



# Chaparral updrafts

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## The Post Natural World: an interview with Gary Snyder

By John Felstiner

*One of the original voices of the Beat Generation, Gary Snyder has been publishing poems for over 50 years. In addition to writing poems, Snyder has had a firm commitment to sustainability, a concern that is echoed in both his poems and essays.*

**JOHN FELSTINER: On the BART train this morning, someone said to me, "Ask Gary for one haiku I can take home with me."**

GARY SNYDER: I don't remember who wrote this one, but . . .

Walking on the roof of hell gazing at the flowers.

**That haiku makes me think of William Carlos Williams' challenge to poets toward the end of "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower":**

**It is difficult  
to get the news from poems  
yet men die miserably every day  
for lack  
of what is found there.**

**Are haiku a concrete instance of us getting the environmental news from poetry?**

More than any other literary tradition on earth, it has been the language of the natural world, and has had an enormously large readership for two and a half centuries. It is not a literary career; it's an exercise in mind-focus that everyone shares. And they have not yet exhausted it; that is to say, there are major Japanese newspapers that still have a daily haiku page. Daily commentaries are provided by one or another of Japan's most eminent haiku writers; they are sent in by the thousands, and the critics take one haiku and comment on it.

**But given the "roof of hell" haiku you just recited, it seems that you don't worry about the five-seven-five syllable count?**

That's for Japanese language. The ratio of morphemes to phonemes is different in English and in Japanese. I am in touch with the American haiku people and their magazines, like *Modern Haiku*. The position I take, and there's several others who join me on this, is not to worry about syllable count. That's a Japanese challenge, not an English language challenge.

I have vigorously declared when necessary that I am not a haiku poet, and that very few of my very short poems qualify as haiku. Haiku is a different aesthetic, which is very specialized. In the rest of the world, there are a number of short-poem traditions that are not necessarily haiku, but which are equally powerful and to the point.

**Do you remember some moment in your recent or remote past when you got the connection between**

**poetry and environmental consciousness, where you felt it as a kind of absolute truth?**

I grew up with it. Beginning when I was four years old, five years old, in the countryside, in a wooded landscape north of Seattle, back in the days when kids weren't programmed. We just ran loose around the family dairy farm and went through the gap in the fence and right back into the woods. I felt as welcome and as much at home in the forest, second-growth forest growing back, as I did anywhere else, and I was comforted by it. I was always easy being alone. And if I went with a friend, that was fine too.

So I grew up [with] a natural conviviality and sympathy and sense of belonging in the whole natural world. My parents were socialist-minded agnostics who did not subscribe to any Christian doctrine. My mother supported the idea that we should be aware and sympathetic to all of nature, and also taught that there was no transcendental deity that was set apart from the creation.

**Was there any moment or moment within a particular poem when the nexus between poetry and**

*continued on page two, 'Gary Snyder'*

## The vigorous, meandering notebooks of Robert Frost

*A collection of 40 lined pads expose the thoughts and ideas that shaped his verses*

More than 40 years after his death, Robert Frost remains America's quintessential poet and perhaps its least understood. So much of his work appears simple on the surface, while dark, mysterious currents swirl beneath. If there were a key to unlock those hidden riches, or explain the dualism throughout, many would eagerly buy it.

What some may reach for instead is *The Notebooks of Robert Frost*, a collection of his private jottings now being published in their entirety for the first time. Here, readers will find access to the thoughts and observations of the four-time Pulitzer Prize winner.

These do not include, however, glimpses into Frost's personal life, his private pains, or family stories. Nor

*continued on back page: 'Robert Frost'*

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## Wordsworth goes hip-hop with the help of a squirrel

To mark the bicentennial of the publication of William Wordsworth's poem "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," the tourist board of Cumbria, a region in northwestern England, has filmed a hip-hop version of the poem being recited—or rapped—by a squirrel. MC Nuts, the mascot for the region's Lake District, delivered his performance on the banks of Lake Ullswater, which was the original inspiration for the poem.

A spokeswoman for Cumbria Tourism said the video, which can be viewed at <[www.golakes.co.uk/wordsworthrap](http://www.golakes.co.uk/wordsworthrap)>, is intended to convey the message to the YouTube generation that it's hip for young people to visit Lake District National Park.

Wordsworth, famous for his book-length autobiographical poem *The Interlude*, was born in Cockermouth in 1770. According to the Wordsworth Trust, the poem "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," remembered for its daffodils, was written in 1804, two years after the poet saw the flowers while walking by Ullswater on a stormy day with his younger sister Dorothy. He published the poem in 1807. A second version, published in 1815, is the one widely known today.

