Close Talking Episode #116

“Those Winter Sundays” by Robert Hayden

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https://soundcloud.com/close-talking/episode-116-those-winter-sundays-robert-hayden

Show Notes

Jack 0:08
Hello and welcome to Close Talking the world's most popular poetry analysis podcast from Cardboard Box Productions Incorporated. I am co-host Jack Rossiter-Munley and with my good friend Connor McNamara Stratton we read a poem,

Connor 0:22
talk about the poem

Jack 0:23
and read the poem again.

Connor 0:25
Before we get into today's selections, a quick note that if you like what we do here at Close Talking and have a spare minute of your time, it would mean the world to us, if you would give the podcast a rating and review on Apple podcasts.

Jack 0:40
Those ratings and reviews help boost us up the algorithm and find new listeners.

Connor 0:45
And if you have suggestions for future episodes or comments on this one, you could send us an email at closetalkingpoetry@gmail.com.

Jack 0:54
And you can also find us on social media, on Twitter the show is @closetalking. I am @jackrossitermun. And Connor is @connormstratton. On Instagram the show is @closetalkingpoetry, and on Facebook, it's facebook.com/closetalking. We also have a website, closetalking.com you can find all the past episodes of the show. And Cardboard Box Productions has just launched a newsletter UNBOXED and if you go to cardboardboxproductionsinc.com you can subscribe for more behind the scenes stuff on Close Talking, and all of the other literary and cultural history podcasts that Cardboard Box Productions makes. On with the show.

(Close Talking theme music)

Connor 1:41

Hello, and welcome to an all new episode of Close Talking. I am one of your co-hosts Connor McNamara Stratton.

Jack 1:48
And I am your other co host, Jack Rossiter-Munley.

Connor 1:52
And we are greeting you here on our first ever Christmas special. And we have picked a distinctly secular poem for all those who do not celebrate Christmas. So it is a winter, close to the solstice special. We got a good poem for the winter. And although this will not be reflected on when you listen to it, unless you listen to it on a Sunday, but we are recording on a Sunday, and the poem we got for you today is a classic, iconic American poem, "Those Winter Sundays" by Robert Hayden.

Jack 2:31
Who is a classic, iconic American poet.

Connor 2:34
Yes, he was the first Black US Poet Laureate. So early, it was not even called Poet Laureate at the time, I think it was a consultant in poetry, which actually sounds a little more interesting. I would, I would rather consult the Library of Congress on poetry than just be some sort of laurel bearing, you know, figure.

Jack 2:59
It does sound pretty cool. And like, what other literary discipline gets its own consultant.

Connor 3:05
And that's true.

Jack 3:07
I mean, I guess you could also say, which literary discipline gets its own laureate, but like, being the special consultant on poetry to the Library of Congress just seems like, ooh.

Connor 3:17
Yeah. No, very nice. But yeah, I mean, Hayden was, yeah, he, you know, he wrote basically in the mid 1900s, and yeah, he's one of the most in the kind of standard, white, mostly white cannons and anthologies, Hayden, it's like Hayden and Langston Hughes, and then maybe Gwendolyn Brooks, are like the select few that get consistently at that anthologized. He is just a wonderful poet. And this is one of those poems that I've known about for a while, and it's like, it's something that the best poems feel deeper and more like, resonant the more you you know, like some, some poems, some works of art have a great first impression, and then they kind of lose their luster, and some really deepen over time, and I feel like this is one that really does that for me. So let's just get going into it. This is

“Those Winter Sundays” by Robert Hayden

Sundays too my father got up early
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,
then with cracked hands that ached
from labor in the weekday weather made
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
and slowly I would rise and dress,
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him,
who had driven out the cold
and polished my good shoes as well.
What did I know, what did I know
of love's austere and lonely offices?

Jack 5:29
It's so good. I really liked what you were saying about how revisiting even a an incredibly classic poem like this deepens over time because I very much felt that way. Like when we talked about Mary Oliver's "Wild Geese," it's a poem that you kind of, you remember the main standout lines from, it becomes ingrained in you where you feel like it's familiar. But when you do actually revisit it and spend time with it, there's so many more depths that you can just find your way into. And I, I found myself having that experience, as we, you know, as I was preparing for this episode, because this is one of those poems where when you mentioned it was like, oh, yeah, I like that poem a lot, that's a good one. There'll be a lot to talk about. And then when I actually sat down with it, I was like, whoa, there's a lot to talk about, this is a really good poem, you know, it's just a whole other level of appreciation that can accrue over time.

