

The Lyric, The Narrative, Free Verse and Prose Poetry

San Diego Poetry of Resilience

by Ron Salisbury

Resilience. Which is the ability to recover quickly from a challenge.

Most types and forms of poetry have an ancient history and the lyric and the narrative are no different.

Aristotle distinguished three generic categories of poetry: lyric, drama and epic.

The epic poem was the voice for the entire tribe, its myths, problems and even history.

The dramatic monologue was a persona voice

The lyric was a solitary voice speaking or singing on his or her own behalf.

This was the introduction of the “I” in poetry.

Early lyric poetry was always set to music, in the Renaissance, the music was dropped and the words remained.

And almost all poetry today is a form of the lyric. And poetry today is usually all about conflict, vague setting, character is usually only the absent speaker in the poem and plot is a hindrance.

The lyric poem is short, hardly ever more than sixty lines, shorter, supposed to be musical, does not tell a story which portrays characters and action, usually in first person and there is always one specific mood or emotion being expressed.

The textbook division between lyric, dramatic monologue and epic is helpful but flawed; the genres do not separate out with such distinction.

Narrative poetry is probably our oldest form of poetry. It has its roots in the oral tradition of ancient cultures long before there was paper to write on or ink to write with.

There are three primary forms of narrative poems—epics, ballads and straightforward narratives. They differ in length and style but all share fundamental elements and use a narrator to tell the story.

Epics usually have a larger than life hero as the central character and emphasizes moral lessons, customs and traditions.

The Ballad is a narrative poem meant to be sung.

Straightforward narratives are what are mostly written in the modern and contemporary world, rhyme and metrical considerations hardly emphasized.

But all forms contain these narrative elements: character, setting, conflict, plot

There is a beginning, middle and end. Sometimes there is only one character, setting may be implied rather than obvious, conflict may be internal rather than external, plot is how the narrative points are arranged to make the story understandable to the reader or listener.

Here are a few questions to ask of any narrative poem:

Who are the characters and what are they doing, or what is happening?

Why are these events happening?

How are the characters affected by the action or events?

What can be learned from the poem?

Although narrative poetry is one of the oldest forms of literature, it is not prevalent in the world of poetry as it is practiced today.

The narrative element (conflict, plot, setting, character, beginning-middle-end) in any length poem really took a beating in the late 1990s, especially in the top MFA Creative Writing programs.

A narrative, by definition, is clear in its delivery, you generally know the time, place, speakers and problems.

Another way to sort out today's poems between a narrative direction and a lyric direction is to look for the source of image or emotion.

Lyrics always look to the inside, the psyche of the speaker, for the source of the mood or emotion. Often the outside world is never mentioned. The narrative usually begins with images of the outside world to explain the inside mood or emotion of the speaker.

The lyric poem, "Drive," by Deborah Allbritain.

Drive

by Deborah Allbritain

It's okay if what
surrounds you

lacks plush, bitters
about unpolished
and uneven because all

you are up against
now is mainstream, not a leveling

of extremes, but the
bristle of a thing heading

north up the trachea
of California,
a straight shot

which is how you travel if
there is closure
or seizure.

You become
angora, lean out
the window,

steer hard
away as though
you were a sentence

of oncoming speed.
Leave in its wake

your shed
back and shoulders.

Wipe your brow.
Hold to the median,

leave poised
on the brink
of open.

This poem begins on the emotional inside of the narrator and never really moves outside. A typical lyric poem.

Our world has been defined by generally the five senses, sound, sight, smell, taste, touch. And the most common of the senses is sight. And our language is organized around these senses, which are all located outside the body. When we try to describe the emotional life of a self, the interior life of a self, we have no specific words. No language for the inside.

A contemporary narrative poem, *Poker Night in Tornado Alley*, by Stephen Dunn.

Poker Night In Tornado Alley
by Stephen Dunn

Two blasts of the siren was a warning,
a maybe.
Three—the real thing had been sighted.

But at my friend Al's farmhouse, as the dark
clouds gathered,
the game was so good we couldn't stop playing.

It was Minnesota, the prairie, and the warnings
seemed to add something
to our low stakes, and the hard lives of men

who, earlier, had dismounted Caterpillars,
and John Deeres,
left the flat, loamy fields behind them.