## Gary Snyder interview: environmental thoughts

continued from page one

**environmental consciousness came home to you?**

You know, it would have been first with Walt Whitman, although Whitman just embraces everything, so you get nature and everything else too. The next step for me was discovering the *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* collection of poems by D. H. Lawrence, which I stumbled onto, actually, looking for *Lady Chatterley's Lover* when I was seventeen or sixteen at the Seattle Public Library. Of course they didn't have the novel, but they did have *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*. That was a wonderful awakening to the fact that you can be absolutely straightforward and clear in taking nature as a subject.

**How would one distinguish an environmental poem from what is sometimes called an ecological poem?**

Look at the words. "Environment" means the surroundings. The surroundings can include an oil refinery, can include all of Los Angeles and the I-5 strip. That's the environment too, whatever surrounds us.

**So there's an "us" in "environment."**

Everything surrounds everything else. Yes. What is "ecological"? Etymologically, the "household of nature" is what's being called up. "Ecological" refers to the systems of biological nature, which include energy, and mineral and chemical transformations and pathways. "The environment" is used more commonly to also include human and technological productions. And it's not an absolute, hard and fast separation...

**Have you written poems that could be qualified as one way or the other, or as both together—environmental and ecological?**

The best example of how you can cross the line is in this little book right here, *Danger on Peaks*.

"In the Santa Clarita Valley": That is the first valley north of the San Fernando Valley on Interstate 5. There's a little river there, and it has become almost entirely suburban development now. Here's the poem:

Like skinny wildweed flowers sticking up  
hexagonal "Denny's" sign  
starry "Carl's"  
loopy "McDonald's"  
eight-petaled yellow "Shell"  
blue-and-white "Mobil" with a big red "O"  
growing in the asphalt riparian zone  
by the soft roar of the flow  
of Interstate 5.

This is playing with the possibility that we might look at the human, physical, made environment as if it were natural environment.

**So we move from "Mobil" into a "riparian zone."**

Yeah.

**And hear that word "flow" for the highway.**

Right, it's ironic. I comment when I read this in meetings, that this is to help prepare us for a postnatural age. For writing nature poems in a postnatural age.

**What's always struck me is how your poems move through time and space—say, for example, in *Riprap*. First, it's about being at a mountain lookout in '52 and '53; then, before we know it, without your giving us any warning, we're in Kyoto, Japan. What makes this seamless movement? What's happening as you pass between wild America and Japanese culture?**

Well, it's also wild Japan, too. The third step is when I left Japan for a while on my seaman's papers. I shipped out from the Yokohama harbor and sailed in the South Pacific and the Indian Ocean on several trips. Ah, so that also is just flowing right through it too.

Asia is far, far west. You have to understand that we are in the eastern Pacific. East and west no longer mean what they meant for the rest of the Occidental world. How does one get from the West Coast to Asia? Well, if you're a working person and you have seaman's papers, you sign on to a job and work your way somewhere. I did that back and forth across the Pacific Ocean as a working seaman two times. I had my little handbooks of ocean weather and birds and ocean fish, and I could keep track of where I was that way.

**In this society we are burdened by the Abrahamic tradition—God's giving us dominion over earth and its creatures. The Hebrew word for "dominion" even means "tyrant." But I find other things, in *Genesis* plus *Job* and *Psalms*, which do speak to us. That great litany of wild nature that God challenges *Job* with, and the *Psalms'* rolling praise of earth's plenty.**

Yes, it's the Abraham story in *Genesis*, where everything is framed in terms of the poisonous covenant that grants that occupied country to Abraham and his followers, namely Canaan, the Promised Land. The Promised Land is a toxic image that the Occidental world has used as an excuse for going on to the next conquest ever since. And you know, the final poor end result of that is that California was called the Promised Land up to a few years ago.

Yet also, there's a lot of good common sense in the Torah. It is Neolithic. It has nothing to do with Yahweh. It's in the empirical and common-

# Monthly Contest Winners

on the topic of *Hares, Lions and Lambs*

## Eclipse

On dreamy light  
She stood before me  
In a gown  
Of royal blue.

In her hand  
A lily white,  
A lion by her side.

I walked toward her.  
Marigolds bloomed  
Where I stepped.

I stopped.

Thunder sounded.  
Sunshine vanished,  
And the storm grew.

Dark clouds  
Raced across the sky  
Like panthers.

The lady smiled  
There in the rain.  
She raised her hand  
In command.

Two fingers  
Led the moon  
To cross the sun,  
And the world  
Shadowed in eclipse.

—Judith Lyn Sutton, Campbell, CA  
*First Place, March*

This poem appeared in a collection called *Jubilation*, published in 2001 by Beat Books, which included the work of 20 poets including Jack Kerouac and William Everson.

## Mountain House Garden

Brown suited farmers  
tend sour cherry bushes  
near the house,  
harvest first crop  
with scarlet snouts,  
purple paws.

