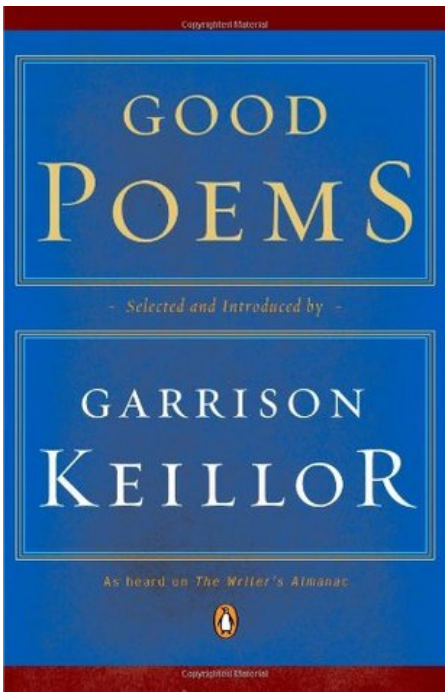

Good Poems

Garrison Keillor (Editor)

Good Poems

Garrison Keillor (Editor)

Good Poems Garrison Keillor (Editor)
Every day people tune in to *The Writer's Almanac* on public radio and hear Garrison Keillor read them a poem. And here, for the first time, is an anthology of poems from the show, chosen by Keillor for their wit, their frankness, their passion, their "utter clarity in the face of everything else a person has to deal with at 7 a.m."

Good Poems includes verse about lovers, children, failure, everyday life, death, and transcendance. It features the work of classic poets, such as Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, and Robert Frost, as well as the work of contemporary greats such as Howard Nemerov, Charles Bukowski, Donald Hall, Billy Collins, Robert Bly, and Sharon Olds. It's a book of poems for anybody who loves poetry whether they know it or not.

Good Poems Details

Date	:	Published August 26th 2003 by Penguin Books (first published September 28th 2002)
ISBN	:	9780142003442
Author	:	Garrison Keillor (Editor)
Format	:	Paperback 476 pages
Genre	:	Poetry, Nonfiction, Literature

From Reader Review Good Poems for online ebook

Gracellyn says

This morning when I was looking through our bookshelves, I saw I book that I had never seen before. I don't know where we got it, I don't know how long we've had it, but I do know that I am going to try to read the short poems out of this book every day until I'm done.
Can I do it?

Wendy says

I am so not a Garrison Keillor fan--While his radio show contains some good nuggets, more often than not the stories ramble for an eternity before reaching a mediocre punchline. However, I love this anthology of poems selected by Keillor. I recommend it to anyone who thinks that poetry doesn't resonate with them--these poems are accessible, easy to read and many of them, in Keillor tradition, tell stories.

Christiana Pearce says

Such a beautiful collection

Sara says

Not as clean or classic as the other anthology I read. Half of the poems are crude or cursing, but the other half have become some of my new favorites. Also, half to say a word for the way it's arranged. Yellow, music, a good life, trips - those are good themes for poems and pleasant to read together.

Casey Hampton says

Yes, these poems (in no particular order).

* "Some Details of Hebredean House Construction" - Thomas A. Clark
* "The Icelandic Language" - Bill Holm
* "The Cloths of Heaven" - W B Yeats
* "Ox Cart Man" - Donald Hall
* "Wild Geese" - Mary Oliver
* "For C.W.B." - Elizabeth Bishop
* "A Ritual to Read to Each Other" - William Stafford
* "On the Strength of All Conviction and the Stamina of Love" - Jennifer Michael Hecht
* "A Red, Red Rose" - Robert Burns"Trees" - John Tagliabue
* "Postscript" - Seamus Heaney

* "On a Tree Fallen Across the Road" - Robert Frost
* "Parable Of The Four-Poster" - Erica Jong
* "Dirge Without Music" - Edna St. Vincent Millay
* "The British Museum Reading Room" - Louis Macneice
* "Names of Horses" - Donald Hall
* "How to See Deer" - Philip Booth
* "Bats" - Randall Jarrell
* "Her First Calf" - Wendell Berry
* "To Be of Use" - Marge Piercy
* "Prayer for a Marriage" - Steve Scafidi
* "After Forty Years of Marriage, She Tries a New Recipe for Hamburger Hot Dish" - Leo Dangel
* "The Middle Years" - Walter McDonald
* "This Is Just To Say" - William Carlos Williams
* "The Grain of Sound" - Robert Morgan
* "Elevator Music" - Henry Taylor
* "Her Door" - Mary Leader
* "Late Hours" - Lisel Mueller

TBML says

What a great anthology! There are poems in here for just about every mood and situation which you could encounter.