Connor 6:21
No, it's really true. I like I feel like, yeah, it's, and it's one of those that like, it's so, um, you know, it's pretty well known and so it's like, kind of people you know, it like comes up sort of, like, every now and then, and people like, pay attention to like, a new detail of the poem. And like, why that part's interesting. And it's one of those that's like, it's got so much into it, that you can like spend a long time like focusing on like, you know, one word or one phrase, and, like, you know, how that adds such a resonant, you know, an extra layer of meaning or resonance or something. But, yeah, it's like, so yeah, like, maybe we could do a quick narrative play by play. Um, you know, it's, yeah, I was thinking about the winter. But, you know, the speaker is kind of remembering, you know, being a child and the his father, and kind of just this sort of thankless task that, you know, every Sunday has, his father basically warmed the house. And, you know, it was a while ago, you know, so the technology was, you know, the, the, you know, had to make an actual fire to heat the house and also speaks to like, their, you know, I mean, Hayden, you know, grew up pretty working class in Detroit, as I recall, and so that it also suggests there, you know, economic position. And, yeah, and that it's kind of just remembering that the that Sunday moment, and then kind of how, as a kid, the speaker wasn't very appreciative or warm with his

dad, which, you know, in the main reason why from the poem that we get is that fearing the "chronic angers of that house," which is such a just stunning line, I think. But then it kind of ends with this reflection of like, you know, "What did I know, what did I know / of love's austere and lonely offices?" that there was kind of this warming the house and then waking up the kids, you know, after it was warm, was this kind of lonely act of love, that he's, the speaker sort of now an adult and older kind of appreciates more with time, I mean, like on a on a, on a personal level, obviously, the circumstances of the, of the poet and the speaker are much different than mine. But I do feel like I'm, I'm at a point in my life, where I'm sort of thinking back to being a kid and like, the things that I didn't appreciate, you know, that my parents were doing and the kind of the thankless labor that often sort of goes into being a parent. And so that was the that that aspect of it really was striking me this time around. Yeah, I'm, I'm curious, I just I have a lot of thoughts but curious where, where your, where your mind is going with this one?

Jack 10:19
A well, unsurprisingly a lot of different places. I one of the things I was really struck by, especially as you're doing this sort of narrative play by play is how effectively the narrative is conveyed in the poem without it being pedantic. Because that can be a really, really big challenge as a writer when you're trying to convey a pretty linear story, but you want to do it evocatively rather than rote. And this succeeds so well at that. And not only does it succeed at doing that, but the ways in which it tells the story evocatively are brilliant, because just down to the word by word choice, you have words that tell you what was going on, and add crucial details without explaining it. So you get something like "Sundays too my father got up early / and put on and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold". And the phrasing of blueblack cold, blueblack as a descriptor of cold does so much work. Because immediately you're conjuring images of bruising, like it's not only is he getting up and doing work, but it's work that hurts. And then in the next line, you hear about cracked and aching hands, it also puts in the seeds of the idea of frostbite and being frostbitten. Again, the next line that immediately pays off with the cracked and aching hands. And blueblack is also the color of really early mornings, because it's dark. And that one word as a modifier for cold that immediately has context built around it that you're already feeling. And the number of times that that happens in the poem, with different very small and important word choices, even down to I connected to the first line of the second stanza where "I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking" again, coming right after talking about hands, it's like the sharpness of the wood and the cutting and the potential for injury. And the hard labor that this person is putting themselves through, is really just repeatedly built up without you almost noticing or feeling it other than experiencing it as you read through the poem and then later realizing all of the work that was done to give you that experience by the writer. And I think that there's sort of on a entire poem level, there's kind of a way that that operates where that last line of "love's austere and lonely offices", love is work in this poem. And of course, it happens in an office and love is lonely in this poem, there's no one else around because the act of love that's being done is, you know, thankless and solitary. But it comes from such a genuine place, for the person doing it. Or at least that's the impression that you get, or that's the impression that the speaker had as a child, whether they were realizing it or not, they were noticing that this happened every Sunday as it was happening, even if they weren't building the sort of big contextual meaning around it that they now can. And so that was something that really struck me because that last line is so powerful, but just the way that it thematically hits the love and work idea, while still being just a beautiful and evocative phrase all on its own, is so

masterful. And also just sort of overall, this had me thinking of the love languages that like circulate. Yeah, I'm and the, the idea that acts of service could be someone's love language. But I think you get the impression that the speaker in this poem might be more of like a words of affirmation sort of person. Or that at the very least, you get the strong sense that there was a disconnect in terms of how love was being expressed and how the speaker wanted love to be given to them. And that tension and rub that exists in the poem without ever being made particularly explicit other than in the, the chronic angers of that house line, is also really telling because that's part of I feel like what the adult reckoning is happening is like, I wanted to be loved in a certain way. And maybe I felt like I wasn't loved because I wasn't getting it that way. But I now realize that love was being communicated to me the whole time. I just couldn't quite see the ways in which that was happening. And that very much is, you know, again, it's all over the poem without ever having to be stated, which is the mark of doing good poetry, or good writing really, in general. And, yeah, all of that sort of where I went, as I was just marinating in this poem's brilliance.