Groom each plant  
to await a  
second yield.  
Leave ruby seed  
in scat to root, and  
bloom in rocky soil,  
awaiting  
next autumn.

—Patricia Dreyfus, Corona Del Mar, CA  
*Second Place, March*

## A Pair of Two

Moss green and two shades of pink  
past which two white bunnies wandered

clutching silver purses, one on each  
open arm, strolling hand-in-hand,

whistling two lovely tunes  
on the second day of May.

On breezy spring days my twin and I  
would crouch near the garden gate.

I loved Short Bunny with sequined purple vest;  
she adored Tall One with periwinkle shawl.

“Let us join them.” Falling in line behind  
we dance into sparkling sunbeams.

—Carol Moon Harp, Sacramento, CA  
*Third Place, March*

sense tradition of agrarian subsistence cultures.

**So many of us find ourselves preaching to the converted 99 percent of the time. Is poetry, your poetry, getting out to the common reader, people who don't know the terms “reinhabitation” and “bioregion”?**

Well, I write prose as well as poetry. I never use the word “reinhabitation” or “bioregion” in poetry. [Laughter] So, I mean, I see my prose as serving one function, and my poetry is another. It's true I've written a number of poems that are very, very accessible, and I'm happy to do that. And some of them come out of the world of work

and daily life in such a way that people can read them with no difficulty.

**Any other such poems in *Danger on Peaks*?**

Yes, it's almost all accessible, but it has a few little tricks and twists and turns in it, too. Which is part of the fun of being a writer. And it can be said that if you're a literate person and you're writing a book, you are already addressing the choir. The literate, reading population is the choir in that sense. I also like to think about the pre-literate oral tradition, and how it was performed for people who don't necessarily read and write at all.

**I have a memory of your reading at the ASLE**

**[Association for the Study of Literature and Environment] conference a little over a year ago.**

In Eugene?

**In Eugene, right. I took some notes about your way of presenting poems. This is from my June 2005 notebooks:**

*moving from a deep voice to a tenor, varying speed, volume, tone, intensity, emphasis, with sudden enunciations, hands gesturing, fingers pointing, often with a comical shrug, facial turns and shakes and glances.*

*continued on page five: “Gary Snyder”*

# The 'hard poem,' a sort of fiction: is it discernible or

by Kwame Dawes

A graduate student in my verse composition class said recently, "I don't want to write poems that can be read in five minutes." He did not mean, by this, that he wanted to write epics. He meant that he wanted his poems to demand more of the reader than might a five minute gander. I wondered how long would be enough. Ten minutes? Twenty minutes? An hour? Five hours? A year? Had we but world enough and time..., I thought. But I did not say that. I did say that perhaps a good poem could be apprehended in five minutes. He countered that any poem that could be fully apprehended in five minutes was invariably a weak poem, a superficial poem. We were, I could tell, slowly moving towards the aesthetic of the "hard poem". He believed in the hard poem—the poem that demanded more of us. That is the kind of poem he wants to write.

I am not entirely convinced of the merits of the hard poem. Indeed, I am not sure that spending a long time with a poem is a particularly good thing in and of itself. I am not sure that a quick and immediate response to a poem is a bad thing at all. Most haiku can be apprehended quite quickly

## John Hollander named winner of the Frost Medal

John Hollander, who was recently named Connecticut Poet Laureate, has also been honored by the Board of Governors of the Poetry Society of America as the recipient of the 2007 Frost Medal.

### An Old-Fashioned Song

No more walks in the wood:  
The trees have all been cut  
Down, and where once they stood  
Not even a wagon rut  
Appears along the path  
Low brush is taking over.

No more walks in the wood;  
This is the aftermath  
Of afternoons in the clover  
Fields where we once made love  
Then wandered home together  
Where the trees arched above,  
Where we made our own weather  
When branches were the sky.

Now they are gone for good,  
And you, for ill, and I  
Am only a passer-by.

We and the trees and the way  
Back from the fields of play  
Lasted as long as we could.  
No more walks in the wood.

Hollander has written 29 books of poems, 10 books of criticism, over 300 articles and reviews, *continued on page six, "Hollander"*

in less than thirty seconds, less than the time it takes us to read them. Does that make them less profound? And in many of the best haiku, we can return to them later on and discover something new, something we had not grasped the first time around. Does that mean that we should add another ten days to the period of gestation before understanding of the poem arrives?

My student was really expressing concern (and a hint of complaint) about the workshop. He was suspicious of the quality of comments that could be made about a poem after only ten minutes of looking at it. He worried that much of what could be appreciated about a poem in such a short space of time would have to be superficial. I expressed my own suspicion that he was also suggesting that his own experience of having his work looked at in the class under such circumstances may explain why there was not always stellar praise for his work. More than likely, people just did not get the work because they had not spent enough time with it.