As a Keillor fan, I can imagine him reading these. The public radio station to which I listen does not carry **The Writer's Almanac**, so I have never heard him read any of this poetry, but when I read them, it is Garrison's voice I hear in my head.

Divided into 19 sections, ***Good Poems*** touches on all manner of topics. From iceberg lettuce to the nature of the divine, from poetry readings to bodily excretions, from the delights of making love in a pile of leaves to old age and youth and so much more, it's all here. The range of poets Keillor selected is equally wide ranging. From Kenneth Rexroth to Emily Dickinson, from Shakespeare to Anne Sexton the list goes on.

I keep my copy in one of my motorcycle saddlebags as emergency reading in case I find my self waiting at an appointment. I know I can open it anywhere at random and immediately be transported away into another world, and I enjoy the unpredictabilikty of not knowing where it will be.
--Mark Pendleton

http://chile.las-cruces.org/search/t?...

Shawn Sorensen says

Hooked by the intro...funny and opinionated, just the needed thing. A friendly debate over the best poets and poems gets me right here (pointing to chest).

The main purpose of the book is to show how well poetry handles its well-familiar themes: childhood, death and the heartfelt appreciation towards being outside. While this can be annoying in other poetry titles, here those themes get their fair, glorious due. The poets here don't sit by a window and write about robins. They stroll outside through woods to a still pond to share the night with herons and "deep trees" (from a Mary Oliver poem in the book).

Why good poems? Why not great? These are short conversational pieces, most without endings that benefit the start and middle of a piece. Poems where the last stanza usually summarizes the whole thing - or just ends it - rather than adding a twist or memorable last line.

Here's an excellent contribution from Louis Simpson called

Ed

Ed was in love with a cocktail waitress,
but Ed's family, and his friends,
didn't approve. So he broke it off.

He married a respectable woman
who played the piano. She played well enough
to have been a professional.

Ed's wife left him...
Years later, at a family gathering
Ed got drunk and made a fool of himself.

He said, "I should have married Doreen."
"Well," they said, "why didn't you?"

Not that the book isn't without its great poems... after all, it includes "This Is Just To Say" by William Carlos Williams and "Let Evening Come" by Jane Kenyon.

It's just on the side of really good. Comforting without being smug. Real without giving you nightmares. Full of the variety - and therefore the glory - that are the poems around us everyday.

There are 19 themed chapters, each with 5-30 poems, so the book seems to read with a little better pace, like a novel. There's a full biography of each poet in the back, with Garrison's comments, important dates and achievements, and well-chosen quotes.

Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Hass, William Stafford and Donald Justice are some of the poets that come out of this book looking particularly good. Inevitably there are strong poets that get left out, like Jack Gilbert, Dorianne Laux and Larry Levis.

But I'll forgive Keillor the omissions that would have added even more variety, creativity and depth to this volume. I will pull it out often and read a new favorite poem. I will cherish a genre that continually leaves it's deep, telling, life-giving marks.

Doreen says

Finally finished this, some 3? 4? years after Dan, a regular at my old restaurant gave it to me to encourage my interest in poetry. Clearly, his efforts did not succeed too well, as it has taken me all this time to finish the collection which, by happy coincidence, I began reading again before a friend wrote a sonnet for me, but it isn't due to a lack of interest in poetry per se. I own and love several collections of poetry by Ted Hughes, Stephen Dunn and Margaret Atwood (and have a collection of Philip Larkin's waiting,) but so much poetry, even the "good" stuff is awful and unreadable. While this book that I'm reviewing has, on the whole, poetry I enjoy, it still has the odd verse or two that makes me go into skim mode, which is not the way to be when you're trying to enjoy poetry.

Overall, it's a good selection, but I think it's more of a starting point for the novice to find poets they'll enjoy as opposed to a collection that stands out as something truly good on its own. It did really, really make me want to re-read Dunn's Pulitzer-Prize-winning "Different Hours" though, which is an OUTSTANDING collection of poetry. It also makes me regret somewhat that I don't own any Billy Collins, though I've found the two selections of his in this book to be my favorites of his works by far.