Connor 15:25
I know it's so good. No, I agree with that. Completely. Yeah, no, I love the attention to blueblack cold and just the cold in general. It's so you know, there's three stanzas in the poem. And the cold, you know, cold as a word appears, like, one time in each stanza, and kind of, you know, the, the father has to experience it as the blueblack cold and then the second stanza, “I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking" which is like, again, it's it's like, you kind of it's, it's a, there's a great like, sort of sensory interplay, kind of, it's like kind of like synesthesia-ish. But, you know, like, you can imagine sort of, like wood being chopped or something like that in the splintering and breaking but it's actually the cold that is being splintered. And, and you know, that's kind of midway, it's like, he hears the cold, sort of, you know, being destroyed.

Jack 16:36
Yeah, as you were saying, you hear the wood being split for the fires, you hear the fires themselves crackling, writing that description of the cold being banished. It's so it's so many levels of description that's happening so rapidly in the poem.

Connor 16:50
Yeah, yeah. Um, and then, yeah, the, you know, who had, "who had driven out the cold," um, kind of the last appearance in the last stanza. And, you know, and it's such a good, you know, like, perhaps that last line, I'm sure people have talked about the last line, so I'm sure it's, it's many, many essays have been written on on it. To me, just the the most immediate loveliness of it is a manner of diction and, like, word choice and, and tone and this idea of distance, like, it can, it contrasts with blueblack cold, so intensely, because, you know, blueblack, as is one word, it's not hyphenated in the poem. It's very visceral and sensory, and kind of, like, gritty. And then the end is, like, "love’s austere and lonely offices", you know, like, the use of austere, you know, which is like such a, you know, like, high, you know, $10 word whatever. And offices, it's, it has such a, remoteness, because, like, it's not, there's no like, physical office, per se, in the poem that's being described, it's like this figurative office of love. And then too that it contrasts with the, the repetition, which is also something that I think a lot of people have focused on of the "What did I know, what did I know / of love’s austere and lonely offices?" Like, there's such a in repeating that what did I know, there's such a, like, the speaker's really urgently, kind of grasping

at something, and it's this, this rhythmic kind of moment, that then also has this tension with the distance and the kind of like, heightened language of the last line. Which, you know, works really well for the topic just in kind of like a, you know, it captures the remoteness of the love to the speaker, like at least as a kid, you know. But it also like kind of speaks to, yeah, and and also just like the, the difficulty of accessing it, I think, you know, in the speaker's present day, it's so it's so interesting, and there's just so much like, yeah, just the language of the poem, so wonderful. Just little things here that that I know have been commented on before I think but like the "Sundays too my father got up early". The use of too really captures immediately that you get a sense of the father without having like that, he's always getting up early in this wretched cold and doing this work during the week. And then you know, like, like, "chronic angers of that house" is like the use of chronic. And like, now it's so interesting because now, like the term kind of 'chronic stress,' I feel like has started to enter into, like, out of sort of psychology and, like public health language into the mainstream. But like the house, and also just like the house itself is chronically angry that it's just this pervasive, insistent anger that, you know, in some ways is like, not to introduce a like sociological reading of the poem or something, but like, in a low income family, where you have to work so much, and it's difficult work, and you're also being like, Black in Detroit, and like, systemic racism and stuff, it's like, and there's so there's so much studies, you know, that like, chronic stress is, is disproportionately affects, you know, Black people in the US. But like this poem, which I don't know, was was written, you know, decades before, at least, I think this kind of science of the idea being expressed there. But uses that same word is so interesting. And just so like, the idea of like, a kid kind of being in their room, or whatever, wherever they were sleeping, and like knowing that elsewhere in the house is like the chronic angers. And being afraid of that is like such a, like visceral, but also like, I don't know, I don't know, I can just see it so intensely.

