**POETRY**

# Amor Fati

BY [SANDRA LIM](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/sandra-lim)

Inside every world there is another world trying to get out,

and there is something in you that would like to discount this world.

The stars could rise in darkness over heartbreaking coasts,

and you would not know if you were ruining your life or beginning a real one.

You could claim professional fondness for the world around you;

the pictures would dissolve under the paint coming alive,

and you would only feel a phantom skip of the heart, absorbed so in the colors.

Your disbelief is a later novel emerging in the long, long shadow of an earlier one—

is this the great world, which is whatever is the case?

The sustained helplessness you feel in the long emptiness of days is matched

by the new suspiciousness and wrath you wake to each morning.

Isn’t this a relationship with your death, too, to fall in love with your inscrutable life?

Your teeth fill with cavities. There is always unearned happiness for some,

and the criminal feeling of solitude. Always, everyone lies about his life.

“Amor Fati" from The Wilderness: Poems.  Copyright © 2014 by Sandra Lim.  Used by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

# [**Evergreen**](https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/evergreen-0)

What still grows in winter?

Fingernails of witches and femmes,

green moss on river rocks,

lit with secrets... I let myself

go near the river but not

the railroad: this is my bargain.

Water boils in a kettle in the woods

and I can hear the train grow louder

but I also can’t, you know?

Then I’m shaving in front of an

unbreakable mirror while a nurse

watches over my shoulder.

Damn. What still grows in winter?

Lynda brought me basil I crushed

with my finger and thumb just to

smell the inside of a thing. So

I go to the river but not the rail-

road, think I’ll live another year.

The river rock dig into my shoulders

like a lover who knows I don’t want

power. I release every muscle against

the rock and I give it all my warmth.

Snow shakes

onto my chest quick as table salt.

Branches above me full of pine needle

whips: when the river rock is done

with me, I could belong to the evergreen.

Safety is a rock I throw into the river.

My body, ready. Don’t even think

a train run through this town anymore.

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# **Burning the Old Year**

Letters swallow themselves in seconds.

Notes friends tied to the doorknob,

transparent scarlet paper,

sizzle like moth wings,

marry the air.

So much of any year is flammable,

lists of vegetables, partial poems.

Orange swirling flame of days,

so little is a stone.

Where there was something and suddenly isn’t,

an absence shouts, celebrates, leaves a space.

I begin again with the smallest numbers.

Quick dance, shuffle of losses and leaves,

only the things I didn’t do

crackle after the blazing dies.

Naomi Shihab Nye, “Burning the Old Year” from *Words Under the Words: Selected Poems.*

## Abecedarian Requiring Further Examination of Anglikan Seraphym Subjugation of a Wild Indian Rezervation

By [Natalie Diaz](http://www.poetryoutloud.org/poems-and-performance/poets/detail/natalie-diaz)

Angels don’t come to the reservation.  
Bats, maybe, or owls, boxy mottled things.  
Coyotes, too. They all mean the same thing—  
death. And death  
eats angels, I guess, because I haven’t seen an angel  
fly through this valley ever.  
Gabriel? Never heard of him. Know a guy named Gabe though—  
he came through here one powwow and stayed, typical  
Indian. Sure he had wings,  
jailbird that he was. He flies around in stolen cars. Wherever he stops,  
kids grow like gourds from women’s bellies.  
Like I said, no Indian I’ve ever heard of has ever been or seen an angel.  
Maybe in a Christmas pageant or something—  
Nazarene church holds one every December,  
organized by Pastor John’s wife. It’s no wonder  
Pastor John’s son is the angel—everyone knows angels are white.  
Quit bothering with angels, I say. They’re no good for Indians.  
Remember what happened last time  
some white god came floating across the ocean?  
Truth is, there may be angels, but if there are angels  
up there, living on clouds or sitting on thrones across the sea wearing  
velvet robes and golden rings, drinking whiskey from silver cups,  
we’re better off if they stay rich and fat and ugly and  
’xactly where they are—in their own distant heavens.  
You better hope you never see angels on the rez. If you do, they’ll be marching you off to  
Zion or Oklahoma, or some other hell they’ve mapped out for us.