Brian says

I've been reading this one off and on for four or five months; it's not to be digested all at once! The poems Keillor chooses are, on average, sentimental and accessible, and I mean that in the best way. They are poems that bridge the gap between your heart and the poet's, rather than separating you. They are also, very largely, twentieth-century poems written by people I've never heard of; these are mostly not the endlessly anthologized poems found in most volumes like this one. A really excellent read.

Patrick says

If you have any interest in poetry at all, you should give this collection a listen. A really interesting, varied assortment of poems, well-performed by a number of skilled readers.

David Mills says

Favorite Poem = "As Befits a Man" by Langston Hughes

I don't mind dying —
But I'd hate to die all alone!
I want a dozen pretty women
To holler, cry, and moan.

I don't mind dying
But I want my funeral to be fine:
A row of long tall mamas
Fainting, Fanning, and crying.

I want a fish-tail hearse
And sixteen fish-tail cars,
A big brass band
And a whole truck load of flowers.

When they let me down,
Down into the clay,
I want the women to holler:
Please don't take him away!
Ow-ooo-oo-o!
Don't take daddy away!

Heidi says

Emily Dickenson wrote, "If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only ways I know it. Is there any other way?"

Very few of the poems in this collection would meet these criteria for me. Ok, so I didn't read every poem; I got about 3/4 of the way through. And I guess I didn't pay enough attention to the title: these are good poems, but I wouldn't call most of them *great poetry.*

Granted, Keillor states in the intro that he wants to make poetry more accessible to people who think they don't like poetry because they were frustrated and confused by e. e. cummings and T. S. Eliot in high school. But I *like* cummings and Prufrock (though I could do without The Wasteland). So there.

Allie says

I'm generally too obtuse to appreciate poetry but thought I'd give this book a try, given my affection for Garrison Keillor. Good poems, as advertised.

I especially liked Wendell Berry's The Peace of Wild Things "I go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds./I come into the peace of wild things/that do not tax their lives with forethought/of grief." And laughed out loud at Charles Bukowski's Poetry Readings: "they read on and on/before their mothers, their sisters, their husbands,/their wives, their friends, the other poets/and the handful of idiots who have wandered/in/from nowhere."

Kylin Larsson says

This book has a lot of variety. Plus, since Keillor selected the poems, I'm hearing all the poems in his voice from his show on NPR.

Derek says

Note: It's a lamentable shame that Keillor's name now brings to mind allegations of sexual misconduct. I'm here to review the book and not the editor.

Collections like this can help keep poetry alive. These are bright, occasionally powerful poems that are accessible to even the most novice of poetry readers.

The hardline artist types who want poetry to be constantly challenging probably won't care for this collection. These are friendly poems of a largely homespun nature; there's nothing alienating going on here.

Yet these poems do have much to say. The sorrowful richness of life, all of its gifts and violations, is on full display here. Some of the poems collected here are likely to stay with you long after you've put the book on the shelf and gone on with your life. If that's not the mark of a good poem then I don't know what is.

Margie says

Loved it. Loved the intro by Keillor, loved the selections.

Ellen Gail says

Unfinished at 25ish%

I think it's time that I admit defeat. I like (some) poetry, but not enough to read a book of it. This might be the kind of thing where I would read a poem or two as a palate cleanser between books. But I just cannot sit down and read it like I would a novel.

I'd like to say that I will eventually finish *Good Poems*, but I need to return it to its owner, who has been patient while I dawdled over this.

Nichole says

I haven’t read much poetry lately. I’d “forgotten how big,” how restorative it can be. I’m so glad that I ended my evening with Anne Sexton's “Welcome Morning” rather than finishing the day with “American Idol.” A good poem makes me want to read more and to write. Whether or not I’ll actually pick up the pen is another question, but it feels good to want to do it. A good poem calms me and gives me perspective and makes me feel centered — all things I certainly could use on a daily basis.

(Garrison Keillor's introduction is wonderful; don't skip it.)