Jack 22:09
Absolutely. And to have that all-consuming anxiety and tension there, as you said, there have been studies about what that does to young people. So it becomes these generational mental health, and in some cases, physical health impacts of poverty, or of, you know, at the very least, you know, food insecurity, housing insecurity, any level of, you know, the insecurity of existing as a Black person in Detroit in the 20s, and 30s, which would, if, you know, we take the speaker to be Hayden, which I think we do, and that's basically the timeline you're looking at, and that was a time when a lot of Black people were moving to Detroit, in kind of a wave of migration to work in Henry Ford's automobile plants. And so this was a time when there was a strong working class, Black presence growing in Detroit, it was still a time of intense racism. But yeah know, just the like, the all-encompassing impacts, and the sort of reverberating and generational impacts of that sort of thing are striking. And I think you get a sense of that, because this is something that was so impactful on the speaker there and now reflecting on it in later life. And you get the sense that this poem is the culmination of a lifetime of reflecting on this phenomenon, which is embodied by the experience on Sunday. But part of I think the reason the poem has such depth to it is because there is a depth of non-Sunday specific experience that is being delivered to you through Sunday. So like, as you said, the too in the first line does so much work, because basically, you learned that the Father is always getting up early, to go to work, to make money, to do you know, another version of the work of "love’s austere and lonely offices", whether it was an office job or not, that's another version of, you know, especially for a couple of generations of men through social messaging around what love looked like, you know, the idea

that you go to work you provide for your family was a very big idea tied up with masculinity and masculine self-worth, and you get the sense that that is something you know, whether or not the father, we don't know explicitly if the father feels that way about himself, but you get that feeling from the poem. And, and I definitely was reflecting on, you know, what does that then communicate to the speaker as a child about what it means to grow up and be a man and what kind of messages around masculinity are in this poem, which I feel like is a whole level that's going on because this is also a poem about like a father-son relationship. And most depictions of father- son relationships in media, it was interesting the first connection I made was one that I initially tried to move beyond because we've talked about it before. And it felt a little bit too obvious, which is in Cormac McCarthy's "The Road," where it's a man and his son traveling in the post-apocalypse and part of the reason I made that connection is both because it is such is sort of extended examination of a father-son relationship that's mostly positive, but also because so much of the theme in that book is about carrying the light. And towards the end of the book, you know, I guess spoilers for "The Road," do you have to say that, I don't know. But the father is like wounded and dying, and some of the last interactions he has with his son he describes him as being like, he's sort of hallucinating from injury, but he sees him as wreathed in light. And not only is he then carrying this concept of the light forward, but he becomes the embodiment of the light. And he's like a fiery, almost angelic presence. And it's, it's very beautiful. But particularly in this poem, where like the creation of fires to warm the home, is the act of love and is, I feel like in some way, what the Father is then handing over, and you get that point of connection, where the poem says “and polished my good shoes as well." And so there is this level of personal attention. And you feel like implicitly, in doing this every single Sunday, the repeated routines of a home, at some point start to become lessons either do things this way, or, as you start to notice what the pattern is, you decide, I don't want to do things that way, as like a young person growing up in an environment. And so I was sort of, I was thinking a lot about that level, and particularly just trying to decipher, given what's in the poem, what if anything, it was trying to say about masculinity.

Connor 27:07
Yeah, no, for sure. Yeah. And going back to kind of your, the thing you were saying before that, although it's all related, there's a relatively well known study that's about adverse child experiences, also known as ACES, which, you know, can include basically, you know, physical emotional abuse, neglect, household violence, also racism, and that, there's, the more there's kind of like a list of like, 10 ACES, and that the power of the study is like, the number of ACES that a child has growing up, is like, really, highly correlated to all of these things later in life. Some things, you know, from, like, poor academic achievement, but also like substance abuse, but also physical, more physical things like diabetes, and heart disease, and things like that. And so, anyway, um, it's a lot of it has to do with this kind of, they, those experiences create toxic stress is kind of the phrase or whatever that has, yeah, um, as you were saying, you know, affects the brain itself and has other sort of, you know, like, consequences that really endure. And then there's also this sort of, you know, especially when we're thinking about like, like Black Americans or other, you know, oppressed sort of groups, there's like, intergenerational trauma that kind of, like, is, is passed, you know, in, in the kind of like, epigenetic, like, is, is passed on from generation to generation. And so, there's, yeah, um, it's, it's a very, like, I like to think about the kind of, you know, the, sort of the, the science and the kind of that larger context because it, it's like, it connects these two things, which I think are very often not connected, you know,