I was the bad influence from New York,
raiser of the ante,
introducer of Hold 'Em. It was my fault,

Al's wife said later, that her husband was bluffing
when he should have been running.
Nor could she resist pointing out it was stud

we were playing, seven card, when that siren
blasted thrice
and we finally hurried to our obedient cars.

The wisdom was go north, and north we went,
suddenly silent, the radio telling us
the approximate drift of that swirling thing

we'd gambled with. When it seemed safe
we turned back to find
Al's barn was gone, hardly a trace of it,

but his house was intact, and all the chips
in their sweet, neat stacks.
I called my wife to tell her everything,

or, as husbands do, some of everything.
Al's opening the beer, I said,
I'm all right, and, no, I'll still be home late.

Free verse, which most of us write, is considered an open form of poetry, as opposed to poetry written in structure or form, think of sonnets and villanelles.

Free Verse tends to follow natural speech patterns and rhythms. However, this not does imply that free verse has no guiding principles.

Free verse antecedents:

King James Bible:

Job 38:12-13

Have you ever given orders to the
morning,
or shown the dawn its place,
that it might take the earth by the
edges
and shake the wicked out of it?

Job 38:36-38

Who endowed the heart with wisdom
or gave understanding to the mind?
Who has the wisdom to count the
clouds?
Who can tip over the water jars of
the heavens
when the dust becomes hard
and the clods of earth stick together?

Job 39: 5-8

Who let the wild donkeys go free?
Who untied his ropes?
I gave him the wasteland as his home
the salt flats as his habitat.

He laughs at the commotion in the
town;
he does not hear a driver's shout.
He ranges the hills for his pasture
and searches for any green thing.

Walt Whitman from "Leaves of Grass" Lines 1324-1335 (Song of Myself)

The last scud of day holds back for me,
It flings my likeness after the rest and true as any on the shadowed worlds,
It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk.

I depart as air...I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
I effuse my flesh in eddies and drift it in lacy jags.

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
If you want me again look for me under your bootsoles.

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
And filter and fibre your blood.

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
Missing me one place search another,
I stop some where waiting for you.

Free verse caught fire during America's two great forays into expressionist poetry: the Transcendentalist movement of mid-19th century and then the beatnik poetry of the 1950s.

Allen Ginsberg from "A Supermarket in California"

I saw you, Walt Whitman, childless, lonely old grubber, poking among the meats in the refrigerator and eyeing the grocery boys.

I heard you asking questions of each: Who killed the pork chops? What price bananas? Are you my Angel?
I wandered in and out of the brilliant stacks of cans following you, and followed in my imagination by the store detective.

We strode down the open corridors together in our solitary fancy tasting artichokes, possessing every frozen delicacy, and never passing the cashier.

Where are we going, Walt Whitman? The doors close in a hour. Which way does your beard point tonight?

Free verse lines do not have specific syllable counts or rhyming patterns; stanzas are not bound by standard line counts. The movement of free verse is more reliant on natural speech rhythms than on imposed patterns.

Yet as T.S. Eliot warned, "No verse is free for the man who wants to do a good job."

Behind free verse is a belief that poetry should be a representation of the lived experience. This blending of the daily living and writing about the daily living, the living and the writing, was supposed to be kept separate in the past.

Free verse disregards this distance between life and art, between the poem and the poet.

I prefer to think of free verse in the same way that Frank O'Hara, the famous poet from the New York School of poets, said describing Free Verse: "You just go on your nerve. If someone's chasing you down the street with a knife you just run, you don't turn around and shout, 'Give it up! I was a track star for Mineola Prep.'"

Free verse poem, from "Strip Poker," David Kirby

from "Strip Poker"

I'm giving blood and looking at a magazine photo
of bosomy Ava Gardner next to that squirt Sinatra
and remember saying, "Want to play strip poker?"
to my mom when I was eight because I thought it was a game,
not a way to get naked, and was ready to put on
lots of layers that hot July evening—
p.j.s, raincoat, my patrol boy's belt
with the badge I was so proud of—and figuring
my mom would do the same with her clothes:

the cotton dresses she taught fifth grade in
over the jeans and boots she wore for gardening
and, on top of everything, the long coat she wore
when she went out with my dad on cool nights
and the ratty mink stole her rich sister had given her.
My dad looked up from his newspaper, looked down again.
My mother looked up from her book, looked down again,
looked up again, said, "No, thank you, darling,"
which is how it was in our house

no yelling, no explanation, even,
just the assumption that you were a smart kid,
you could figure things out on your own,...