Jessica Snell says

So, I started this book by reading the introduction. And as Keillor talked about poems that tell stories, I had trouble remembering why I disliked him. And then I read:
"And then there is T. S. Eliot, the great stuffed owl whose glassy eyes mesmerized the English profs of my day. Eliot was once a cultural icon, the American guy so smooth he passed for British . . . but you look at his work today and it seems rather bloodless . . . Eliot didn't get out of the house much . . ."
and I remembered, Oh yeah, that's why I dislike him. Talk about reverse snobbery! Eliot sucks because he's not earthy enough. Heaven forbid poetry talks about, well, heaven.
Yes, there are some amazing poems in here. Keillor's intro isn't the fault of any of the poets he collected here. But, sigh. What an intro.
And yet - it's not all bad. Keillor has a lot of really good points, too, of course he does! The man is brilliant. And frustrating in his prejudices. And brilliant . . . I could go back and forth forever. But enough of that. The volume as a whole is more worth reading than not, so pick it up if you're in the mood for poetry, and feeling patient enough to sift out the chaff.

Cheryl says

Garrison Keillor is one of the funniest men on the planet, and as a connoisseur of funniness, I always suspect the wisest of us are the funniest, and this lovely anthology proves it. So the dour and cynical can stand in line on the scale of wisdom, if they even make it to the line, having lost their sense of humor which as everyone knows is a directional sense also. I rarely like poems from poets when they are in academia mode, trying to impress all the critics with their academic, heartless poetry, and so I love what he writes about poetry, kind of redeeming it from the emotionally challenged academics:
“Poetry is the last preserve of honest speech and the outspoken heart.”
“A poem is not a puzzle that you the dutiful reader is obliged to solve. It is meant to poke you, get you to buck up, pay attention, rise and shine, look alive, get a grip, get the picture, pull up your socks, wake up and die right.”

I loved the chapter headings, loosely grouping the poems in uncertain categories, but who would not want to read poems that may or may not be about ‘kindness to snails,’ ‘such as it is more or less,’ ‘the lust of tenderness,’ and ‘simpler than I could find words for.’

Some favorites:

the little horse is newlY
Born)he knows nothing,and feels
everything;all around whom is

perfectly a strange
ness(Of sun
light and of fragrance and of

Singing)is ev

erywhere(a welcom
ing dream:is amazing)
a worlD.and in

this world lies:smoothbeautifuL
ly folded;a(brea
thing a gro

Wing)silence,who;
is:somE

oNe.

--e. e. cummings

“A Poem for Emily,” by Miller Williams

Small fact and fingers and farthest one from me,
a hand’s width and two generations away,
in this still present I am fifty-three.
You are not yet a full day.

When I am sixty-three, when you are ten,
and you are neither closer nor as far,
your arms will fill with what you know by then,
the arithmetic and love we do and are.

When I by blood and luck am eighty-six
and you are someplace else and thirty-three
believing in sex and God and politics
with children who look not at all like me,

sometime I know you will have read them this
so they will know I love them and say so
and love their mother. Child, whatever is
is always or never was. Long ago

a day I watched awhile beside your bed,
I wrote this down, a thing that might be kept
awhile, to tell you what I would have said
when you were who knows what and I was dead
which is I stood and loved you while you slept.

Sharon Olds, “The Summer-Camp Bus Pulls Away from the Curb.”

Whatever he needs, he has or doesn’t
have by now.
Whatever the world is going to do to him
it has started to do. With a pencil and two

Hardy Boys and a peanut butter sandwich and
grapes he is on his way, there is nothing
more we can do for him. Whatever is
stored in his heart, he can use, now.
Whatever he has laid up in his mind
he can call on. What he does not have
he can lack. The bus gets smaller and smaller, as one
folds a flag at the end of a ceremony,
onto itself, and onto itself, until
only a heavy wedge remains.
Whatever his exuberant soul
can do for him, it is doing right now.
Whatever his arrogance can do
it is doing to him. Everything
that's been done to him, he will now do.
Everything that's been placed in him
will come out, now, the contents of a trunk
unpacked and lined up on a bunk in the underpine light.

Invitation by Carl Dennis

This is your invitation to the Ninth-Grade Play
At Jackson Park Middle School
8:00 P.M., November 17, 1947.
Macbeth, authored by Shakespeare
And directed by Mr. Grossman and Mrs. Silvio
With scenery from Miss Ferguson's art class.

