POEMS
for the
TIME CAPSULE
#2
collected by DAVID WATTS
Gary Snyder

- Snyder was born in San Francisco and raised on small farms in Washington state and Oregon. Because he lived close to nature from earliest childhood, Snyder was distressed at a young age by the wanton destruction of the Pacific Northwestern forests, and he began to study and respect the Indian cultures that offered a more harmonious relationship with nature.
- Gary Snyder began his career as a poet in the 1950s as a noted member of the “Beat Generation.” (Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, Walen, DiPrima, McClure) Snyder’s work blends physical reality and precise observations of nature with inner insight received primarily through the practice of Zen Buddhism. (Alan Watts, The Way of Zen)
- Kenneth Rexroth observed that although Snyder proposes “a new ethic, a new esthetic, [and] a new life style,” he is also “an accomplished technician who has learned from the poetry of several languages and who has developed a sure and flexible style capable of handling any material he wishes.”

- Snyder is also identified as a poet of the San Francisco Renaissance along with Jack Spicer, Kenneth Rexroth and Robert Duncan.
- Snyder has looked to the Orient and to the beliefs of American Indians for positive responses to the world, and he has tempered his studies with stints of hard physical labor as a logger and trail builder. Altieri believed that Snyder’s “articulation of a possible religious faith” independent of Western culture has greatly enhanced his popularity.
- In the autumn of 1952 Snyder moved to the San Francisco Bay area in order to study Oriental languages at Berkeley. He was already immersed in Zen Buddhism and had begun to write poetry about his work in the wilderness. He became part of a community of writers, including Philip Whalen, Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, who were soon heralded as the forerunners of a counterculture revolution in literature. The literary fame of the Beat Generation was launched with a poetry reading in October of 1955 at San Francisco’s Six Gallery.
• 1956 moved to Japan on scholarship but stayed for 12 years living in an ashram where he participated in strenuous Zen study and meditation and... writing poems. First two collections were about that time in Japan and Indonesia, traveling and living close to nature. The also represent a vigorous attempt to attain freedom from the “establishment” mores of urban America.

• He built his own house along the Yuba River in the Sierras where he has lived since.

• He emphasizes spiritual exercises as clearing a path from the temporal life to Enlightenment. But he also is conversant in primitive cultures, seeing the poet as a shaman voicing the songs of the earth and revering myths and their representation of “man in nature and nature in man”

• He has become a spokesperson for ecological awareness and a sustainable life style.

• “most of my work, such as it is, is done.”

For All

Ah to be alive
on a mid-September morn
fording a stream
barefoot, pants rolled up,
holding boots, pack on,
sunshine, ice in the shallows,
northern rockies.

Rustle and shimmer of icy creek waters
stones turn underfoot, small and hard as toes
cold nose dripping
singing inside
creek music, heart music,
smell of sun on gravel.

I pledge allegiance

I pledge allegiance to the soil
of Turtle Island,
and to the beings who thereon dwell
one ecosystem
in diversity
under the sun
With joyful interpenetration for all.
Kim Addonizio

• Kim Addonizio was born in Washington DC, the daughter of a former tennis champion and a sports writer. She attended college in San Francisco, earning both her BA and MA from San Francisco State University, and has spent much of her adult life in the Bay Area. She currently lives and teaches workshops in Oakland, California.

• Addonizio’s poetry, known for its gritty, street-wise narrators and a wicked sense of wit, has received significant recognition since it first appeared as *The Philosopher’s Club* (1994), a collection of unflinching poems on subjects ranging from mortality to love.

• Writes often about the downtrodden, drug addicts, and through the use of her “cracked, smoky voice” produces a fashionable cynicism. Yet she always finds something there to make beautiful.

• Speaking to those that come after. . .