There has to be some truth to this. Perhaps people need to mull over poems for longer periods before they say anything about it. But the experience of reading poems is hardly like that. For the most part we make quick assessments of poems after only one reading, and sometimes, having only read a stanza of the poem. One would not get away with that in an academic setting, but is poetry only read in school and just to answer some essay prompt? We hope not. We hope that people come to poems like they come to biographies and memoirs and novels—open to discovering something new, and yet with a trigger sharp discriminating attitude that will make them dump a work without giving it a second thought. That first blush has to hold some power, hold some weight, it has to take us in somehow, making us want to read more.

I could have expounded on the real life value of the quick read, on the importance of first glances, on the necessity for a poem to work at its most superficial level if it is to work on a deeper level. I could have gone on at length about that, but instead I felt a need to try and tackle what I worried was a romanticizing of the mystique of the poem, a kind of preciousness about the poem that made the "harder" poems seem more valuable. There is just too much going on in a poem for one to come at it so lightly and casually, it said. Really good poetry makes you think long and hard, and invariably you don't arrive at epiphany and revelation until you have meditated in the work at length. So I embarked on a bit of a rant about how easy it is to tell if a poem is working well or if it is not. I went on about the deception of the allusion and its capacity, depending on the depths of its obscurity, to genuinely mystify readers of poetry, and in the process turn

them on. The allusion, I said, was more often than not, the cause for confusion, puzzlement and uncertainty for people who area reading poems. Ezra Pound in his quite snobbish listing of all the great works that have to be read before anyone can begin to understand contemporary poetry, did a great deal for the hard poem. Basically, he argued that unless one has read a quite impressive and specific list of authors (most in their original language) then one could not begin to view oneself as educated and thus capable of reading a strong poem. Pound was offering up the blue print of the hard poem. Allusion, first and foremost. Twisted syntax, multiple ellipsis and the eschewing of the linear fell in line behind the allusion when it comes to ranking what makes a poem hard.

I struggled with *The Wasteland* as an undergraduate. I enjoyed the language, the structure, the ruggedness of the project. But I often did not like the way the poem's notes made me feel. They made me feel like an ignorant person for even beginning to want to understand the poem. Two months later, armed with the key to all the allusions, I suddenly felt brighter, alert, and capable of reading the entire poem without anxiety. Now I knew the codes, the language, even the most difficult poem begins to feel fairly ordinary. So I argued that one of the most important skills we all brought to the class was our capacity to read for the allusion and to know where it is going quite quickly. In other words, I was arguing that poetry is a convention and one filled with tricks of the trade. The more I know about it, the less time I will have to spend on poems that I think are not especially enduring or fulfilling. Once the mystique of the allusion is taken away, the raw poem, chuck full of metaphors and similes and adjectives—oh, the wearying adjectives—becomes an ordinary thing and it will ask the question, "So what?"

I was saying, in other words, that "hard" can be quantified, can be dissected; can be understood. Hard was not a subjective thing. Hard could be worked out quite quickly as long as one has the allusions in hand or in the head.

What I should have said was that that first glance, that look that helps the reader to say, "I like this book. I am not sure why. But I do. I will read on," is a crucial look in that it provides exactly the kind of data that we want first investigators to come up with. We want to know what is useful in the outward shape of the poem. We want to know a great deal about its structure and organization. We want to have some assurance that if we invest in the poem, the pay off will be worth the time and effort. We can't always be assured of this, and there is some truth to the idea that people should get into the habit of coming back to poems several times before giving up on them

## does inscrutability make it better?

after one reading. But the truth is that people are not going to be so generous most of the time, and a poem, should, at some level offer up something. And this is discernible in the first two reads of the poem. More easily discernible than MFA student poets can sometimes be aware of.

I know that this last statement might well draw the tongue of a number of people. Those people, for instance, who hold to the view that poetry is simply not for everybody and in just the same way that Jeopardy is not for everybody, poetry is for those people willing to invest the time. They will say that poets who try to write for everybody are in fact selling themselves short and are likely to produce work that is simply bad poetry. There is some truth to this. But I have to say that even someone like me, a clearly devoted reader of poetry and someone fully inscribed in the poetry world, am subject to the first glance approach to reading a poem in so many different situations. When someone walks up to me and says to me, "Can you look at my poem for me and tell me what you think?" while handing me a tattered piece of lined paper with tidy writing scrawled across it, I know I don't have more than a few minutes. When I am staring at a pile of six to seven hundred poems entered for a contest that I have to screen, I know that the poem has no more than a few seconds to win my interest or attention; when I am given a manuscript of poems to review for another poet, I know that I won't be able to spend a lot of time on each poem, returning to the poem after a week of contemplating it. None of these are ideal settings for reading poems, but they are critical moments in the life of many poems.

