

## MY PASS-ALONG POEM

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# Pass-Along Poems

SAMPLES OF  
 WORK FROM  
 THE TWELVE  
 DEBUT POETS  
 FEATURED IN  
 POETS & WRITERS  
 MAGAZINE'S  
 "FIRST AND  
 FOREMOST"

# Pass-Along Poems

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**A PRAYER FOR MY DAUGHTER, WHO DOES NOT EXIST**

By Dan Albergotti

Bless you, my hollow child, lying under nothing tonight  
in one of those other worlds. Let there be wind, for there is  
no wind. Let me hear it and fear nothing for you.

Bless your yawning, unreal mouth, your even breath.  
When you wake, will your first word be *Daddy*  
or *God*? Let it be *God*, let there be that.

Bless your tiny fingers playing on my face, in my hair,  
under my skull. Let there be your soft touch, for there is  
no touch. And let there be the light crescent moons of you  
nails.

Bless everything you will do and all your dreams.  
Dream of your father. Dream of your god. Let there be  
years and years and years, for there is no future.

And since between each world there is nothing,  
let there be a prayer. Let me bless your too-pale skin,  
your too-auburn hair, your beautiful impossibility.

Spread the word about debut poets and their work with this *Pass-Along Poems* chapbook. We've compiled poems from each of the twelve poets featured in our fourth annual roundup, "First and Foremost," in the January/February 2009 issue of *Poets & Writers Magazine*. Use the instructions posted on our Web site ([www.pw.org/content/diy\\_how\\_make\\_saddlestitched\\_chapbook](http://www.pw.org/content/diy_how_make_saddlestitched_chapbook)) to print, assemble, and bind several of your own handcrafted, saddle-stitched editions. Remember to use a heavy stationery for the interior pages and a card stock for the covers. For an extra touch, forgo the stapler and use needle and thread instead. Add your recommendations for first-time poets on the back pages, and while you're at it, paste in your own polished, unpublished work or that of others you admire.

MY PASS-ALONG POEM

MY PASS-ALONG POEM

Light, light, light to white, white, white. Nothing  
 magic is this dab. Just read the box correctly. Apply  
 it day and night, night and day until primordialness  
 recedes, until the crust of deep taint seeps into the  
 pore and sink bowl, until she rinsed fair and lovely,  
 gossamer, an angel wing, until the loud, choir  
 singing, the mocking blisters and cheekbones, until  
 the green veins bulging from a deep pink forehead,  
 disappear. Pain, she tells herself, the shortness of  
 breath, the nausea, the black lumps, only temporary.

Perfectly grounded suspicion she is fearfully,  
 wonderfully made, is instead a matter of burnt  
 skinned; fat skulled; nose line flared into caverns;  
 a wiggling amoeba, evolution poisoned. Herodotus  
 said there were creatures living on the continent of  
 her past, wool-haired, feral with skin the color of  
 soot, creatures to be caged, rooted out the gene pool,  
 their brains removed by a hook through the nose,  
 cool, white cream she holds in her hands.

—The Venus Hottentot by Elizabeth Alexander  
*Science, science, science. Everything is beautiful.*

**WHITENING**  
 By Karen S. Williams

**MY DEBUT POETS RECOMMENDATIONS**

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I attribute  
 it to you and your punk  
 rock garden, the collections  
 of stingers and pollen  
 from the gully arms  
 of azaleas like so many patches  
 on dirty hoodies. Your lips  
 are steel-toed rusted roof.  
 The rift between you  
 and them pre-Sid and slang  
 on the hooved motorcycle  
 you straddled like a loaded  
 word was an articulate eff  
 off Mr. Parliament.  
 Oh Sylvie,  
 we didn't need that music then.

**PUNK ROCK PLATH**  
 By Michael Cirelli

**AN EFFORT TO BE AGREEABLE**

By Todd Boss

In the public library I'm  
 sitting as usual beneath  
 the giant finned papier-  
 mache sculptures of maple  
 seeds when a little boy not  
 two years old bumbles in  
 and joys out: "Fish!" and  
 dances to point at them  
 while his mother, in his  
 wake, apparently (maybe  
 because of me) chagrined  
 by his outburst, seems to  
 worry whether her duty  
 is to correct him or just  
 let him give to helicopters  
 whatever names he will. In  
 an effort to be agreeable, I  
 say "Absolutely. Fish." and  
 smile and nod at them, but  
 then I realize, as she swings  
 him up and away in one  
 urgent motion, that I'm  
 the mad foreigner, and I

The woman with the microphone sings to hurt you,  
 To see you shake your head. The mic may as well  
 Be a leather belt. You drive to the center of town  
 To be whipped by a woman's voice. You can't tell  
 The difference between a leather belt and a lover's  
 Tongue. A lover's tongue might call you *bitch*,  
 A term of endearment where you come from, a kind  
 Of compliment preceded by the word *sing*  
 In certain nightclub. A lush little tongue  
 You have: you can yell, *Sing bitch*, and, *I love you*,  
 With a shot of Patron at the end of each phrase  
 From the same barstool every Saturday night but you can't  
 Remember your father's leather belt without shaking  
 Your head. That's what satisfies her, the woman  
 With the microphone. She does not mean to entertain  
 You, and neither do I. Speak to me in a lover's tongue—  
 Call me your bitch, and I'll sing the whole night long.

By Jericho Brown  
**TRACK 1: LUSH LIFE**

remember the world  
 has as many languages as  
 a forest has pages  
 or the ocean  
 wings.

Perfectly grounded in rule and intuition, sure that  
 this time there *is* guaratee, a becoming fearfully  
 and wonderfully made, no more sucker, destroyer,  
 curse of Cain, a Hottentot Apron excised and stored,  
 but woman, desire, Prometheus fouled, fouled by a  
 cool, ill cream, cream so hot the devil couldn't take  
 it, his wildfire skin rubbed, eaten away, the folly of  
 his roots sore and exposed.