• In 1997 Addonizio collaborated with Dorianne Laux in *The Poet’s Companion: A Guide to the Pleasures of Writing Poetry*, a volume that focuses on the craft and process of writing poetry, said by some to be head and shoulders above the rest.
• She has also written novels, essays, verse-stories and plays the blues harp to accompany her readings. She formed a blues band which does performances in the Bay Area. She teaches writing workshops, often with the poet Dorianne Laux.

• Addonizio once told *Contemporary Authors*: “Writing is an ongoing fascination and challenge, as well as being the only form of spirituality I can consistently practice. I started as a poet and will always return to poetry—both reading and writing it—for that sense of deep discovery and communion I find there. There are only two useful rules I can think of for aspiring writers: learn your craft, and persist. The rest, as Henry James says, is the madness of art.”

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**First Kiss**

Afterwards you had that drunk, drugged look my daughter used to get, when she had let go of my nipple, her mouth gone slack and her eyes turned vague and filmy, as though behind them the milk was rising up to fill her whole head, that would loll on the small white stalk of her neck so I would have to hold her closer, amazed at the sheer power of satiety, which was nothing like the needing to be fed, the wild flailing and crying until she fastened herself to me and made the seal tight
between us, and sucked, drawing the liquid down and out of my body; no, this was the crowning moment, this giving of herself, knowing she could show me how helpless she was—that’s what I saw, that night when you pulled your mouth from mine and leaned back against a chain-link fence, in front of a burned-out church: a man who was going to be that vulnerable, that easy and impossible to hurt.
Czeslaw Milosz

- Polish poet, prose writer, translator and diplomat of Lithuanian origin. After WWII he served as Polish cultural attache to Washington and Paris. In 1951 he defected to the West.
- After the fall of the Iron Curtain he divided his time between Berkeley and Krakow, Poland.
- European Literary Prize 1953
- Neustadt International Prize for Literature 1978
- Nobel Prize for Literature 1980
- Righteous Among Nations Award 1989 (Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial)
- Puterback Fellow 1999
- Died 2004 at 93. Buried in Kraków’s Skalka Roman Catholic Church
• Raised Catholic in rural Lithuania - led to ongoing controversies. Refused to categorize himself as either Pole or Lithuanian.
• "I am a Lithuanian to whom it was not given to be a Lithuanian. My family in the sixteenth century already spoke Polish, just as many families in Finland spoke Swedish and in Ireland English, so I am a Polish not a Lithuanian poet. But the landscapes and perhaps the spirits of Lithuania have never abandoned me”.
• Fluent in Polish, Lithuanian, Russian, English and French.
• In his youth he took a scientific, atheistic point of view but returned to the Catholic Church later in life.
• Graduated Law School in Paris the same year as the publication of his first book of poetry, 1934. 17 Poetry and 27 Prose collections.
• Spent WWII in Warsaw. Criticized the resistance movement as a “blameworthy lightheaded enterprise.”
• Was criticized and censured for his defection. Camus sympathized but Neruda labeled him as “the man who ran away.” Reading his work was forbidden in Poland.
• Hard time getting American Citizenship due to the climate of McCarthyism.
• In the Captive Mind he explores the fate of intellectuals under repressive regimes. Dissidents were not necessarily the strongest minds but the weakest stomachs.
• Yale Rare Book and Manuscript library holds his papers.

A Task

In fear and trembling, I think I would fulfill my life
Only if I brought myself to make a public confession
Revealing a sham, my own and of my epoch:
We were permitted to shriek in the tongue of dwarfs and demons
But pure and generous words were forbidden
Under so stiff a penalty that whoever dared to pronounce one
Considered himself as a lost man.
Happiness

How warm the light! From the glowing bay
The masts, like spruce, repose of the ropes
In the morning mist. Where a stream trickles
Into the sea, by a small bridge—a flute.
Farther, under the arch of ancient ruins
You see a few tiny walking figures.
One wears a red kerchief. There are trees,
Ramparts and mountains at an early hour.
Maxine Kumin
1925 - 2014