In the best of worlds, poems live with us. When we memorize poems they live with us with even greater rewards. We return to them, discover new things about them, and discover new things about us as we mature into our understanding of the poems. This is what the best poems will do, and this is what poetry should do. But a workshop is not such a world and sometimes we have to face the sad fact that the workshop is an artificial environment, an environment that only simulates what happens when a poem enters the world. It is a pale copy of it, but one that offers us some helpful ideas as to how to build poems and shape them, nonetheless. I come to the workshop with mixed feelings, and I encourage those in the workshop to look outside of the workshop for their expansion as poets. If they grow outside of the workshop, if their poems mature and become more sophisticated outside of the workshop, if, that is, those poets have a poetic life outside of the workshop, such poets are more likely to continue in the trade than those who do not. The hard poem can happen in a workshop, but the hard poem does not demand as much time as we think. The

hard poem must still promise some pay off.

Finally, the "sort of fiction". Well, the conversation with my student did not quite happen in exactly this way, although it happened and

## Gary Snyder discusses his work and influences

*continued from page three*

**When you're writing a poem, in your inner ear, do you already sense any of this activity?**

I do indeed. And I really believe in the performance of poems; I believe poetry is an oral art, fundamentally. I hear a lot in my inner ear, of course, especially having done it for so many years, but then I finally learn more when I start performing a poem in public. That's the last lesson.

You move through the gestures as you read the poem. There's something physical in language. The gestures (in some languages more than others) go along with speech.

**How do poems come to you?**

You know, the writing is secondary. I often compose the better part of a poem in my mind before I ever write it down.

**You compose when you're walking outdoors?**

Ah, sometimes, walking around doing physical work. Oh yeah, I'm doing work all the time. I compose while I'm working. When I was working on ships, I did a lot of menial chipping paint down in the hull and repainting down inside the lowest levels. And I wrote little poems in my pocket spiral notebook.

**What are you working on now?**

My publisher is going to bring out two previously published books of mine that have never been very available; one is *He Who Hunted Birds in His Father's Village*, which is the retelling and analysis of a traditional Haida Indian story. This was my undergraduate thesis at Reed College, which was published as a book in 1959. A lot more work has been done on Haida oral literature since that time, particularly by Robert Bringhurst, who is a kind of classical linguistic thinker and poet, a Canadian, who lives in British Columbia. He has written a three-volume work on Haida oral literature. The story that my thesis is about is a version of the Swan Maiden Tale, which is found worldwide.

Then we're bringing out a new edition of my little Grey Fox Press book called *Passage through India*, an account of the six months' travel in India that I did in the early '60s with Joanne Kyger, Peter Orlovsky, and Allen Ginsberg.

And now I have a book of prose essays just out, called *Back on the Fire*.

**That's an ambiguous but exciting title!**

In terms of forest management and marshland

the matters explored here were at stake in that conversation. But I offer this odd disclaimer because I am aware of the seductive tyranny of the narrative and the debate. My journalistic commitments are rather thin in this instance, and I thought if useful to make that clear.

management, it means to be a partner with fire and not treat it as an enemy.

**We were speaking of Williams' "It is difficult / to get the news from poems / yet men die miserably every day / for lack / of what is found there." In 1950 or so he took his Western tour, and he came to Reed, where you were with your poet friends. Is there anything specific you remember about that event?**

There were several young people other than myself who were all writing poetry at that time, including Philip Whalen, William Dickey, Lew Welch, and several others. We did not have a formal poetry program yet at Reed, but we had Professor Lloyd Reynolds, who also was our calligraphy teacher. He was a kind of an expert on William Blake too, and had a print shop up on the top floor of one of the buildings where he taught people how to set type. He actually hosted Williams, who stayed at his house.

We all had one-on-one meetings with Bill Williams where he read our poems and gave us some little comments, said it was okay, made some points in regard to a couple of individual lines. And then there was a kind of a colloquium with a larger number of students in one of the meeting rooms. What stayed with me was how he said ultimately the poet, the artist, brings to society and to the world "conviviality." That surprised me and stayed with me: conviviality.

He said art is about conviviality. I saw instantly that this goes past the idea of the solitary, romantic, lonely artist suffering for his art, which I never trusted. And the acknowledgment that artists have a role in society, which is to contribute to the community — to the heart of the community.

To take Williams' statement that people "die for lack of what is found there," I think this means lack of open-heartedness, lack of sweetness and tenderness to each other. But then a little later I saw that meaning also as ecological, that openness not just for the human community but for the natural community; it's for our immediate neighborhood of all the other species, all of us passing through time. I get angered when the bears eat my apples right off the tree. But I can say well, okay, they got to them first; they must have enjoyed them.