## THE BROWN BOY, THE WHITE MAN, AND THE SNOW

By Ronaldo V. Wilson

The brown boy, looking out into the snow, did not think of his own depression. He only thought of the white man's as he washed away the leftover layers of rice that had soaked in the water and oil from the evening's Garlic Chicken and Pad Thai. As he finished his dishes, the brown boy's interpretation of the white man's sadness in winter was fueled by his focus on the bluebird that bounced on the snow outside his window, flitting around for food on the covered trash cans.

Instead of thinking something like, *What a beautiful bird*, the brown boy remembered what the white man said once, about birds just before he was about to eat a handful of newly fallen snow: *Birds shit on that—you'd better not eat it.*

Some of what he said was to spare the brown boy, but most of it was his hate for the way the snow froze the air and sucked the life out of the crisp limbs that fought to hold their shape in winter. It was the weight of the grey light around the electrical cylinders against the opaque sky. It was the eternal snow, itself, its fat mutations, chunks that sat, latched to everything.

It's a light gesture to meet for coffee, a big comfort  
 when the will aches in the wake of fall for the last lover,  
 and the mind ruminates over the eve of the breakup,  
 the eaves of wisteria trailing down the wet white wall,  
 an abandoned dove at a cold nest, dandelion globes,  
 trail globes blown apart without a chance for a late spring  
 wish,  
 flood waters rising, as if the weather knows, wind knows each  
 broken window of the house, the aching will breaking free,  
 involuntarily, of wrought embellishments, the mind's  
 missing evening logic, the iron splinters festering:  
 The question of how to remove them, like the lover's last  
 words, incubation in the air with the ears that felt them  
 wrest inside the canals, as small daggers, scraping the wax,  
 filling the insides with flood waters—*this absence, this lack.*

SONNET  
 By Claire Kagayama-Ramakrishnan

## IMPATIENT

By Sally Van Doren

I want it to come  
 right away, like it  
 did last night, when  
 I didn't know what  
 I needed, when I  
 thought I was sick,  
 when I was fed up with  
 how much time it took  
 for salt to turn to water.

I will not name it  
 here, but if you part  
 your lips, I will relieve  
 you of your share  
 of our burden.

some genius, for instance:  
*winter has too many pockets or  
 it didn't take long for the skywriter to say I'm sorry.*  
 And you may still have a problem  
 with endings, which may have something to do  
 with ambition—or Lorne Michaels,  
 how he's not afraid to drop a cow  
 on the stage to end the scene.

No one wanted you  
 to prove your metaphors.

But you did, with leather skin  
 and eyes like spikes you left us,

a gallop into your myth  
 that set like Jello each night.

This is for teaching us how  
 to chug hot air with no flinch.

This is for distortion made sweet.

You eat with your fingers  
when appropriate. You are a native  
with an immigrant mind.  
No one mows the lawn like you do.  
The blue jays sing from your railing.  
You drink your coffee black, like a man.  
Why are your eyeglasses always smudged?  
Because your sense of smell is so strong,  
like your neighbor's dog, Rodney,  
the Tibetan wolfhound—  
the only one in Delaware, and such a smart dog,  
so quiet but playful, not a jumper, very curious—  
yes, a genius of a dog lives next to you,  
Frank Giampietro.  
When you work, people around you work harder.  
When you're on the set with DeNiro,  
DeNiro works harder.  
You are in demand. You have a ministry.  
You console the living, you honor the dead.  
Your headaches are the price you pay.  
You speak in cliché, but only when spoken to.  
When you are sixty, if you try hard enough,  
but not too hard, you will write beautiful—no,  
accurate, poems. Some lines will be mediocre,

**FRANK GIAMPIETRO, POET**  
By Frank Giampietro

## HISTORY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

By Brian Culhane

Not as Braudel did it, the hegemonies  
Of trade and the grand sweep. Nor yet  
As those three-walled frescoes studded  
With the sweat of innumerable angels.  
I mean the gravity of feeling  
Whose small wave without acclaim scatters  
Redolent sand. Or a cheap hotel lobby:  
Widow and widower talking beside a pillar  
Of no particular importance  
But that their marvelous lives lend.  
Luxury bereft of years' weight, no  
Chiseled imprimatur, marble freed  
From the centurion's implacable shadow.

So, the day's gauntlet thrown, stand  
On this Tuscan hill and watch as noon  
Ripples the flax of distant homes.  
In ahistorical sunlight we murmur,  
Repeating the ever-to-be-repeated.  
Pull your dress off and find the wind.

I could write a letter here, a litany of my city's history so that it  
all collides, runs up against itself, and I could say that this shows  
all the forces that have run up against each other and themselves  
over all these years to make this city what it is today with all its  
atendant problems (broken streetlights, failing schools, crazy  
Larry pushing his shopping cart down the left turn lane of  
Woodward Ave., come here, he says, and me all belligerent,  
no, you come here, and he does to show me a picture of a baby  
girl—can he have a dollar—who may or may not be his). What  
takes precedence? What do we view together and in isolation?  
City, I could write about you until the end of time and it would  
not make me able to return to you. I know it's been said it's  
time to decide whether you are going to be the problem or you  
are going to be the solution, and my first thought is that I don't  
know which I am though I suspect that the answer is both.

**THE STRAITS**  
By Kristin Palm

## EASY

By Khadijah Queen

Answer your own questions.

Think of how he encompasses you,  
The small moon he has made

Of your mind. To say nothing of

The body, attenuated  
Fastenings that started it all,

The temptation to tease, to flank,  
Feign capture.