

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Matthew E. Henry: Two Poems

Matthew E. Henry · Friday, July 25th, 2025

when asked what poets should do in response

actually, I started an abecedarian almost immediately,
but stopped for feeling unoriginal. I mean, how many others
couldn't resist the banned word bank created by this god-
damned dumpster-fire of an administration? how many
elegies to equity were composed—lamenting a death,
flowers strewn across the casket? how many villanelles on
gender-based violence, heroic couplets on affirming care? but
haiku imaging hate speech as wilting chrysanthemums,
irises, or poppies will not water and sun the soil of social
justice. it's this folly of allyship that I fear. those who think
kenning alone can protect alphabet people—BIPOC and
LGBTQAI+. those who think a well written haibun will
make the Gulf of Mexico and Mount Denali great again.
no asshole decrying DEI initiatives will be swayed by an
ode to the effect of climate change on indigenous communities.
pantoums cannot assure diversity in hiring practices or
quell the bias quivering stone hearts which desire racism's
return to a Webster's definition they can more easily defend.
seriously, what pastoral sonnet are you thinking will strip
trauma from the eyes of transgender students attempting to
use the fucking bathroom, dribble or kick a nonbinary ball?
vulnerable populations are not steadied by a ballad in blank verse,
will not find intersectionality increased by the perfect sestina.
xenophobic bastards who think *privilege*, *prostitutes*, and
yes, *pronouns*, should be theirs alone need more than the perfect
zuihitsu or ghazal—something that speaks louder than words.

*

when asked to read a poem for the Black History Month assembly, again

this time I have to keep certain things in mind—need to find a balance.

knowing the pride of being Blackity Black Black scares the red into faces
clenching fists in their seats. knowing they need to see more than the METCO
struggle bus stories some of them are expecting. represent something other than
slavery, reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the white rage backlash to civil rights
seen in the 60s and 70s, the 80s and 90s, and right now, while still remembering
some of them think racism doesn't exist because we had a Black president once.

this time I should remind them who invented peanut butter, the gas mask,
the stop light, air conditioners, performed the first successful open-heart surgery,
was first to the North Pole, revolutionized blood transfusions, fire extinguishers,
helicopters, fountain pens, and cell phones. but how many of them will pay attention
to that partial list or bother to verify later?

this time I have to remember not to mention ms_____, a “nice white lady”
who wears her DEI support like a white durag on Juneteenth, desperately trying
to impress the Black women in the building, hoping the nearest Brown man
will think she's “one of the good ones” and invite her to bed or at least the cookout.

this time I have to make sure they celebrate not only Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks,
and Oprah, but the other “Hidden Figures” untaught in our curriculum: Sojourner Truth,
Madame C.J. Walker, Shiley Ann Jackson, Ida B Wells, Marie Van Brittan Brown.
this time I should see if they recognize names other than Crispus Attucks, Malcolm X,
and Martin Luther King Jr.—you know, Black men who weren't shot down in the street.

this time I should keep mr_____’s name out of my mouth, despite how often
he's made a paper mâché badge and proclaimed himself the “woke police,” defends
those anti “affordable housing” yard signs sporting a brick monstrosity with angry,
yellow eyes and a dark, “urban” vibe.

this time I might mention how we cut and bag and sell Blues and Soul and Jazz and
Funk and Rock and Roll and Reggaeton and Dancehall and R&B and HipHop and
Queen Bee winning a Grammy for the Best Country Album,
but some might call that bragging.

this time I should highlight entertainment that doesn't include us running with a ball
or from the cops. see if they recognize Douglas, Du Bois, Butler, Walker, Wright,
bell hooks, Brooks, Baldwin, Wilkerson, Ellison, Huston, Hansberry, Adichie,
Kendi, Toni, Nikki, Ta-Nehisi, Langston, Colson, Lucille, Roxanne, Maya,
and many many others as more than the anti-racist homework that make
their parents' palms sweat.

this time I might put on blast all the examples I'm not allowed to read out loud,
on a school mic, at a school assembly, but you can catch me later and ask
in person about all the things they want to keep on the DL.

or maybe this time I should go back to my original idea, and
read another poem about why squirrels are still vastly superior to dogs.

This entry was posted on Friday, July 25th, 2025 at 7:21 am and is filed under [Poetry](#)

You can follow any responses to this entry through the [Comments \(RSS\)](#) feed. You can leave a response, or [trackback](#) from your own site.