Natalie Diaz, “Abecedarian Requiring Further Examination of Anglikan Seraphym Subjugation of a Wild Indian Rezervation” from When My Brother Was an Aztec. Copyright © 2012

## Acquainted with the Night

By [Robert Frost](http://www.poetryoutloud.org/poems-and-performance/poets/detail/robert-frost)

I have been one acquainted with the night.  
I have walked out in rain—and back in rain.  
I have outwalked the furthest city light.  
  
I have looked down the saddest city lane.  
I have passed by the watchman on his beat  
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.  
  
I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet  
When far away an interrupted cry  
Came over houses from another street,  
  
But not to call me back or say good-bye;  
And further still at an unearthly height,  
One luminary clock against the sky  
  
Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.   
I have been one acquainted with the night.

Robert Frost, "Acquainted with the Night" from The Poetry of Robert Frost, edited by Edward Connery Lathem. Copyright © 1964

## Passing

By [Toi Derricotte](http://www.poetryoutloud.org/poems-and-performance/poets/detail/toi-derricotte)

A professor invites me to his “Black Lit” class; they’re  
reading Larson’s Passing. One of the black  
students says, “Sometimes light-skinned blacks  
think they can fool other blacks,  
but I can always tell,” looking  
right through me.  
After I tell them I am black,  
I ask the class, “Was I passing  
when I was just sitting here,  
before I told you?” A white woman  
shakes her head desperately, as if  
I had deliberately deceived her.  
She keeps examining my face,  
then turning away  
as if she hopes I’ll disappear. Why presume  
“passing” is based on what I leave out  
and not what she fills in?  
In one scene in the book, in a restaurant,  
she’s “passing,”  
though no one checked her at the door—  
“Hey, you black?”  
My father, who looked white,  
told me this story: every year  
when he’d go to get his driver’s license,  
the man at the window filling  
out the form would ask,  
“White or black?” pencil poised, without looking up.  
My father wouldn’t pass, but he might  
use silence to trap a devil.  
When he didn’t speak, the man  
would look up at my father’s face.  
“What did he write?”  
my father quizzed me.

“Passing” is from Tender, by Toi Derricotte, © 1997

## Prayer

By [Jorie Graham](http://www.poetryoutloud.org/poems-and-performance/poets/detail/jorie-graham)

Over a dock railing, I watch the minnows, thousands, swirl     
themselves, each a minuscule muscle, but also, without the     
way to create current, making of their unison (turning, re-  
                                                                      infolding,  
entering and exiting their own unison in unison) making of themselves a     
visual current, one that cannot freight or sway by     
minutest fractions the water’s downdrafts and upswirls, the     
dockside cycles of finally-arriving boat-wakes, there where     
they hit deeper resistance, water that seems to burst into     
itself (it has those layers), a real current though mostly     
invisible sending into the visible (minnows) arrowing  
                                    motion that forces change—  
this is freedom. This is the force of faith. Nobody gets     
what they want. Never again are you the same. The longing  
is to be pure. What you get is to be changed. More and more by  
each glistening minute, through which infinity threads itself,     
also oblivion, of course, the aftershocks of something     
at sea. Here, hands full of sand, letting it sift through     
in the wind, I look in and say take this, this is     
what I have saved, take this, hurry. And if I listen     
now? Listen, I was not saying anything. It was only     
something I did. I could not choose words. I am free to go.     
I cannot of course come back. Not to this. Never.     
It is a ghost posed on my lips. Here: never.

Notes:

PRAYER (“minnows”) was written as a turn-of-the-millennium poem for the New York Times Op-Ed page, and was originally dated 12.31.00

Jorie Graham, “Prayer” from Never. Copyright © 2002 by Jorie Graham