• Despite traveling away from home to lecture at schools and universities around the United States, Kumin retained close ties with her farmhouse in rural New Hampshire; “Practically all of [my poems] have come out of this geography and this state of mind.”
• Kumin is often referred to as a regional pastoral poet. “I have been twitted with the epithet ‘Roberta Frost,’ which is not a bad thing to be.”
• In other efforts to classify her work, critics have also described her as a transcendentalist, like Henry David Thoreau, or a confessional poet, like Kumin’s friend and coauthor, the late Anne Sexton. She has also been likened to Elizabeth Bishop because of her commitment to meticulous observation.
• Married Victor Kumin, an engineering consultant; they have two daughters and a son. In 1957, she studied poetry with John Holmes at the Boston Center for Adult Education where she met Anne Sexton, friends until Sexton’s suicide in 1974.

- From 1976 until her death in February 2014, she and her husband lived on a farm in Warner, New Hampshire where they bred Arabian and quarter horses.
- Kumin also wrote prose. “I try to steal from myself,” she said.
- When Kumin was 73 she suffered an accident while preparing a horse for competition and broke her neck, receiving serious internal injuries. She was able to make a successful recovery, and her book Inside the Halo and Beyond: The Anatomy of a Recovery (1999) describes her convalescence.
- 19 books of poetry, 6 books of prose (novels, short stories, mystery novel) 23 books for children (several with Anne Sexton)
- Taught at a bunch of colleges and universities including Tufts, Radcliffe and Princeton.
- Along with Carolyn Kizer she resigned from the Board of Chancellors for the Academy of American poets.
- “Writing is my salvation. If I didn’t write, what would I do?”
After Love

Afterward, the compromise.
Bodies resume their boundaries.

These legs, for instance, mine.
Your arms take you back in.

Spoons of our fingers, lips
admit their ownership.

The bedding yawns, a door
blows aimlessly ajar

and overhead, a plane
singsongs coming down.

Nothing is changed, except
there was a moment when

the wolf, the mongering wolf
who stands outside the self

lay lightly down, and slept.
Forrest Hamer

- Born 1956, Forrest Hamer is a poet, psychologist, and psychoanalyst. He is the author of three poetry collections and winner of the Beatrice Hawley Award and the Northern California Award.
- Anthologized in three editions of Best American Poetry
- Educated at Yale University and University of California, Berkeley
- His work has been praised for its beauty and delicate truth. A psychologist as well as a poet, his poems are finely wrought tapestries. The Hudson Review called Hamer remarkable for his ability to find the universal in his own experiences with “seeming casualness and ease, and yet [the work] deftly opens deep and complex issues of identity — identity explored in the dimensions of race, family, generation, sex, psychology, and religion.”
- Yusef Komunyakaa has lauded Hamer’s ability to translate “everyday feelings” for all of us: “Southern, American, universal—the voices cohere into a seamless, symphonic bravo for human endurance.”

- Partially deaf, Hamer has attuned himself to listen exquisitely, with subterranean depth, to his own voice and others’, and to recount their stories with quiet power. “Becoming a poet,” he once remarked, “was my version of becoming a preacher. The opportunity to in some way lead the call—to engage people literally in a back and forth between speaker and audience, between preacher and congregation—is also the opportunity to engage people in listening closely to an aspect of themselves that is attuned communally and is much more complex than seems at first true.”
- Hamer currently teaches literature at the University of California at Berkeley and maintains a practice in psychology in Oakland, California.
Pica

an abnormal desire for unusual foods

I'd noticed the flowers first, wondered if
the orange I saw in the pink of them was
actual or an idea of mine,
something descriptive which had become real.

I still don't know, but in his office
that morning we talked about how soil tastes.

The dirt nearest my grandmother's hollyhocks was
the best. Shades of black smelled of stories
I hadn't yet heard that would linger
in my nose through night - these would be places
to grow things, grow: lay inside some seed then each day
resurrect the forming curl and green of them.

