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Anthology of
Modern American Poetry

EDITED BY CARY NELSON

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5 I beg a dime for dinner—
 You got a butler and maid.
 But I'm wakin' up!
 Say, ain't you afraid

10 That I might, just maybe,
 In a year or two,
 Move on over
 To Park Avenue?

1934

Let America Be America Again

Let America be America again.
 Let it be the dream it used to be.
 Let it be the pioneer on the plain
 Seeking a home where he himself is free.

5 (America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed—
 Let it be that great strong land of love
 Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme
 That any man be crushed by one above.

10 (It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where Liberty
 Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,
 But opportunity is real, and life is free,
 Equality is in the air we breathe.

15 (There's never been equality for me,
 Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")

*Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?
 And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?*

20 I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,
 I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.
 I am the red man driven from the land,
 I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek—
 And finding only the same old stupid plan
 Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

25 I am the young man, full of strength and hope,
 Tangled in that ancient endless chain
 Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!
 Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need!
 Of work the men! Of take the pay!
 30 Of owning everything for one's own greed!

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.
 I am the worker sold to the machine.
 I am the Negro, servant to you all.
 I am the people, humble, hungry, mean—
 35 Hungry yet today despite the dream.
 Beaten yet today—O, Pioneers!
 I am the man who never got ahead,
 The poorest worker bartered through the years.

Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream
 40 In that Old World while still a serf of kings,
 Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,
 That even yet its mighty daring sings
 In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned
 That's made America the land it has become.
 45 O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas
 In search of what I meant to be my home—
 For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore,
 And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea,
 And torn from Black Africa's strand I came
 50 To build a "homeland of the free."

The free?

Who said the free? Not me?
 Surely not me? The millions on relief today?
 The millions shot down when we strike?
 55 The millions who have nothing for our pay?
 For all the dreams we've dreamed
 And all the songs we've sung
 And all the hopes we've held
 And all the flags we've hung,
 60 The millions who have nothing for our pay—
 Except the dream that's almost dead today.

O, let America be America again—
 The land that never has been yet—
 And yet must be—the land where *every* man is free.
 65 The land that's mine—the poor man's, Indian's, Negro's, ME—
 Who made America,
 Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,
 Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,
 Must bring back our mighty dream again.

70 Sure, call me any ugly name you choose—
 The steel of freedom does not stain.
 From those who live like leeches on the people's lives,
 We must take back our land again,
 America!

75 O, yes,
 I say it plain,
 America never was America to me,
 And yet I swear this oath—
 America will be!

80 Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,
The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,
We, the people, must redeem
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.
The mountains and the endless plain—
85 All, all the stretch of these great green states—
And make America again!

1936

Letter from Spain°

Addressed to Alabama

Lincoln Battalion,
International Brigades,
November Something, 1937.

Dear Brother at home:

We captured a wounded Moor today.
He was just as dark as me.
I said, Boy, what you been doin' here
Fightin' against the free?

He answered something in a language
10 I couldn't understand.
But somebody told me he was sayin'
They nabbed him in his land

And made him join the fascist army
And come across to Spain.
15 And he said he had a feelin'
He'd never get back home again.

He said he had a feelin'
This whole thing wasn't right.
He said he didn't know
20 The folks he had to fight.

And as he lay there dying
In a village we had taken,
I looked across to Africa
And seed foundations shakin'.

25 Cause if a free Spain wins this war,
The colonies, too, are free—
Then something wonderful'll happen
To them Moors as dark as me.

poem title: written while Hughes was in Spain visiting American volunteers. For general information on the Spanish Civil War see the notes to Millay's "Say That We Saw Spain Die" and Rolfe's "Elegia."