where it's like, the, the, the science by itself is like, you know, creates this set of evidence and data that gets close to being able to say like, this is a true thing or whatever, but it doesn't capture the kind of like, what is it like to be a part of that or to have experienced that and you know, poetry or literature or art by itself can really kind of, you can have this visceral encounter with, you know, this experience or this kind of, you know, really interior sort of sense of someone else, but like, totally separated from a larger context. You know, it's, like connected, you can really kind of, you know, it's like, obviously, like, the speaker in this poem, you can't like generalize the experience, like outward, totally, but at the same time, you know, there is something that is kind of, like, identifiable, broader, and then to sort of just think about the pain in this poem. And, like, the, the widespread-ness of that, when you think about these these, like, systemic historical things. And, you know, with masculinity too that, like, these sorts of dynamics of, you know, father-son relationships and how, how that is, you know, like, yeah, quite common, um, and that they're these these painful distances that kind of emerge when, yeah, it's, it's funny, because it is kind of love languages, when you put it like that I mean, it tickles me. Because I, I mean, that's like the one thing of like, sort of pop psych, that I found the most useful in my own life, it's like, so it just like has such explanatory power. So whoever came up with that, good job. But it also does speak to like, that is kind of almost one of the I mean, like, sort of recurring issues, I think, in masculinity and in like, father-son relationships and stuff, where there's a mich mismatch of love language. And in some ways, there's just not a mismatch, but there's just a lack of a lack of knowledge. A lack of language perhaps.

Jack 32:33
Which is a common is a big theme, particularly. And, I mean, I know it most from my own American cultural context. And in American culture, just men being taciturn and that being seen as a sign of strength. I know, we've talked about it before, at least glancingly on the podcast where, you know, it's a huge theme in westerns, the strong silent type, the cowboy who is incredibly skilled and does work on behalf of a community but doesn't talk a lot doesn't reveal a lot of themselves. That shows up again, in a different form in something like Star Wars, where their response to saying I love you, is Han Solo, saying "I know," and that's like, deeply romantic. And it carries on into any number of other pieces of popular culture that teach people, you know, what does it mean to be a man, which is changing for the better, especially as you know, more conversations about breaking up the gender binary, and thinking more broadly about gender enter the mainstream. As you know, one of my favorite pieces is Angels in America, where literally, the description of Heaven is a place where there's gender confusion, and all this other great stuff. One of my favorite speeches, yeah, that the this poem felt to me, like a prism through which a lot of that was being refracted. Or I guess it was describing an experience. And that experience kind of encompassed a lot of that. Because, yeah, I mean, it's basically the show don't tell of affection. Right? Where it's like, I'm doing all this stuff, obviously, you should understand that I care about you. But like, from the child's perspective, how am I ever going to know that if you don't tell me I'm a kid. The love of routine and consistently, caring acts can also then become a level in which it kind of obscures how much it is an expression of affection, which I think is something that this poem also touches on, it's like, well, he always got up early, like, did it on Sundays, too. He always made the fires every single Sunday. So like, you don't, that's the kind of thing where when it's happening, you don't realize how special it is because it's just what your existence is kind of the positive side of what we're talking about with a house that's filled with chronic angers, a house that's warmed every Sunday, when it just happens all

the time, it's just what happens. It's sort of like, the first time that you meet other people and, or maybe you like go to a friend's house.

Connor 35:14
Another like, part of this poem that I, each new time that I read it I appreciate more and more is like, you know, beyond the words, voice, like the syntax. And then the way that the sentences are happening are just like, super interesting. Like the first stanza, there's two sentences, and the first one is like, really long, it's like "Sundays too my father got up early", and it goes all the way down until "in the weekday weather made / banked fires blaze." And then the second sentence is "No one ever thanked him" one sentence, half a line, rather than, you know, four and a half lines for the other sentence. And then there's, "I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking", which is a not like, the third sentence has its own line and the second stanza. And then we have another super long line, "When the rooms were warm, he'd call" and then it goes down all the way six lines until, "and polished my good shoes as well." And then that ends the sentence and then it sort of closes out with "What did I know, what did I know / of love's austere and lonely offices?" The other part that that is striking to me too, you know, the first sentence is very, there's this one moment that has this kind of, it's almost confusing to read how the sentence goes, it's it's strange, but like so "Sundays too my father got up early / and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold," great, fine, "then with cracked hands that ached / from labor in the weekday weather made / banked fires blaze", the sentence in terms of like, the subject, and then the verb, it's like "then with cracked hands, made banked fires blaze", like the hands is sub, like the thing that's doing the acting, the made is the verb. And then the, you know, the banked fires is like what's being made. But in between that is like this kind of clause, like "then with cracked hands that ached / from labor in the weekday weather made / banked fires blaze", and there's this extra part with like, the stresses and the words. So it is a sonnet, one of the one of the marvelous sonnets. And it's, you know, it's in the 1900s, so it's a little more or less formal, and it has kind of an odd stanza length for sonnet, where, you know, oftentimes we have the 4442, or the 86, and this one has kind of a well, it's interesting, because so the stanzas are 545, right. But then you can kind of think about it as the six and then the eight. But it's like, we're made in a weird way, so it's like Sundays too, to know when everything's done. And then "I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking", and then that ends a sentence. It's not in the stanza, but like, then this sentence comes. Like "When the rooms were warm, he'd call, / and slowly I would rise and dress / fearing the chronic angers of that house, / Speaking indifferently to him / who had driven out the cold / and polished my good shoes as well." Um, so there's sort of like a turn that slowly starts happening after the splintering and the braking, which makes sense in terms of the, the cold that the kind of like, what's happening with the cold is kind of going along with the turn of the poem in some kind of way. And then we have a bit of a couplet ending with the like, "What did I know, what did I know / of love's austere and lovely offices", but it's like structured in a fairly strange way in terms of a traditional sonnet. I think deliberately so. But then with the stresses there's that weird "that ached / from labor in the weekday weather" and then it's these four words, that are all like stressed words, like "made / banked fires blaze." Like it's really hard to say that as an example, "I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking." The first six words is a very classic iambic thing where you have a non-stress-stress in the kind of like sonnet, like "I'd wake and hear the cold" like wake and here and cold are the stressed ones and that's just how you would naturally say it. Um, but like there's this weird like this then "with cracked hands that ached / from labor in the weekday weather made / banked fires blaze" that ends this long sentence that has this kind of