Stories change things, even the dead things laid there.
So when my grandmother was buried,
and there could be no digging and redigging,
I imagined the darkness was changing her

night by night: her face sank while hairs raised themselves
like fur, her nails grew long and rounded, and

each dim wrinkle dried into another.
By the eightieth night, I noticed
that her skin had worn itself away, and how
her pink dress loosely framed her shape of bones.

And there were stories in the soil
about where she's gone and the people I knew

only by name that she'd seen again. She
was learning other stories to tell me,
and she whispered them in my deepening sleep.
I had forgot the story about the night

the soil erased her and she was anything
but brightness in grains. But I was

sitting in his office one morning
complaining of no dreams, and the idea
of orange made those flowers smell dank,
and I became alive, craving.
Johan Wolfgang von Goethe

- 28 August 1749 – 22 March 1832) was a German writer and statesman.
- His body of work includes epic and lyric poetry written in a variety of styles; prose and verse dramas, memoirs, and autobiography, literary and aesthetic criticism, treatises on botany, anatomy, and color, and four novels.
- In addition, numerous literary and scientific fragments, more than 10,000 letters and nearly 3,000 drawings.
- A literary celebrity at 25, he was enobled by the Duke of Saxe-Weimar, Karl August in 1782. He had already taken residence there after the success of is first novel, The Sorrows of Young Werther.
- Goethe served as a member of the Duke’s privy council, sat on the war and highway commissions, oversaw the reopening of silver mines in Ilmenau, and implemented a series of administrative reforms of the university or Jena. He also contributed to the planning of Weimar’s botanical park and the rebuilding of its Ducal Palace, which in 1998 were designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
Crystel

My senses oftentimes are oppress'd,

Oft stagnant is my blood;
But when by Christel's sight I'm blest,

I feel my strength renew'd.
I see her here, I see her there,

And really cannot tell
The manner how, the when, the where,

The why I love her well.
If with the merest glance I view

Her black and roguish eyes,
And gaze on her black eyebrows too,

My spirit upward flies.
Has any one a mouth so sweet,

Such love–round cheeks as she?
Ah, when the eye her beauties meet,

It ne'er content can be.

And when in airy German dance

I clasp her form divine,
So quick we whirl, so quick advance,

What rapture then like mine!
And when she's giddy, and feels warm,

I cradle her, poor thing,
Upon my breast, and in mine arm,—

I'm then a very king!

And when she looks with love on me,

Forgetting all but this,
When press'd against my bosom she

Exchanges kiss for kiss,
All through my marrow runs a thrill,
Runs e’en my foot along!
I feel so well, I feel so ill,

I feel so weak, so strong!

Would that such moments ne’er would end!

The day ne’er long I find;
Could I the night too with her spend,

E’en that I should not mind.
If she were in mine arms but held,

To quench love’s thirst I’d try;
And could my torments not be quell’d,

Upon her breast would die.

Crossing In and Out of Sleep on a Warm Afternoon

There was mist
on the windshield
and wipers
that hadn’t started.
It was toasty
where I dozed
taking of women
bending over me
with kisses. I was glad
to finally acknowledge
my pleasures, and
how the erotic
matters also
for the something dark
we seek
beyond pleasure.
I thought to roll
down the car window
for a little cool air
which did arrive

as if from no particular
place even though
there was no window.
Have I claimed
a small but permanent
space in the minds
of the women I have loved?
a kite string of intimacy
that connects us
no matter?
The hypnotic sound
of a Piper Cub
buzzed into a space
wide enough to remind me
of July afternoons
in Central Texas. We
can rely upon music
despite everything.
I drew my lines
back into myself.
The excesses
of the universe
no longer made me feel
small.
Nor the strangeness
of being momentary.
Drifting sideways
porous to the past—
much to keep,
much to leave behind—
I saw that what survived
is what’s alive
in me, resiliencies
like boxcars connected
in a long deliberate
train, the one
that almost swept me off
Katy Bridge
when I was fifteen—
dust and cinders—
what I’d made of myself,
the keeping and the
losing, cargo
boxed for the future.
Time veered.
An ocean calmed
and the body stopped
asking its questions. I dozed
like a cat on a bed
drifting in the eddy
of two worlds
mixing together
at the threshold.
And I heard the sound
of fast waters
and the eternal blessing
of women laughing.
I might even have purred
a little.