A lot of effort has gone into it.
Dozens of students have chosen to stay after school
Week after week with their teachers
Just to prepare for this one evening,
A gift to lift you a moment beyond the usual.
Even if you've moved away, you'll want to return.
Jackson Park, in case you've forgotten, stands
At the end of Jackson Street at the top of the hill.
Doubtless you recall that Macbeth is about ambition.
This is the play for you if you've been tempted
To claw your way to the top. If you haven't been,
It should make you feel grateful.
Just allow time to get lost before arriving.
So many roads are ready to take you forward
Into the empty world to come, misty with promises.
So few will lead you back to what you've missed.

Just get an early start.
Call in sick to the office this once.
Postpone your vacation a day or two.
Prepare to find the road neglected,

The street signs rusted, the school dark,
The doors locked, the windows broken.
This is where the challenge comes in.

Do you suppose our country would have been settled
If the pioneers had worried about being lonely?

Somewhere the students are speaking the lines
You can't remember. Somewhere, days before that,
This invitation went out, this one you're reading
On your knees in the attic, the contents of a trunk
Piled beside you. Forget about your passport.
You don't need to go to Paris just yet.
Europe will seem even more beautiful
Once you complete the journey you begin today.

"Working in the Rain," by Robert Morgan

My father loved more than anything to
work outside in wet weather. Beginning
at daylight he'd go out in dripping brush
to mow or pull weeds for hog and chickens.
First his shoulders got damp and the drops from
his hat ran down his back. When even his
armpits were soaked he came in to dry out
by the fire, make coffee, read a little.
But if the rain continued he'd soon be
restless, and go out to sharpen tools in
the shed or carry wood in from the pile,
then open up a puddle to the drain,
working by steps back into the downpour.
I thought he sought the privacy of rain,
the one time no one was likely to be
out and he was left to the intimacy
of drops touching every leaf and tree in
the woods and the easy muttering of
drip and runoff, the shine of pools behind
grass dams. He could not resist the long
ritual, the companionship and freedom
of falling weather, or even the cold
drenching, the heavy soak and chill of clothes
and sobbing of fingers and sacrifice
of shoes that earned a baking by the fire
and washed fatigue after the wandering
and loneliness in the country of rain.

"There Comes the Strangest Moment," by Kate Light

There comes the strangest moment in your life,

when everything you thought before breaks free--
what you relied upon, as ground-rule and as rite
looks upside down from how it used to be.
Skin's gone pale, your brain is shedding cells;
you question every tenet you set down;
obedient thoughts have turned to infidels
and every verb desires to be a noun.
I want--my want. I love--my love. I'll stay
with you. I thought transitions were the best,
but I want what's here to never go away.
I'll make my peace, my bed, and kiss this breast…
Your heart's in retrograde. You simply have no choice.
Things people told you turn out to be true.
You have to hold that body, hear that voice.
You'd have sworn no one knew you more than you.
How many people thought you'd never change?
But here you have. It's beautiful. It's strange.

"A Physics," by Heather McHugh
When you get down to it, Earth
has our own great ranges
of feeling-Rocky, Smoky, Blue-
and a heart that can melt stones.

The still pools fill with sky,
as if aloof, and we have eyes
for all of this-and more, for Earth's
reminding moon. We too are ruled

by such attractions-spun and swaddled,
rocked and lent a light. We run
our clocks on wheels, our trains
on time. But all the while we want

to love each other endlessly-not only for
a hundred years, not only six feet up and down.
We want the suns and moons of silver
in ourselves, not only counted coins in a cup. The whole

idea of love was not to fall. And neither was
the whole idea of God. We put him well
above ourselves, because we meant,
in time, to measure up.

"Things" by Lisel Mueller

What happened is, we grew lonely
living among the things,
so we gave the clock a face,

the chair a back,
the table four stout legs
which will never suffer fatigue.

We fitted our shoes with tongues
as smooth as our own
and hung tongues inside bells
so we could listen
to their emotional language,

and because we loved graceful profiles
the pitcher received a lip,
the bottle a long, slender neck.

Even what was beyond us
was recast in our image;
we gave the country a heart,
the storm an eye,
the cave a mouth
so we could pass into safety.

"Just Now," by W.S. Merwin

In the morning as the storm begins to blow away
the clear sky appears for a moment and it seems to me
that there has been something simpler than I could ever
believe
simpler than I could have begun to find words for
not patient not even waiting no more hidden
than the air itself that became part of me for a while
with every breath and remained with me unnoticed
something that was here unnamed unknown in the days
and the nights not separate from them
not separate from them as they came and were gone
it must have been here neither early nor late then
by what name can I address it now holding out my thanks