



FAVORITE POEM PROJECT

Newsletter

October 2019

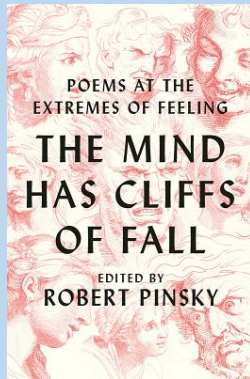
In This Issue

Welcome and Events	p.1
News and Updates	p.2
Interview with an Educator	p.3

Coming Soon!

We are excited to announce a new anthology from W.W. Norton edited by Robert Pinsky. Publication date: October 22!

The Mind Has Cliffs of Fall: Poems at the Extremes of Feeling



A Note from Robert Pinsky

The Favorite Poem Project has thrived and grown beyond what could be expected from our limited resources. That accomplishment is thanks to the imagination and hard work of young poets, beginning with co-founder Maggie Dietz, who in our first years managed readings at the White House and New York's Town Hall. In turn, Rosemarie Ellis Villani, Brandy Barents, Bekah Stout, and Duy Doan each contributed memorably.

Most recently, Laura Marris has continued and extended the tradition with her editorial brilliance and managerial skills. My personal gratitude to Laura is immense—and so is my pleasure that Laura is passing the torch to Annette Frost, another gifted young poet who combines worldly abilities with dedication. Annette has already organized wonderful events and projects. The continuing history of the FPP shows how poetry can, among other things, attract people of outstanding talent—as their many publications demonstrate—to work for the good of this great, fundamental art.

UPCOMING EVENTS

An Anniversary Celebration Reading with Poets House in New York City

The FPP and Poets House will host a reading on **October 12 at 3:00pm** at Poets House in NYC to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the FPP and the 10th anniversary of Poets House in their new space. Readers including **Nell Painter, Vivian Gornick, Michael Cunningham, and Murray Dewart** will share their favorite poem and speak about its personal significance for them.

Robert Lowell Memorial Lecture Series

Prize-Winning Poet Naomi Shihab Nye will read at BU with alumna Katherine Hollander at the Leventhal Center Auditorium at 233 Bay State Road in Boston on **November 6 at 7:30pm** with a reception to follow at The Castle.

We hope to see you there!

Send Us Your News! Do you have a poetry-related event or opportunity you'd like to share with our audience? Contact fpp@bu.edu with the details. We would love to hear from you!



Featured FPP Video

For this issue of the newsletter, we have chosen to feature **Merav Opher's** reading of "One Art" by **Elizabeth Bishop**. We invite you to visit our website **favoritepoem.org** and explore the full collection of videos.



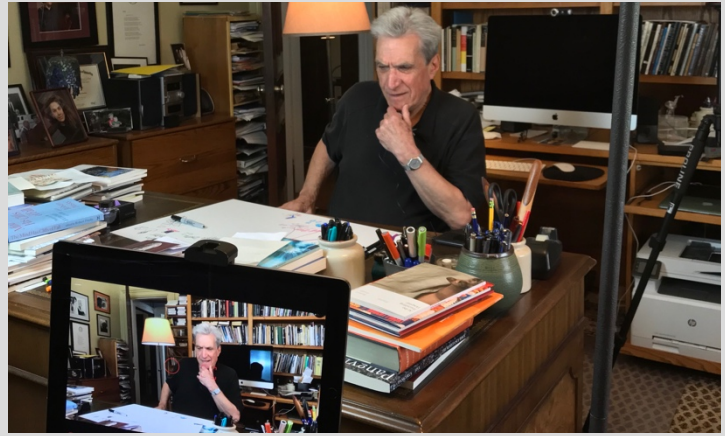
PoemJazz with Robert Pinsky

Using his voice as a musical instrument, Robert Pinsky along with musicians Stan Stickland on reeds and vocals, Hankus Netsky on piano, and John Lockwood on bass, improvised a conversation between the melodies of spoken sentences and the melodies of music.

Follow us on social media and look out for the next PoemJazz event!

Connect with Us

facebook.com/favepoem
instagram.com/favepoem
twitter.com/favepoem



Drawing Connections Between FPP Videos and Articles

We are working on adding exciting new features to the Favorite Poem website. Soon, users will be able to navigate through FPP videos, articles, and other links and discover nuances between poems. We hope this new feature will be engaging for users of all ages. Stay tuned!

