem to take on a sudden shimmer before vanishing: the polished black loafers he wore yesterday, the reason for climbing the stairs, even the names of his own children are swallowed like spent stars against the dark vault of memory. Today the toaster gives up its silver purpose in his hands, becomes a radio, an old Philco blaring a ball game from the '40s with Jackie Robinson squaring up to the plate. For now, it's simple; he thinks he is young again, maybe nineteen, alone in a kitchen. He is staring through his own reflection in the luster and hoping against hope that Robinson will clear the bases with a ball knocked so far over the stadium wall it becomes a pigeon winging up into the brilliance. And perhaps, in one last act of alchemy, as Jackie sails around third, he will transform everything, even the strange and forgotten face glaring back from the chrome, into something familiar, something Solomon could know as his own.



Prompt three:

Name your fears.

Yusef Komunyakaa “Anodyne”

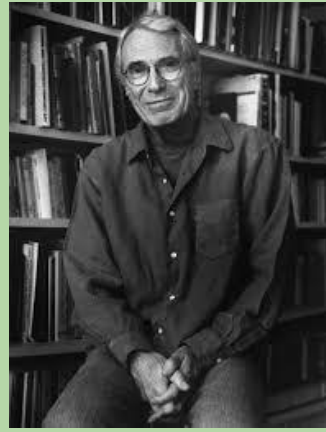


I love how it swells
into a temple where it is
held prisoner, where the god
of blame resides. I love
slopes & peaks, the secret
paths that make me selfish.
I love my crooked feet
shaped by vanity & work
shoes made to outlast
belief. The hardness
coupling milk it can't
fashion. I love the lips,
salt & honeycomb on the tongue.
The hair holding off rain
& snow. The white moons
on my fingernails. I love
how everything begs
blood into song & prayer
inside an egg. A ghost
hums through my bones
like Pan's midnight flute
shaping internal laws
beside a troubled river.

I love this body
made to weather the storm
in the brain, raised
out of the deep smell
of fish & water hyacinth,
out of rapture & the first
regret. I love my big hands.
I love it clear down to the soft
quick motor of each breath,
the liver's ten kinds of desire
& the kidney's lust for sugar.
This skin, this sac of dung
& joy, this spleen floating
like a compass needle inside
nighttime, always divining
West Africa's dusty horizon.
I love the birthmark
posed like a fighting cock
on my right shoulder blade.
I love this body, this
solo & ragtime jubilee
behind the left nipple,
because I know I was born
to wear out at least
one hundred angels.

Mark Strand

“The Coming of Light”



Even this late it happens:
the coming of love, the coming of light.
You wake and the candles are lit as if by themselves,
stars gather, dreams pour into your pillows,
sending up warm bouquets of air.
Even this late the bones of the body shine
and tomorrow's dust flares into breath.

Lu Yu

“Written in a Carefree Mood”

Old man pushing seventy,
In truth he acts like a little boy,
Whooping with delight when he spies some mountain fruits,
Laughing with joy, tagging after village mummers;
With the others having fun stacking tiles to make a pagoda,
Standing alone staring at his image in the jardinière pool.
Tucked under his arm, a battered book to read,
Just like the time he first set out to school.

Prompt four:

What are you bringing with you
/ what are you still discovering.

- *Poems from the workshop & Extra Resources*

["On Aging," Maya Angelou](#)

["Ordinary Sex," Ellen Bass](#)

["There is a Girl Inside," Lucille Clifton](#)

["Essays After Eighty," Donald Hall](#)

["Warning," Jenny Jones](#)

["Touch Me," Stanley Kunitz](#)

[Anodyne, Yusef Komunyakaa](#)

["Ode to Wattles," Sharon Olds](#)

["When Death Comes," Mary Oliver](#)

["The Blessing of the Old Woman, the Tulip, and the Dog," Alicia Ostriker](#)

["At Night," Stanley Plumly](#)

["The Greatest Love," Anna Swir \(translated by Czeslaw Milosz & Leonard Nathan\)](#)

["In the Next Galaxy," Ruth Stone](#)

["Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night," Dylan Thomas](#)

["Written In a Carefree Mood," Lu Yu](#)

["My Old Body," Jean Valentine](#)