Saturday, January 30, 2016

WBS+JHU

Poetry & Social Justice

WBS Orientation

**Crossing That Line**

Paul Robeson stood

on the northern border

of the USA

and sang into Canada

where a vast audience

sat on folding chairs

waiting to hear him.

He sang into Canada.

His voice left the USA

when his body was

not allowed to cross

that line.

Remind us again,

brave friend.

What countries may we

sing into?

What lines should we all

be crossing?

What songs travel toward us

from far away

to deepen our days?

Naomi Shihab Nye

[*You & Yours*. Rochester, NY: BOA Editions (2005).]

What “countries” can your words and poems “sing” into?

Where do you *want* them to sing?

What are the “lines” in your world that you believe you or others should be crossing?

What “songs” travel toward you from far away to deepen your days?

These countries, lines, and songs can be literal or metaphorical, “real” or surreal.

Example of the literal (Choman Hardi, from “At the border, 1979”):

I was five years old

standing by the check-in point

comparing both sides of the border.

The autumn soil continued on the other side

with the same colour, the same texture.

It rained on both sides of the chain.

Example of the metaphorical/surreal (James Tate, from “Dear reader”):

I am trying to pry open your casket

with this burning snowflake.

Example of the literal AND metaphorical/surreal (Allison Joseph, from “Xenophilia”):

Sing to me in a language I don’t speak

with vowels swirling round my ears like silk . . .

untranslatable lullabies lilting me into sleep

deeper than the rivers by towns now wiped

off any map, a disappeared cartography.