Not all free verse looks or sounds like this. In fact, this poem and its shape represent a kind of outlier of much of today's free verse poets.

Remember; proceed at your own peril.

In **Prose Poetry**, the Poetic unit of the "Line" is replaced by the unit of the sentence.

On the page it can look like a paragraph or fragmented short story, but it acts like a poem.

Only the line ends have been removed, all the other poetic devices utilized in good free verse is required: compression of language, metaphor, music,

Where did this begin?

Aloysius Bertrand published a strange little book of prose poems called *Gaspard de la nuit* (Gaspard of the Night) in 1842. But it was Baudelaire, in France, who launched the genre, giving it a home and a name.

There was a long tradition of poetry in prose form in the English language tradition: the King James Bible, the writings of Plato-translated into English. And don't forget the best prose poet of the age, Shakespeare

Maxine Chernoff: "there is a shorter distance from the unconscious to the Prose Poem than from the unconscious to most poems in verse."

Russell Edson: "Prose poetry is poetry freed from the definition of poetry and a prose free of the necessities of fiction."

Charles Simic: (the prose Poem) "is someone chasing an imaginary fly in a dark room.....a burst of language following a collision with a large piece of furniture."

Victor Olivares: "Someone told me that the images in line poems are comparable to walking down a stairwell, whereas the images in a prose poem are like walking in a field of tall grass and stepping into gopher holes every once in a while."

The Canoeing

by Russell Edson

We went upstairs in a canoe. I kept catching my paddle in the banisters.

We met several salmon passing us, flipping step by step, no doubt to find the remembered bedroom. And they were like the slippered feet of someone falling down the stairs, played backward as in a movie.

And then we were passing over the downstairs closet under the stairs, and could feel the weight of dark overcoats and galoshes in a cave of umbrellas and fedoras; water dripping there, deep in the earth, like an endless meditation . . .

. . . Finally the quiet water of the upstairs hall. We dip our paddles with gentle care not to injure the quiet dark, and seem to glide for days by family bedrooms under a stillness of trees . . .

Corkscrew

by Louis Jenkins

The woman next door comes over to return a corkscrew. "Thanks for letting us use this. I'm sorry you couldn't make it to the party." I don't remember being invited to a party. I just stand at the door with the thing in my hand as she goes. I look at it dumbly and don't recognize it. This isn't my corkscrew. Well, I don't really own this corkscrew or anything else, for that matter. That has become more apparent to me as time goes by. This is just another thing that came to my door of its own volition, out of some instinctual urge perhaps, the way bees swarm into a tree, piling up, forming what seems to be a single living shape; or came by accident, the way the wind makes a dust devil out of dirt and straw, whatever is at hand. It careens across the field, picks up a newspaper, picks up a college degree, picks up a driver's license.... "Margaret, I'd like you to meet Louis. He's not the guy I was telling you about." "Really? Who are you then?"

Carolyn Forché

"The Colonel"

The Country Between Us

The first twenty or thirty syllables of a prose poem set up, as do the opening syllables of a lined poem, certain expectations felt in the nervous system of the reader. The nature of a prose poem seems to force the principle of “idea” to the forefront.

A Story About The Body

by Robert Hass

The young composer, working that summer at an artist’s colony, had watched her for a week. She was Japanese, a painter, almost sixty, and he thought he was in love with her. He loved her work, and her work was like the way she moved her body, used her hands, looked at him directly when she made amused and considered answers to his questions. One night, walking back from a concert, they came to her door and she turned to him and said, “I think you would like to have me. I would like that too, but I must tell you that I have had a double mastectomy,” and when he didn’t understand, “I’ve lost both my breasts.” The radiance that he had carried around in his belly and chest cavity—like music—withered very quickly, and he made himself look at her when he said, “I’m sorry. I don’t think I could.” He walked back to his own cabin through the pines, and in the morning he found a small blue bowl on the porch outside his door. It looked to be full of rose petals, but he found when he picked it up that the rose petals were on top; the rest of the bowl—she must have swept them from the corners of her studio—was full of dead bees.

Some of the attraction of the prose poem is its seeming lack of rules. But what happens to the prose poem when you enforce a form, like in a sonnet or villanelle or pantoum which have prescribed forms.

The poet David Kepplinger has done something unique to the prose poem format. He set up the format of exactly nine lines, right and left justified as the exact requirement of a prose poem.