-- David Watts
The Sonnet

• Name comes from the Italian *sonetto* or a little sound or song.
• 14 lines
• Iambic Pentameter
• An 8-Line Octave and a 6-Line Sestet
  – Usually a change in rhyme form
  – Signifies a change in subject matter
• The “Turn” or *volta*
• Fixed End Rhyme Schemes
  – Italian (Petrarchan)
  – English (Shakespearian)
  – Spenserian

Three Sonnet Forms

1. The Italian (Petrarchan)
   Divided into two sections with two different rhyming sounds

   octave:  a b b a a b b a
   sestet:   c d c d c d
             c d c d c c
             c d e c d e
             c d e c e d
             c d c e d c

   Never and ending couplet
"London, 1802"

Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour:
England hath need of thee: she is a fen
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
Have forfeited their ancient English dower
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;
Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.
Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart;
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
So didst thou travel on life's common way,
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

— Wordsworth

2. The English Sonnet has the simplest and most flexible pattern of all sonnets, consisting of 3 quatrains of alternating rhyme and a couplet:

a b a b

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Each quatrain develops an idea related to the overall idea
Easiest of the sonnets in terms of the rhyme scheme and more flexible in the placement of the volta.
“Sonnet LXXIII”

That time of year thou mayst in me behold,
When yellow leaves, or none, or few do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou seest the twilight of such day,
As after sunset fadeth in the west,
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self that seals up all in rest.
In me thou seest the glowing of such fire,
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the deathbed, whereon it must expire,
Consumed by that which it was nourished by.
This thou perceivest, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well, which thou must leave ere long.

—Shakespeare

(Where is the volta?)

3. The Spenserian Sonnet, invented by Edmund Spenser as an outgrowth of the stanza pattern he used in The Faerie Queene has the pattern:

a b a b b c b c c d c d e e

Creates distinct four line groups but they are overlapping in the repetition of the last sound
Three ideas developed in the three four line stanzas with a different idea in the couplet.
The turn is usually at L9
"Sonnet LIV"

Of this World's theatre in which we stay,
My love like the Spectator idly sits,
Beholding me, that all the pageants play,
Disguising diversely my troubled wits.
Sometimes I joy when glad occasion fits,
And mask in mirth like to a Comedy;
Soon after when my joy to sorrow flits,
I wail and make my woes a Tragedy.
Yet she, beholding me with constant eye,
Delights not in my mirth nor rues my smart;
But when I laugh, she mocks: and when I cry
She laughs and hardens evermore her heart.
What then can move her? If nor mirth nor moan,
She is no woman, but a senseless stone.

—Spenser

Shakespeare
1564-1616

• English poet, playwright, and actor widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and its pre-eminent dramatist.
• 38 Plays. 154 Sonnets. Two long narrative poems.
• Plays have been translated into every living language and are performed more often than any other playwright.
• Stratford upon-Avon. Anne Hathaway. Three children
• 1585-1592 in London as actor, playwright. Founder of Lord Chamberlain’s Men/The King’s Men.
• Retired to Stratford in 1613 at age 49. Died three years later.
• His early plays were Comedies and Histories. Wrote Tragedies until about 1608. Latter works were TradgiComedies or Romances often collaborating with other writers.
• Born into an affluent family of a Glover and a daughter of a land-owning farmer. Exact birth date unknown, presumed to be Apr 23, same day of his death 42 years later.
• 1599 The Globe Theater on the south bank of the Thames River. Became a wealthy man.
His Sonnets

Shakespeare's sonnets were published in 1609 and were the last of Shakespeare's non-dramatic works to be printed. Scholars are not certain when each of the 154 sonnets was composed, but evidence suggests that Shakespeare wrote sonnets throughout his career for a private readership. Two unauthorised sonnets appeared in The Passionate Pilgrim in 1599 and before that his sonnets were rumored to have been circulating among his private friends.