Poetry and Democracy

In March, the Favorite Poem Project hosted a favorite poem reading and voter registration drive featuring BU Creative Writing faculty, staff, students, and alumni. It was co-sponsored by the Academy of American Poets and introduced by Robert Pinsky. We had a great time sharing the power of the individual poetic and democratic voice!

**What Is It, Then,
Between Us?:
Poetry & Democracy**

An Interview with Educator, Researcher, and Summer Poetry Institute Lead-Teacher Karen Harris, Ed.D.

Favorite Poem Project: Did you always know that teaching poetry would be the focus of your research?

Karren Harris: No, actually. My original dissertation was looking at whether regular meditation practice could affect students' attention in the classroom. I left my studies to raise my kids, then was inspired to return to doctoral work and switch my dissertation topic to poetry teaching after so many years working with Robert, the FPP staff, and so many passionate teachers of poetry. We started the FPP summer institute for teachers on the heels of the No Child Left Behind act. As a consequence of this, poetry began to be seen by those making curricular decisions as an "add on." Teaching poetry to students in an integrated, challenging, unhurried, patient way came to be regarded as a kind of radical act in the face of pressures to increase test scores from year to year. So, I didn't even know I'd return to do doctoral work, but once I decided to do "round two," I wanted to see how some of these great poetry teachers did what they did and what studying them could teach the rest of us.

FPP: Can you tell me a little bit about how your research was conducted? How did it change your perspective to observe others teaching poetry?

KH: It was humbling. Teaching poetry well is one of the hardest things to do. Poetry is the hardest thing to feel you've done justice to, and it's a difficult thing to make compatible with many of the ways our culture thinks about mastery. I surveyed teachers, then I visited each of them in their classrooms as they taught poetry three different times. After each classroom visit, I interviewed the teacher, asking them to reflect on the class they'd just taught. Even though I used bare observation, I needed some kind of organizing principle to sort of order and categorize what I was seeing and hearing; so, I had a set of categories with which to frame different threads of practice conceptually. When you enter a school and a classroom, everything is pertinent. There is so much data to observe in a school and in a classroom—from what posters are on the wall, to what's on a teacher's desk, to what you see out a window. And so on. Everything has something to tell you about a school, a teacher, a classroom, the students.

I learned that reading poetry together with students is most successful when you're really reading it together. In order to get students to take the kinds of

intellectual risks that poetry demands, they have to trust you as a co-reader and as a risk-taker yourself, as well as an experienced facilitator and reader. Above all, though, you have to know your students and they have to know and trust you. All these teachers did all of these things and had all of these attributes.

I also learned that practicing poets teach poetry slightly differently. There were two published poets among the five teachers I observed, and there was almost a vocational or craft-focused element to their teaching. They read and taught as poets. It wasn't better; it was just slightly different. I also reflected in my dissertation's "recommendations" section that I think teacher training programs need to support more risk taking on the part of new teachers, and they need to provide more poetry content. Otherwise, especially if a beginning teacher who is already functioning with a confidence deficit had a poor experience with poetry in their own schooling—which anecdotally seems to be the case fairly often—they will feel reluctant to include it in any more than a perfunctory way.

FPP: You've been a wonderful mentor to other teachers through your work as a lead-teacher at the Favorite Poem Project Summer Poetry Institute. Were there conversations from the Institute that informed your graduate work?

KH: Yes! Over the 17 or 18 years of the institute, I learned from the group discussions, the planning meetings/discussions, and whole group discussions with Robert and the other poets. So often, teachers in the institute were seen as outliers in their department or in their school. I learned that in many contexts, it takes a fearless person to teach poetry. It was illuminating to notice the following pattern: In schools that were struggling so intensely that the administration was willing to take more risks and "try anything," *and* in schools that were elite or high performing, teachers generally felt more free to seek out poetry and to include it as a regular part of their teaching. But for teachers at those schools sort of in the middle, there was a greater pressure to put poetry teaching and student connoisseurship far down on their list of priorities. It was frustrating for them to know how important poetry is to them, to the world, and potentially to kids—and yet to have to fight tooth and nail to include it, because it's not on the test. And still, they persist!