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## A High School Senior with a Voice for Poetry

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LINDA WERTHEIMER, host: You're listening to WEEKEND EDITION from NPR News. This week high school students from all 50 states and Washington, D.C. came to the capital to compete in the national finals of Poetry Out Loud! The winner, who is from Columbus, Ohio, is Jackson Hille. It's not just fame and glory Mr. Hille earned, but a \$20,000 scholarship to college.

Jackson Hille joins us from Columbus. Welcome.

Mr. JACKSON HILLE (Winner, Poetry Out Loud!): Thank you.

WERTHEIMER: Now, you don't have to write poetry for this competition, you recite it. So which poems did you pick to carry you through the competition?

Mr. HILLE: A Satirical Elegy on the Death of a Late Famous General by Jonathan Swift; Altruism by Molly Peacock; and Forgetfulness by Billy Collins.

WERTHEIMER: Well now, why on earth did you pick Jonathan Swift?

Mr. HILLE: Jonathan Swift is hilarious. He has a sense of sarcasm and satire that I use in my own humor. And so it was just finding a poem that I could relate to.

WERTHEIMER: What about the others?

Mr. HILLE: Altruism, it was romantic in that silly kind of way that I like so much. And the same with Billy Collins. It's got a real melancholy to it, but it's also a really just funny poem.

WERTHEIMER: Well, can we hear it?

Mr. HILLE: Certainly. Forgetfulness by Billy Collins. The name of the author is the first to go, followed obediently by the title, the plot, the heartbreaking conclusion, the entire novel, which suddenly becomes one you have never read, never even heard of. As if one-by-one the memories you used to harbor decided to retire to the southern hemisphere of the brain, to a remote fishing village where there are no phones.

Long ago you kissed the names of the nine muses goodbye and watched the quadratic equation pack its bag. And even now as you memorize the order of the planets, something else is slipping away. A state flower perhaps, the address of an uncle, the capital of Paraguay.

Whatever it is you are struggling to remember, it is not poised on the tip of your tongue or even lurking in some obscure corner of your spleen. It has drifted off down a dark, mythological river whose name begins an L as far as you can recall, well on your own way to oblivion where you will join those who have even forgotten how to swim and how to ride a bicycle.

No wonder you rise in the middle of the night to look up the date of a famous battle and a book on war. No wonder the moon in the window seems to have drifted out of a love poem you used to know by heart.

Forgetfulness by Billy Collins.

WERTHEIMER: Jackson Hille won the Poetry Out Loud! national competition this week. He is

headed to Otterbein College in Westerville, Ohio. Thank you for your time and good luck in college.

Mr. HILLE: Thank you so much for having me.

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