Shakespeare probably intended two contrasting series of sonnets: one about uncontrollable lust for a married woman of dark complexion (the "dark lady"), and one: about conflicted love for a fair young man.

It remains unclear if these figures represent real individuals or even if the "authorial I" who addresses them is Shakespeare.

Wordsworth believed that with the sonnets "Shakespeare unlocked his heart"

Sonnet XVIII

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:  
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;  
And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;  
But thy eternal summer shall not fade  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;  
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to time thou growest:  
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.
Gwendolyn Brooks

• Born in 1917, Gwendolyn Brooks was a life-long resident of Chicago until her death in 2000. Even as a child, she aspired to be a writer and received the support of her parents. She published her first poem at age thirteen in the magazine *American Childhood*. Under the tutelage and encouragement of James Weldon Johnson and Langston Hughes, Brooks began to submit her poems.

• First collection of poems, *A Street in Bronzeville*, won wide acclaim.

• *Mademoiselle* in 1945 named her as one of their “Ten Young Women of the Year.”

• Pulitzer Prize

• Brooks explored everyday African American life through subjects like home, family, war, racism, and poverty, while melding colloquial speech with formal diction.

• She was writing during the early years of the Civil Rights movement, during which time her interest in social issues deepened and found expression in her work. In *The Bean Eaters*, she employs free verse and refuses to shy away from topics such as educational integration and lynching.

• Amiri Baraka had a strong influence and turned her work more radical.
We Real Cool

THE POOL PLAYERS.
SEVEN AT THE GOLDEN SHOVEL.

We real cool. We
Left school. We

Lurk late. We
Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We
Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We
Die soon.
Juan Ramon Jimenez

• Juan Ramón Jiménez Mantecón (23 December 1881 – 29 May 1958) was a Spanish Poet who received the Nobel Prize in 1956 for his lyrical poetry, which constitutes an example of high spirit and artistic purity.
• One of Jiménez’s most important contributions to modern poetry was his advocacy of the French concept of “pure poetry.”
• “Pure Poetry,” message-free verse that is concerned with exploring the essential musical nature of the language rather than with conveying a narrative or having didactic purpose.
• He trained in law at the University of Seville but he declined to put this training to use. He published his first two books at the age of eighteen, in 1900. The death of his father the same year devastated him, and a resulting depression led to his being sent first to France, where he had an affair with his doctor’s wife, and then to a sanatorium in Madrid staffed by novitiate nuns, where he lived from 1901 to 1903. In 1911 and 1912, he wrote many erotic poems.
• The main subjects of many of his other poems were music and color, which, at times, he compared to love or lust.
• Considered to be the father of Spanish Contemporary Poetry.

• A quality of mutability can be observed in the poetry of Juan Ramón Jiménez, ever changing to the point of losing the readers he had gained in his first books.
• The modernist and popular Juan Ramón of Platero and I, a work that had been translated into thirty four languages, was very different from the avant-garde poet of The Diary of a Newlywed Poet, and even more so from the post-modern Juan Ramón, who wrote Space and Time, or, indeed, the mystic poet of God Desired and Desiring.
• The radical departure from one conception of poetry to another had readers and critics totally perplexed. They wondered how an artist who had called on intelligence to find the “exact words of things,” and who had subscribed to anonymity, could later be writing in long conversational sentences, full of repetitions, recording the names of friends and family in his poems. The poetry of his later years was left unread or for the most part misunderstood during Juan Ramón’s life.