like, weird inserted clause about the hands aching. And then it's like the verb is like, made comes in at the end of the line. And it's like "made / banked fires blaze." So it sounds like made is like with the weekday weather, you know, because it's like on the same line as the weekday weather even though it's actually leaving the clause about that, and it's what the hands were doing. But it's also kind of like it's making and then "banked fires blaze" is like, and the made like there's these 'a' sounds like that "ached / from labor in the weekday weather made / banked fires blaze", lots of 'a' sounds there, lots of 'd's' and hard consonants, and then "No one ever thanked him." And the thanked has kind of a rhymes with banked, but in this kind of weird sort of way, you know. So it's like sonically rhythmically syntactically very complex, I think. And then even like structurally in terms of the sonnet it's very, it's, it's, you can kind of tease out the sonnet form, I think there's a lot of things that all those things are doing, it speaks to the images that are being described, where like when you get the fires, and you get the warmth, that's like the intense kind of glorious thing, the banked fires blazing is like very punctuated and like, cool. And there's also like a lot of labor in the syntax to get there, which maybe is a kind of miming of the work that it takes to put the, the fire together with the kind of weird clauses in there. But at the same time, it also sets up this really stark contrast so that when you get to "No one ever thanked him", and the shortness and crispness and directness of that, like really kind of hits you, I think, where you have this pretty long sentence that is strange and sort of hard to read in some kind of way. And then you get "No one ever thanked him", it's like, it throws the rest of it in pretty stark relief, which I think happens again, sort of in a different way, with the next sort of part of the poem where you have, so you have the "I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking", and then you have that long sentence of like, "When the rooms were warm." And then you have just that last, "What did I know, what did I know?" where again, I think it's, it's the repetition of what did I know which again, is like such, both repeating of it is like, so dramatic, in a way and also direct in a way that the previous sentence, there's so many different parts to it, like “When the rooms were warm, he'd call, / and slowly I would rise and dress, / fearing the chronic angers of that house,” then I was speaking, the sentence ends with like four different qualifications to the action of I would rise and dress like "fearing the chronic angles of that house, / Speaking indifferently to him," and then it's modifying “him / who had driven out the cold / and polished my good shoes as well." So there's just like, a lot going on. And then and then it kind of turns again, in that that final sort of last two lines. Um, and I'm not sort of doing justice to, I think like all of the effects of the way that the poem is kind of using the tools of language and sound and rhythm and sentence and line and form. But I just I wanted to, like point out a bunch of things and then speak to a couple different effects and, like, I think that you could really sit with, with those sort of dimensions to the poem and like, the poem would keep giving and giving. Which I think is why - the other great thing about the poem is that it's something you don't have to know, to love it. And it's like it's something that rewards these repeated readings. You know, a year later, I'm sure I'll come across it again and think about some other part of the poem.