*An online feature article published by the Poetry Foundation* <<http://poetryfoundation.org/features/feature.onpoets.html?id=179396>>

## Hollander receives honors for lifetime of poetry

*continued from page four*  
and he has edited and co-edited 27 books on poetry, literature and the arts. His works include *Picture Window* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), *Selected Poetry* (1993), and *A Crackling of Thorns* (Yale University Press, 1958), chosen by W. H. Auden for the Yale Series of Younger Poets. His books of criticism include *The Work of Poetry* (Columbia University Press, 1997) and *Rhyme's Reason* (Yale, 1981) and among the collections he has edited or co-edited are *Committed to Memory: 100 Best Poems to Memorize* (Riverhead, 1996) and *Nineteenth Century American Poetry* (Library of America, 1993).



Hollander's honors include the Bollingen Prize, the Levinson Prize, and the MLA Shaughnessy Medal, as well as fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the MacArthur Founda-

tion, and the National Endowment for the Arts. A former Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets and the current Poet Laureate of Connecticut, he has taught at Connecticut College, Hunter College, the CUNY Graduate Center, and Yale University, where is currently the Sterling Professor emeritus of English.

The Frost Medal recognizes him for achievement in and contribution to American Poetry. PSA's announcement

stated:

John Hollander's credo is the poem. Perhaps for him the ultimate purpose of thought and language is the making of the poem. Poetry and its champions are not always noticed and not often rewarded. We salute John Hollander for his reverence for words, for his allegiance to them, for his intimacy with the meaning they carry, the

## Poet's Choice: Henri Cole's *Blackbird and Wolf*

by Robert Pinsky

One pleasure of art comes from how accurately it can convey ambivalence. In a poem, form can have things both ways at once, emotionally: understated and bold, dark and bright, somber and funny, painful and cool, angry and sympathetic. Here is "Oil & Steel" from Henri Cole's new book:

My father lived in a dirty-dish mausoleum,  
watching a portable black-and-white television,  
reading the Encyclopaedia Britannica,  
which he preferred to Modern Fiction.  
One by one, his schnauzers died of liver  
disease,  
except the one that guarded his corpse  
found holding a tumbler of Bushmills.  
"Dead is dead," he would say, an anti-  
preacher.  
I took a plaid shirt from the bedroom closet  
and some motor oil — my inheritance.  
Once, I saw him weep in a courtroom —  
neglected, needing nursing — this man who  
never showed  
me much affection but gave me a knack  
for solitude, which has been mostly useful.

This poem confirms that strong emotions are mixed emotions. Poetry can express, with precision, forever unresolved feelings like these.

"Oil & Steel" has 14 lines, like a sonnet. Instead of end rhyme, its lines often conclude with slight, polysyllabic echoes of consonant or vowel: "mausoleum," "television," "fiction," for example. A similar muffled similarity associates the sounds of "Bushmills," "courtroom," "useful." In relation to ambivalence, sonnets

traditionally turn after the eighth line, taking a new, sometimes contradictory direction in the final six. "Oil & Steel" does that subtly when, after the father's "Dead is dead," the poem takes a somewhat softer, memorial turn with "I took a plaid shirt from the bedroom closet."

In another poem, "Self-Portrait With Red Eyes," Cole expresses double feelings with a less traditional structure in 14 lines. A lover's presence and absence correspond to two units divided precisely in the middle — seven lines about having and seven lines about lacking:

Throughout our affair of eleven years,  
disappearing into the pleasure-unto-death  
acts I recall now as love and, afterward,  
orbiting through the long, deep sleeps  
in which memory, motor of everything,  
reconstituted itself, I cared nothing about  
life outside the walls of our bedroom.

The hand erasing writes the real thing,  
and I am trying. I loved life and see now  
this was a weakness. I loved the little  
births and deaths occurring in us daily.  
Even the white spit on your sharp teeth  
was the foam of love, saying to me: It is not true,  
after all, that you were never loved.

In both poems, the final line and a half works a little like a Shakespearean sonnet's couplet, resolving or summarizing mingled feelings of hurt and redemption.

(Henri Cole's poems "Oil & Steel" and "Self-Portrait with Red Eyes" are from his book "Blackbird and Wolf." Farrar Straus Giroux. Copyright 2007 by Henri Cole.) © 2007 The Washington Post Company

## Clifton wins Ruth Lilly Prize

The Poetry Foundation recently announced that Lucille Clifton will receive this year's Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize. The annual award honors a U.S. poet "whose lifetime accomplishments warrant extraordinary recognition." This recognition comes in the form of a \$100,000 check.

She has published twelve books of poems since 1969—the year her debut, *Good Times*, was released by Random House. Her poetry has been translated into Norwegian, Spanish, French, Japanese, and other languages. She was the first writer to have two poetry collections chosen as finalists for the Pulitzer Prize—*Good Woman: Poems and a Memoir, 1969-1980* and *Next*, both published by BOA Editions in 1987 and nominated in 1988. She won a National Book Award in 1999 for *Blessing the Boats: New and Selected Poems, 1988-2000* (BOA Editions, 2000). And she served as Maryland's poet laureate from 1974 to 1985.