Mercedes Juliá
Villanova University
Zenobia Camprubi, a Spanish born poet and writer, he married in the United States. Zenobia became his indispensable companion and collaborator. In the year 1916, they moved to Portugal.

Upon the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War 1936 he went into exile in Puerto Rico/Cuba/Mexico. Settlement in Puerto Rico in 1946.

Severe depression caused him to be hospitalized for 8 months.

Became Professor of Spanish Literature at the University of Puerto Rico and also at the University of Miami.

Two days after receiving the Nobel Prize his wife died of ovarian cancer. He never recovered from this loss and died two years later at the same clinic where his wife died.

Both are buried in his hometown of Moguer, Spain.

Jiménez’s early poetry was influenced by the French Symbolists and W.B. Yeats. His later poetry shows an interest in stark imagery, colors, and the open forms associated with "naked" poetry.

"Inner poetry eludes words. When one wishes to express something profound, one does not express it in jingles. In my first period I used adjectives, later the adjectives became substantives. Literary artistry is constant suffering for the poet; one doubts the exactness of words, their ability to express what we feel within us. We strive to find that spirited asset, the inner essence."

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I am not I

I am this one
walking beside me whom I do not see,
whom at times I manage to visit,
and whom at other times I forget;
who remains calm and silent while I talk,
and forgives, gently, when I hate,
who walks where I am not,
who will remain standing when I die.
Louise Erdrich

- Erdrich was born in Little Falls, Minnesota the first of seven children to Ralph Erdrich, a German-American and his wife Rita Gourneau half French-American and half Ojibwe (Chippewa)
- As a child, Erdrich’s father paid her a nickel for every story she wrote. Her sister Heidi is a poet who also lives in Minnesota and publishes under the name Heid E. Erdrich.
- Another sister, Lise Erdrich, has written children's books and collections of fiction and essays.
- In 1979 she wrote "The World's Greatest Fisherman", a short story about June Kashpaw, a divorced Ojibwe woman whose death by hypothermia brought her relatives home to a fictional North Dakota reservation for her funeral. It won the Nelson Algren Short Fiction prize and eventually became the first chapter of her debut novel, Love Medicine which used her technique of multiple narrators and which won the 1984 National Book Critics Circle Award.
• She founded Birchbark Books, a bookstore which hosts literary readings and other events, including the release of each of Erdrich’s new works as well as the works and careers of other writers, particularly local Native writers. Erdrich and her staff consider Birchbark Books to be a “teaching bookstore”.

• In addition to books, the store sells Native art and traditional medicines, and Native American jewelry. A small nonprofit publisher founded by Erdrich and her sister, Wiigwaas Press, is affiliated with the store.

• Won multiple awards: Pushcart, National Book Critics Circle Award, O Henry Award and a Library of Congress Prize.

• Many critics claim Erdrich has remained true to her Native ancestors’ mythic and artistic visions while writing fiction that candidly explores the cultural issues facing modern-day Native Americans and mixed heritage Americans.


• The poems in *Jacklight* center on the conflict between Native and non-Native cultures, but they also celebrate family bonds and the ties of kinship, offer autobiographical meditations, dramatic monologues and love poetry, as well as showing the influence of Ojibwa myths and legends.

• Following Dorris’ death Erdrich returned to doing what she does best: using multiple viewpoints and strange, surreal tales within tales to conjure up a family’s legacy of love, duty and guilt.
Captivity

He (my captor) gave me a biscuit, which I put in my pocket, and not daring to eat it, buried it under a log, fearing he had put something in it to make me love him.

—From the narrative of the captivity of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson, who was taken prisoner by the Wampanoag when Lancaster, Massachusetts, was destroyed, in the year 1676

The stream was swift, and so cold
I thought I would be sliced in two.
But he dragged me from the flood
by the ends of my hair.
I had grown to recognize his face.
I could distinguish it from the others.
There were times I feared I understood
his language, which was not human,
and I kneel to pray for strength.