Jack 45:14
Yeah, I really like all of that, because there is so many, there are so many different ways that this poem like syntactically messes with the form it's working in to the point and even sort of thematically like I was thinking about this time going through that you can even see the sort of turn possibly as being between the first nine lines and the last five, because it's in these three groupings of 545, around these parts, we're pretty comfortable that any 14 line poem, we're happy to put in the sonnet family, possibly more on that to come in 2021 stay tuned. But as I was

reading through it, like the first two lines, the first two stanzas are about what the father is doing, and what the speaker is thinking of, from their bed, in the cold that is being warmed. And then the whole last five lines are about the connection. That's where they first speak to each other, that's where the shoes are polished. And that's where there's this actual adult reflection on the act. And you can, as you were saying, there are a couple of different points in this poem where you can see the the sort of sonnet turn. And I was really sort of struck by thinking about it as a really kind of out there, nine and five turn. That's completely not what you do in sonnets. But I feel like there is a significant switching point there as well, where it goes from being two people, sure, they're in the same, you know, house of chronic angers, but this is where their paths first cross and where the reflection on what their shared experience means. So even though the language no longer becomes about their interactions that are more direct, either speaking or the shoes that last part is the reflection on what these independent actions when going out and making the house warm, the other one receiving the gift of warmth, the reflection on what that meant is what happens in those last couple of lines. And I really, I really like that.

Connor 47:17
Yeah, no, I think that's really right. And especially this is you can appreciate this with the just the audio but speaking as a word which starts the last stanza, is capitalized even though it's in the middle of a sentence. And it's not one of those poems that capitalizes the first word of of every line. So I do I do think highlighting the the connection how like, however, and different to the father in that last stanza, I think is really, really right on. Should we read it again.

Jack 47:58
Let's do it.

Connor 47:59
All right. This is

"Those Winter Sundays" by Robert Hayden

Sundays too my father got up early
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,
then with cracked hands that ached
from labor in the weekday weather made
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
and slowly I would rise and dress,
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him,
who had driven out the cold
and polished my good shoes as well.
What did I know, what did I know

of love's austere and lonely offices?

(Close Talking theme music)

So Jack, I was just wondering, on your own winter days, you've been thinking about this poem. But I'm wondering, are there the things that you're reading, watching, listening to consuming and some sort of capitalist or anti-capitalist or non-capitalist fashion? You know, just a simple question.

Jack 49:45
No, yeah. No, I'm glad that there's like, no incredibly political overlay to my consumption. Now, I mean, I do think about that a lot. I yeah. Well, I have been spending a lot of time thinking about this poem and as a result of thinking about it, reading quite a bit of other Robert Hayden poetry because I'm not as well versed as I would like to be or really should be in his his work. So that has definitely been part of my reading experience, definitely recommend that. But on the theme of like, those winter Sundays, and kind of like comfort, comfort culture, let's call it, there is a series of mystery books that I have, I don't know that I have actually read a physical copy of one beginning to end ever in my life. But I have repeatedly listened to the audiobooks many, many, many times. And that is the "Cat Who" mysteries by Lilian Jackson Braun, which are about James Makintosh Qwilleran, a one-time award winning crime writer and journalist who falls on hard times before we meet him in this series, we meet him in the series as he is on an upswing after the dissolution of a poor marriage and a bout of alcoholism. He is scrounging for any work he can get. And he gets a job as a feature writer at the Daily Fluxion. And during his first assignment, he becomes the adoptive parent of a Siamese cat named Kao K'o-Kung. Or Koco as he is most commonly known. And this cat, it turns out has almost psychic abilities. And they aid in Qwilleran's natural inclination to find himself in the vicinity of crimes. And so, over the course of the first few books in the series, he and Koco moved to different apartments around the city. And they solve crimes there, usually Koco does things like knock books off the shelf that have titles that end up spurring Qwilleran to figure out who did the crime. And then Lilian Jackson Braun had an idea, which was what if I stopped writing books about this journalist in a city, and instead I make him a billionaire who lives in a small town 400 miles, quote, unquote, north of everywhere in a place called Moose County. No in a town called Pick Axe. And so for the next like 25 books in the series, Qwilleran is the inheritor of the Klingenschoen fortune, which he establishes a charitable foundation for that brings large numbers of arts institutions to small town Pick Axe, population 3000 and Moose County more generally. And it basically allows him to do whatever he wants whenever he needs to, which is a brilliant plot device if you're writing serialized crime books along the way, it's still all there down there, quote, unquote, down below, which is what locals in Moose County call the rest of the country. He also adopts another Siamese cat named Yum Yum. And so Koco and Yum Yum are his compatriots as he solves small town crimes in these cozy mysteries. So if you want just like a fun weird read, check out the Cat Who mysteries by Lilian Jackson Braun.

Connor 53:02
Damn, that sounds fascinating.

Jack 53:06

There's something read by George Guidall, who has a very soothing voice. Qwilleran and also has a giant mustache, which is a regular plot point and he gets tingles in his mustache whenever there's like, crime clues percolating. Yeah, so that's another part of it.