Previous winners of the Ruth Lilly Prize, established in 1986, are Adrienne Rich (1986), John Ashbery (1992), A. R. Ammons (1996), W. S. Merwin (1998), Yusef Komunyakaa (2001), and Richard Wilbur (2006).

## Trethewey wins 2007 Pulitzer

Natasha Trethewey won the 2007 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry for *Native Guard* (Houghton Mifflin). Also nominated were Martín Espada for *The Republic of Poetry* (Norton) and David Wojahn for *Interrogation Palace: New & Selected Poems 1982-2004* (University of Pittsburgh Press).

The prize includes a \$10,000 cash award.

## Recent winners of Pulitzer in Poetry

2006 Claudie Emerson for *Late Wife*  
2005 Ted Kooser for *Delights & Shadows*  
2004 Franz Wright for *Walking to Martha's Vineyard*  
2003 Paul Muldoon for *Moy Sand and Gravel*  
2002 Carl Dennis for *Practical Gods*  
2001 Stephen Dunn for *Different Hours*  
2000 C.K. Williams for *Repair*

## Szymaszek succeeds Berrigan as Poetry Project Director

The St. Mark's Poetry Project in New York City recently announced that poet Stacy Szymaszek has been named artistic director of the 41-year-old nonprofit organization. She succeeds Anselm Berrigan, who held the position for the past four years.

Szymaszek, who was born and raised in Milwaukee, previously served as literary program manager of that city's nonprofit Woodland Pattern Book Center. She is the author of the poetry collection *Emptied of All Ships* (Litmus Press, 2005) and several chapbooks, including *Pasolini Poems* (Cy Press, 2005) and *Some Mariners* (Etherdome, 2004).

## Now's the time to get your creative juices flowing!

How do you advertise your poetry? What do you say to let your friends know you've written another masterpiece, or even just something light and entertaining?

The topics are new for this year, so don't retain any old versions of this page that might still be on your desk, or else the poems you submit might not be for the correct topics or you might not have followed the current rules. The rules did change a bit a few months ago, to make things clearer and the process smoother to operate. Notice that line length does *not* include the title or blank spaces, and you are asked for *two* copies of each poem.

It's still a good time for recruiting new members, so that they can attend the Convention and get to know us better. For your convenience we have included the membership form below. If you know of anyone who neglected to renew their membership and wants to re-join, give them this form, but first run off a few blank copies to have available for recruitment.

It's a great idea to place copies of this page on the bulletin board at local libraries and universities, and to carry a few copies with you to hand to friends and acquaintances. One-to-one discussion is our best ally as we continue the drive to increase membership. We need your help!

## 2007 CFCP, Inc. Monthly Contests

*Except where otherwise indicated, poems are limited to 28 lines of text. All forms accepted for all categories.*

<b>JANUARY</b>	— Turnabout
<b>FEBRUARY</b>	— Landscape of Winter
<b>MARCH</b>	— Hares, Lions, Lambs
<b>APRIL</b>	— How to Advertise a Poem
<b>MAY</b>	— Spring Moon
<b>JUNE</b>	— Looking Forward
<b>JULY</b>	— <i>no contest</i>
<b>AUGUST</b>	— Doldrums or Daydreams?
<b>SEPTEMBER</b>	— Memories, Altered
<b>OCTOBER</b>	— Smoke <i>(12 lines or fewer)</i>
<b>NOVEMBER</b>	— Fences
<b>DECEMBER</b>	— <i>no contest</i>

### RULES

Contests are open to all poets in the United States and Canada. Each submission must be typewritten on standard size paper with the contest month in the upper right-hand corner. Send **TWO COPIES** of each poem with author's name and address in the upper right corner on **ONE** copy. Put no identification on the second copy. Address labels are acceptable. Multiple entries are welcome.

Only **UNPUBLISHED POEMS** and poems not previously awarded a money prize are eligible. A fee of \$2.00 must accompany each poem submitted (3 for \$5.00). Send cash or make checks to CFCP, Inc. **DEADLINE** is the last day of the contest month. Envelope must be postmarked no later than 12 midnight of that day. *Print contest month on outside of mailing envelope.*

**NOTE:** *In any month wherein insufficient entries are received, those poems which were submitted will be held over and judged with the entries for the following month.*

**1st prize: \$25.00    2nd prize: \$15.00    3rd prize: \$10.00**

*Poems will be returned only if a stamped, self-addressed envelope is enclosed. Allow one month after closing date of contest before sending poems elsewhere. Winning poems will be printed in the **Chaparral Updrafts** newsletter.*

**CALIFORNIA  
FEDERATION  
of CHAPARRAL  
POETS, INC.**

➔ Cleo Griffith  
mail contest Monthly Contest Chair, CFCP, Inc.  
entries to 4409 Diamond Court  
Salida, CA 95368-9632  
<cleor36@yahoo.com>



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I definitely want to be a member of the  
**California Federation of Chaparral Poets, Inc.** for the year 2007.