The Red Wheelbarrow

by Ron Salisbury

My perfect barn has a roof like the Ark’s bottom, the heavy snows sluff off, built north/south to cut the winds in two, chickens in the yard and wheelbarrows you can depend upon for wheeling dung to the heap. Outside is a fuel pump for the pickups, tractors and reapers. There’s a Yale padlock on the pump. The only key is on the dog’s collar and he is not especially friendly, doesn’t like to be chased. One of us has to tempt him with a waffle or new red shoes while the other grabs the key and runs.

UP

by Ron Salisbury

In his apartment, he has screwed hooks in the walls, strung cables from side to side in order to move from room to room without touching the floor. The stove is hung from the ceiling, likewise the bed, shoe rack, bookshelves, TV and easy chair. He crouches on a mesh floor in the shower, the toilet is located at the top of a tall corrugated culvert pipe. He lays across the network of cables, reaches down and pets the dog who lives on the floor. The floor is the other world, his is up here.

The history of both the Lyric and the Narrative poem is millennia old. But recently, since really about 1990, the narrative poem has fallen out of favor by younger poets and by all poets who want to be topical with what is expected by of poetry today. But the structure of the narrative, that is a spine of the poem that leads the reader from presentation, development and some type of conclusion, must be indicated in order for the poem to gain comprehension for the reader no matter if it is strictly a lyric poem of the interior emotions and experiences or if it is some kind of narrative with characters and some story line. Conversely, the strict narrative poem that doesn't include an emotional reflection of the speaker of the poem's life, will also generally be considered a failure or at least uninteresting to most poetry readers today. Poetry today is strongly influenced by the Lyric structure. And free verse, which is the form that almost all poets write in today, is also millennia old. The youngster in poetic style today is the prose poem, which has gained tremendous acceptance today.

The following is a list of the poems and poets that I included in this presentation this month. Support living poets. Look these poems and poets up on the Internet. Find the journals they're published in, find their books. Buy their books and enjoy. This is how we support poets today.

Deborah Allbritain, "Drive"

Stephen Dunn, "Poker Night In Tornado Alley" *Everything else in the World*

King James Bible: Job 38:12-13, Job 38:36-38, Job 39: 5-8

Walt Whitman from "Song of Myself," *Leaves of Grass*

Allen Ginsberg from "A Supermarket in California"

David Kirby from "Strip Poker," *The House on Boulevard St.*

Russell Edson, "The Canoeing," *The Intuitive*

Louis Jenkins, "Corkscrew," *Nice Fish*

Carolyn Forché, "The Colonel," *The Country Between Us*

Robert Hass, "A Story about The Body," *Human Wishes: Poems by Robert Hass*

Here is your prompt for the month. It's about a year in your life, maybe last year, maybe not. Send me your poems!

...And What a Year It Was

1969

by Tony Gloeggler

My brother enlisted
in the winter. I pitched
for the sixth-grade Indians
and coach said
I was almost as good
as Johnny. My mother
fingered rosary beads,
watched Cronkite say
and that's the way it is.
I smoked my first
and last cigarette. My father
kept his promise,
washed Johnny's Mustang
every weekend. Brenda Whitson
taught me how to French kiss
in her basement. Sundays
we went to ten o'clock Mass,
dipped hands in holy water,
genuflected, walked down
the aisle and received
Communion. Cleon Jones
got down on one knee, caught
the last out and the Mets
won the World Series.
Two white-gloved Marines
rang the bell, stood
on our stoop. My father
watched their car
pull away, then locked
the wooden door. I went
to our room, climbed
into the top bunk,
pounded a hard ball
into his pillow. My mother
found her Bible, took
out my brother's letters,
put them in the pocket
of her blue robe. My father
started Johnny's car,
revved the engine
until every tool
hanging in the garage
shook.

1943

by Ron Salisbury

At the Eastern Star Fall Formal
some jerk kicked my mother's chair.
A heap of yellow crinolines, legs out
and everyone rushing to help.
Nine hours later I was born, yelling,
pissing, and nothing much has changed
for me since. In January, before
that October, it's always cold in Maine,
in their little two storey, World War Two
raging outside. Father's a traveling salesman,
bad back, bad kidneys and mother's raising
my sister, the meager meal always hot at six.
Was there much hope in Orrington, Maine?
In the world that night? Would there ever
be enough meat and sugar again?
I like to think it was hope, not dread
or the cold that pulled them together
after doing the dishes, dialing off the radio.
It would help to know I came from hope
that night, not dread.