Connor 53:26
Amazing.

Jack 53:27
So that's the Cat Who Mysteries. What have you been reading?

Connor 53:34
Oh gosh, well

Jack 53:35
Or listening to or watching or, you know, consuming in a capitalist or anti-capitalist or non-capitalist?

Connor 53:44
Well, yeah, a few things. The thing that's been most interesting, um, as someone who likes jazz as a genre, but who is not super like up on the contemporary scene, I find it difficult to like, I have like artists that I like, and then I listen to their new albums from time to time. But I don't have a good sense of like, oh, this is a good new album that you know, just came out or something, so the end of the year, like, is the only time that the major outlets you know, like, seriously compiled their list of good jazz albums. I mean, they do a little bit you know, there's reviews here and there, but, so, um, this album, Omega by Immanuel Wilkins, came out this year, and he is an alto sax saxophonist. I play the sax to play the alto so that that appealed to me. This made a lot of the lists for for one of the best out one of the best jazz albums. He's like, really young. He's like 22 or something. This album is insanely good.

(Immanuel Wilkins music clip)

It is like high power. And it's cool because I'm gonna do some real hot takes on jazz. A lot of people, jazz musicians are technically virtuosic, like so they're all so good. I mean, the ones who are really good, they're just like, the ones like, it's just, they're just so good it's crazy. But a lot of times, at least for me, who's especially not like, you know, I'm not getting all the musical references and quotations that they're throwing into their, you know, wild solos. It's like, it's like, emotionally, sometimes a little lacking to me, you know what I mean? And then the ones that are, like, more emotional, I don't know, sometimes it's just like, it's not my vibe. This one is like, intense. He's so good. But it's like, it feels like urgent in a kind of way.

(Immanuel Wilkins music clip)

What I was reading about the album, he's he's like, you know, there's one song called, like "Ferguson - An American Tradition." And so there's definitely like, like a, you know, liberatory spiritual, Black aesthetic that's trying to be captured in this in this album, but it's a quartet. It's banging, it's intense, "Omega" Immanuel Wilkins. He's 22.

Jack 57:07
Wow. That's really cool. I'm most familiar with that sort of technical versus field conversation, obviously, I play guitar. So I'm most familiar with it in that context. But that's absolutely the case where there are people who are incredibly technically skilled, and they can shred a million notes a minute, but you end up not feeling a whole lot necessarily, you can kind of marvel at the technical achievement in their playing. But there's usually a threshold for that. I have a much lower threshold for just like feel players, I that's kind of I respond to that on, you know, much more quickly. But there are those who kind of hit the sweet spot of having both. And that is so special for obviously, like the standard, like guitar example of somebody like Stevie Ray Vaughan, who's an incredibly technically skilled player, one of the best ever. And still, you get an intense sense of feeling in his music, especially when you see it performed, because he was such an intense performer. But even on record, there's like, there's something else going on behind the flurry of notes. And you really feel that, and I'm going to have to check out "Omega" this sounds so good.

Connor 58:16
It's really good. Yeah. And I just feel like, and this is why I'm like, I want to, I wish I could, like, find it. Like with poetry, I feel like I have a, I have a sense of my own taste enough. And then I also like, know the scene well enough for like, I can kind of, like, it's easier for me to explore new things and like, not get overwhelmed, with jazz I don't I like am constantly overwhelmed, and like, don't know what I'm getting myself into a lot of the time, but the good stuff that's coming out right now, I feel like it's so good. Because, like, especially like, I don't know, there's, there's like a lot of just like, both work that's doing stuff with, you know, engaging with like, hip hop, and also like, you know, like computer production stuff in in a way that still like, hella good jazz. And that's, like, pretty exciting. And then there's also just like, I feel like, I'm sure it's never really left, but like really polite political, jazz, um, that, I don't know, it's like, an I think this is really this is really one of those albums. So yeah, it's just, it's cool. It's cool. Check it out.

Jack 59:42
Very nice. I will check that out. Probably between now and our next episode.

(Close Talking theme music)

Hello, everybody thank you so much for listening. This is co-host Jack Rossiter-Munley just reminding you that there are a ton of ways that you can get in touch with us and we love to hear from you. It's always great to know if you have a different reading of this poem, or any of the other poems we've covered. Or if there are any poems you wish we would cover in the future. You can send us an email at closetalkingpoetry@gmail.com or the show and Connor and myself are all on Twitter. That's another great way to connect. I am @jackrossitermun. Connor is @connormstratton, and the show is @closetalking. You can also find us on Instagram @closetalkingpoetry or on Facebook at facebook.com/closetalking. See you next time.