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I PREFER TO RECEIVE MY *UPDRAFTS* NEWSLETTER BY: \_\_\_\_\_ E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_ US MAIL

*Your membership includes all issues of the newsletter; Updrafts, free entry in the Annual Contest, Monthly Contest information, and Membership Roster every 2 years during the membership period. All memberships renew between 8/1 and 12/31 yearly. Persons joining between February 1 and July 31 will use the pro-rated formula. New memberships received between August 1 and December 31 will be extended for the following full year.*

**\* Those who desire to continue membership with a chapter, please remit dues to your local chapter treasurer.**

### How to Become a Member

*check the appropriate item:*

_____ Membership Annual/Renewal .....	\$15 <sup>00</sup>
_____ New Member (February 1 to April 30) .....	\$12 <sup>00</sup>
_____ New Member (May 1 to July 31) .....	\$7 <sup>50</sup>
_____ Spouse (1/2 regular member) .....	\$7 <sup>50</sup> , \$6 <sup>00</sup> , or \$3 <sup>75</sup>
_____ Junior (under 21; show proof of age) .....	\$3 <sup>00</sup>
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\_\_\_\_\_ We wish to form a Chapter of our own (5 or more Regular Members are required to form a new Chapter) to be called \_\_\_\_\_

**Members-at-Large:** Clip this form and mail along with a check or money order **made payable to CFCP, Inc.** to:  
Frances Jordan, Members-at-Large Chairman, 2575 W. San Jose Avenue, Fresno, CA 93711-2733.

**All Others:** Send this form along with a check or money order **made payable to CFCP, Inc.** to:  
CFCP Treasurer, P.O. Box 1750, Empire, CA 95319.

# Robert Frost's notebooks offer glimpse into creative process

*continued from page one*

do these notebooks offer explanations of his work.

What can be found is intellect in action, as Frost explores literature, history, philosophy, and religion. The voice is similar to that in his verse – clear, authoritative, sometimes sharp or funny – but the currents flowing through these pages predate those in the poetry, meaning that the water is colder and deeper, not a warm, easy dip.

Editor Robert Faggen, the preeminent Frost scholar, does help readers take the plunge. His introduction to the notebooks, more than 40 in all, is insightful and pitch-perfect.

“His poetry has become to many an alternative to the complexity and despair of modernity,” Faggen writes, “Yet Frost himself emphasized the ephemeral quality of moral order and often took pleasure in uncertainty and chaos.”

That complexity colors the notebooks, whether Frost is jotting down aphorisms, lines for a poem, or lecture notes about writing and art. The thinking is rigorous and bold, and often explores “dark sayings,” proverbs or ideas that require deep thought.

Take, for example, these sentences: “The mind of man is an unvicious circle that no desperation can break through. Knowledge is the same.”

Faggen begins each section with a physical description of the notebook, many of which were dimestore spiral pads. He also annotates some of Frost’s more cryptic references and highlights thematic connections. He does not play tour guide, however; readers must explore the wilderness themselves.

Those who are willing to do so will discover many gems, such as this advice to students in Notebook 4: “Don’t tell the poem in other and worse English of your own to show you understand it. But say something of your own based on the poem (not an opinion of it though).”

Frost’s ideas aren’t always that cogent, however, since a notebook is the mind’s playground. Many entries read more like this, in Notebook 4:

“Nothing more social than to work alone

“Life catches on something to resist itself

“To put love in its place so it will hold a while. The fallacious think poetry must be on the side of love’s not being put in its social place. Poetry is on both sides.”

Frost’s commitment to disciplined thinking is evident throughout, especially when he explores the relationship between it and poetry or any pursuit. Not everyone agreed with his standards or ideas, including many of his students, who felt they didn’t need instruction.

“We reached an agreement,” he wrote, “that most of what they regarded as thinking, their own and other peoples, was nothing but vote-taking sides on an issue they had nothing to do with laying down.”

The Frost in this tome is complex and challenging. Instead of one clear portrait, he emerges from a collage made from thousands of moments. This may satisfy scholars, who are likely to find Frost’s notebooks an invaluable asset.

Lay readers, on the other hand, may wish that Faggen had provided detailed commentary throughout. His words open the notebooks in significant ways, and for many of Frost’s readers, more of that illumination is needed.

• by Elizabeth Lund, who writes on poetry for the *Christian Science Monitor* published March 6, 2007



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