Nineteen Thirty-Eight

by Charles Simic

That was the year the Nazis marched into Vienna,
Superman made his debut in Action Comics,
Stalin was killing off his fellow revolutionaries,
The first Dairy Queen opened in Kankakee, Ill.,
As I lay in my crib peeing in my diapers.

"You must have been a beautiful baby," Bing
Crosby sang.

A pilot the newspapers called Wrong Way Corrigan
Took off from New York heading for California
And landed instead in Ireland, as I watched my mother
Take a breast out of her blue robe and come closer.

There was a hurricane that September causing a
movie theater
At Westhampton Beach to be lifted out to sea.
People worried the world was about to end.
A fish believed to have been extinct for seventy million
years
Came up in a fishing net off the coast of South Africa.

I lay in my crib as the days got shorter and colder,
And the first heavy snow fell in the night.

Making everything very quiet in my room.
I believe I heard myself cry for a long, long time.

San Anselmo 1942

by Michael Cavanagh

I spent most of that year in my mother's womb.
We lived under oak trees too fragile and scatter-brained
To win the approval of Hitler or Tojo,
Or give protection from their bombers.
At blackout time,
My father roamed the neighborhood
Enforcing the dousing of lights,
Cheering on the Russians from afar,
And inviting neighbors back to the house for drinks.
In defiance they partied on the dark porch,
Even when the moon was full-bellied and bellicose
And the California sky blazed dangerously with stars.
I heard it all
From where I was hidden away
And I waited, impatiently to be born.

Year of The Dog

by Jackleen Holton

1994 called.
At first I didn't know why,
though I was aware
that the past sometimes returned
to claim things like old hairstyles,
and clothes. But I didn't have
a mullet, or a granny dress I still wore
with combat boots. So what else could it be
but the turquoise low-rider Honda
I bought fifteen years ago,
not quite new, but shining then,
to a 27-year old with her first half-
decent pay check? Spoiler, fog lights, wide
steel rims. 1994 called,
just to see if I was home. I wasn't.
It had been trailing me for weeks.
I didn't know it when I walked away
that night, though I turned, on impulse,
to look back at that final parking place. 1994 came
like two thugs from a chop shop.

In 1994

we had not yet found each other, my Honda
and I, the year I worked at TGI Fridays, and another
girl

kissed the guy I thought was my boyfriend,
the same year a caveman named Gilooly
wielded a club, struck down a figure skater,
and the Northridge earthquake rattled
the San Fernando valley. It was a year
of sadness. Justin Bieber was born
and Jackie Onassis died. 1994, lunar year
of the dog. A Japanese car
was assembled in a factory
in Canada. And after being fired
from the latest in a string of
waitressing jobs, like a loser, I moved
back in with my mom.
I wondered if it would ever get any
better. It did, but not until
the year that I first saw it, perched
on a tilted ramp at the front
of the used car lot. We never know,
do we, when the last time
will be? When fate will steal in
like a repo man or a thief, the past
coming back to claim all
that we loved and blindly thought
we owned.

In The Year of the Snake,

by Ron Salisbury

my seventh decade slithers
through the dead leaf duff
toward me, lifts its wedged head
and squints rheumy eyes to see
how far to the next warm rock.

Blood cold serpent, wishing for
one more decade's sun, coil yourself
around the tan thighs of memory,
squeeze out that last wet drop.

"1969" Tony Gloggler, *Rattle*, May 28, 2014

"Nineteen Thirty-eight" Charles Simic, *Paris Review*,
issue 192, Spring 2010

"San Anselmo 1942" Michael Cavanagh, *Eclipse*, 2012

"Year of the Dog," Jackleen Holton-Hookway, *North
American Review*

Write a poem about a year in your life. Maybe it's this past year, or maybe one that was not like last year. It can be the year that you were conceived and/or born or another span of time that was important to you. Include the historical backdrop and at least one local detail. Perhaps include a song that was popular at that time. Pay attention to adjectives and adverbs as in "1969." Perhaps use repetition, jump around in time. Make sure to tell at least one lie. Extra points if you make it a specific year in the future.

