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Keillor shares his standards for "Good Poems"

What makes a "good" poem? Some critics say "thought and form" (Emerson) or sound and sense. But these are just ele-ments of an elusive impact on

the reader.
One of Walt Whitman's finest One of Walt Whitman's finest short poems, seldom quoted, is about a "learn'd astronomer" lecturing, with charts and figures, in a crowded, stuffy room. The bored poet feels compelled to walk out by himself in the "mystical moist night-air" where he "Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars."

Whitman, represented by two passages, is one of more than 100 poets in an anthology of "Good Poems" chosen by the noted tale-spinner of North

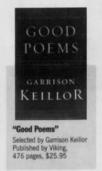
woods humor, Garrison Keillor. The host of two public radio programs and author of nine books, Keillor is as witty, informal and opinionated (yet engaging) as ever. "Good Poems" contains 287 poems read on his show called "The Writer's Almanac."

Keillor's test of a good poem is "stickiness" and memorability. In a radio audience "People listen to poems while they're frying eggs and sausage and truckload of poems to find the few thousand I've read on the radio." Yet, while observing that a "harrative line" makes a poem memorable, many of his choices are simply lyrical. And while many of his poets are new or unknown, most of the

est, uninhibited stamp on the project. His introduction is especially candid and engaging. He scorns terms like "confessional" and "regional" in poetry, and calls "women's lit" one of the "great dumb ideas" to come out of his generation. Yet his assessment of poets and poetry is right on the mark. "Howard Nemerov seems larger and larger to me with each rereading, a kindly giant of great courage and elegance," he notes. And Robert Bly, writing at top form at 75, "gives hope to the rest of us." And though he "once cocked a snoot" at Raymond Carver, Keillor admits he was "dead wrong" and has high praise for that poet.

Altogether "Good Poems"

Altogether, "Good Poems," Charles Guenther is a despite its unconventional St. Louis poet and translator.



choices and incomplete "bio notes," can take its place beside any new or recent anthology of poetry in our language. It has pure entertainment as well.