

Being Sonny Rollins

*One of the dangers of piping Sonny Rollins
into my earbuds on my morning outing
is that I start wishing that I were Sonny Rollins
as I face again the blunt fact that I am not.*

*I usually run along a curvy cinder path
on the edge of a lake that sparkles in the sun.
I spot a heron, a pair of ducks and 5 white ibises,
but the fact remains that I am still not Sonny Rollins.*

*I watch hundreds of scattered black birds
wheeling and squawking in the sky
but that cowbell intro to "I'm an Old Cow Hand"
reminds me that I am someone other than Sonny Rollins.*

*Most of the runners and dog walkers
give me some kind of morning greeting.
Then a guy about my age shoots me a look
that says There's no way you are Sonny Rollins.*

*That does it. If I am not Sonny Rollins,
then none of you other people are either.
Not you in the track suit or you with the collie—
not one Sonny Rollins in the pack of you.*

*And so I began exercising the muscles
of sarcasm as I continued to put down
everyone in sight for being inferior
to Sonny Rollins and every other jazz giant,*

*a pointless habit that ended only
when I found you at home in the kitchen,
you who have no desire to be Sonny Rollins,
you who dream only of being Anita O'Day.*

—Billy Collins

Last weekend, I read Billy's poem to Sonny. Sonny roared with laughter, adding, "Oh, wow. Yeah, I've heard of Billy Collins. That's great, man." Two superb artists communicating with each other and expressive admiration.