We were pursued by God's agents
or pitch devils, I did not know.
Only that we must march.
Their guns were loaded with swan shot.
I could not suckle and my child's wail
put them in danger.
He had a woman
with teeth black and glittering.
She fed the child milk of acorns.
The forest closed, the light deepened.

I told myself that I would starve
before I took food from his hands
but I did not starve.
One night
he killed a deer with a young one in her
and gave me to eat of the fawn.
It was so tender,
the bones like the stems of flowers,
that I followed where he took me.
The night was thick. He cut the cord
that bound me to the tree.

After that the birds mocked.
Shadows gaped and roared
and the trees flung down
their sharpened lashes.
He did not notice God's wrath.
God blasted fire from half-buried stumps.
I hid my face in my dress, fearing He would burn us all
but this, too, passed.
Rescued, I see no truth in things.
My husband drives a thick wedge
through the earth, still it shuts
to him year after year.
My child is fed of the first wheat.
I lay myself to sleep
on a Holland-laced pillowbeer.
I lay to sleep.
And in the dark I see myself
as I was outside their circle.

They knelt on deerskins, some with sticks,
and he led his company in the noise
until I could no longer bear
the thought of how I was.
I stripped a branch
and struck the earth,
in time, begging it to open
to admit me
as he was
and feed me honey from the rock.
Philip Levine

• “Whitman of the industrial heartland” Son of Russian-Jewish parents. 1928 - 2015
• Born and raised in industrial Detroit, where he began working in the auto factories at the age of 14. As a young boy in the midst of the Great Depression of the 1930s, he was fascinated by the events of the Spanish Civil War. His heroes were not only those individuals who struggled against fascism but also ordinary folks who worked at hopeless jobs simply to stave off poverty.
• Noted for his interest in the grim reality of blue-collar work and workers, Levine resolved “to find a voice for the voiceless” while working in the auto plants of Detroit during the 1950s.
• “And as young people will, you know, I took this foolish vow that I would speak for them and that’s what my life would be. And sure enough I’ve gone and done it. Or I’ve tried anyway.”
• In 1953, he studied at the University of Iowa, earning an MFA from the Iowa Writers’ Workshop. There, Levine studied with poets Robert Lowell and John Berryman.

• “I believed even then that if I could transform my experience into poetry I would give it the value and dignity it did not begin to possess on its own. I thought too that if I could write about it I could come to understand it; I believed that if I could understand my life—or at least the part my work played in it—I could embrace it with some degree of joy, an element conspicuously missing from my life.”
• Levine also published nonfiction essays and interviews, editorials and translations.
• Levine was elected Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets and in 2011, was named the 18th U.S. Poet Laureate by the Library of Congress.
• Pulitzer Prize 1995 for *The Simple Truth*. 
Starlight

My father stands in the warm evening on the porch of my first house. I am four years old and growing tired. I see his head among the stars, the glow of his cigarette, redder than the summer moon riding low over the old neighborhood. We are alone, and he asks me if I am happy. “Are you happy?” I cannot answer. I do not really understand the word, and the voice, my father’s voice, is not his voice, but somehow thick and choked, a voice I have not heard before, but heard often since. He bends and passes a thumb beneath each of my eyes.

The cigarette is gone, but I can smell the tiredness that hangs on his breath, He has found nothing, and he smiles And holds my head with both his hands. Then he lifts me to his shoulder and now I too am there among the stars, as tall as he. “Are you happy?” I say. He nods I answer, Yes! oh yes! oh yes! And in that new voice he says nothing, holding my head right against his head, his eyes closed up against the starlight, as though those tiny blinking eyes of light might find a tall, gaunt child holding his child against the promises of autumn, until the boy slept never to waken in that world again.