Jackleen Holton's poems have been published in the anthologies The Giant Book of Poetry, California Fire & Water: A Climate Crisis Anthology, and Steve Kowit: This Unspeakably Marvelous Life. Honors include Bellingham Review's 49th Parallel Poetry Award. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Cimarron Review, Dogwood, Poet Lore, Rattle, RHINO Poetry, Salamander, and others.

The Poems of Summer/Jackleen Holton

Just as the Calendar Began to Say Summer

I went out of the schoolhouse fast
and through the garden to the woods,
and spent all summer forgetting what I'd been taught -

two times two, and diligence and so forth,
how to be modest, and useful and how to succeed and so forth,
machines and oil and plastic and money and so forth.

By fall I had healed somewhat, but was summoned back
to the chalky rooms and the desks to sit and remember

the way the river kept rolling it's pebbles,
the way the wild wren sang though they hadn't a penny in the bank,
the way the flowers were dressed in nothing but light.

--Mary Oliver

The Boys of Summer

They seem to be everywhere this summer,
though summer is noticed only by the calendar
in this city of perpetual sunshine (even when it's foggy).
Smooth young men in muscle shirts or tank tops,
their sculpted arms and shoulders filling my eyes.

I think I have never seen such beauty—the slope of neck
that flows into taut trapezium, descends to mound of deltoid,
the rise and taper of bicep, sometimes encircled by intricate
tattooed band; and under the shirts hugging their bodies,
outline of molded pectorals, solid, armor-plated.

These living Davids, brown or black, yellow or white, gay or straight,
I want to touch them, trace each cut and sculpt, read them
like Braille, remember them with my cupped palm,
trail them with my tongue.

Such bodies! I do not recall such bodies in the boys of my own days.
In the Northeast, where summer was the payoff for freezes and blizzards,
parkas and sweaters hid our bodies' secrets most of the year.
Only on the basketball court or at the lake, visible shoulders
and arms and chests I remember as gawky and stringy and pale—
too fearful of my own desire to look too long.
Now, when it is too late, I see them everywhere.

--Sylvia Levinson

“Just as the Calendar Began to Say Summer” from *Devotions*. “The Boys of Summer” from *Spoon* (also published in *Serving House Journal*). “Blackberry Picking” from *Opened Ground: Selected poems 1966-1996*. “Solstice” from Poem-A-Day by the Academy of American Poets.

Blackberry Picking

for Philip Hobsbaum

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.

--Seamus Haney

Solstice

How again today our patron star
whose ancient vista is the long view
turns its wide brightness now and here:
Below, we loll outdoors, sing & make fire.
We build no henge
but after our swim, linger
by the pond. Dapples flicker
pine trunks by the water.
Buzz & hum & wing & song combine.
Light builds a monument to its passing.
Frogs content themselves in bullish chirps,
hoopskirt blossoms
on thimbleberries fall, peeper toads
hop, lazy —
Apex. The throaty world sings *ripen*.
Our grove slips past the sun's long kiss.
We dress.
We head home in other starlight.
Our earthly time is sweetening from this.

--Tess Taylor

The summer solstice occurred on June 20. Write a poem about summer and/or the loosening of constraints, such as we are experiencing now as the restrictions imposed on us by the Covid-19 pandemic begin to lift. Here is my attempt.

On the Last Day of School

My daughter comes home crying
because she already misses
her first grade teacher, the generous
servant who ushered her

through this difficult year,
and I am struck with the knowing
that the world, for all of its wrong turns
and switchbacks, moves ever toward goodness.

I need only recall my own first grade teacher,
Mrs. Anderson, who sported a Matterhorn
hairdo, and a long, frosty
glare that could vaporize laughter.

She taught me the days
of the week, her voice sharpening
each syllable to a point.
I came to hate the word Monday

and the awful sound
of my name echoing in the dark,
awful cavern of her mouth.
My mother didn't care for her either.

One parent-teacher conference reduced
Mom to tears. Later she wondered
what had befallen Mr. Anderson.
Did he run off or did he drink

himself to death. My mind filled
with cold water, a sad man dipping
his glass into an icy lake
at the foot of a snow-covered mountain.

And this felt to me the correct answer.
I told some kids on the playground
my theory, and landed in the principal's
waiting room again. By this time I knew

about months and seasons, that school
was almost out. Mrs. Anderson
sat across from me, arms folded
as we waited on punishment.

I looked out the window and thought
about summer, the air conditioner
on full blast, my teeth clattering
hard against each other.