

# *Favorite Poem Project*

WINTER 2022 — Newsletter

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favoritepoem.org



@favepoem

## A Note from Robert Pinsky

Poetry is immediate and remote, a physical presence and a presence communicated across distances in time and space.

Borrowing those terms of the difficult pandemic year, I am confident that they apply to the Favorite Poem Project: the videos, the anthologies, the events and the classroom applications: all are based on the voice as bodily medium and the virtual presence of live meanings and feelings, some from long ago or far away.

This has been a good, productive year for the Project under Annette Frost's leadership. Our online presence is growing and about to expand considerably, in exciting new ways. Thanks to our young experts, program associate Yvonne Tran and intern Nathan Miller, the look and energy of our ambitious new web site will be stylish as well as smart.

Poetry, as alive as my memory and as present as my voice, has helped me deal with new challenges and anxieties— and I think I am not the only one for whom that is true.



## Upcoming Events

### **Student, Faculty & Alumni FPP Reading**

We just held our annual “Friends & Family” FPP Reading on Tuesday, February 22nd. It was wonderful to gather—even virtually—with current students, program faculty, alumni and other friends of the Favorite Poem Project. This year’s theme was “Some Blessed Hope.” It was wonderful to reconnect with the origins of the project by hearing the voices of such a variety of poets read out loud by such a variety of readers. Thank you to all who joined us.

### **Robert Lowell Memorial Lecture Series - *Save the Date!***

This spring we are thrilled to be hosting Pulitzer Prize-Winning poet Tracy K. Smith alongside BU alumna Kirun Kapur for the 2022 spring installment of the Robert Lowell Memorial Lecture series. The reading will be held on April 12th at 7:30pm. Please visit <https://www.bu.edu/creativewriting/calendar/robert-lowell-memorial-lectures/> for more info or find us on social media [@favepoem](#)!

## News and Updates

### **Favorite Poem Project 2021 Recap**

This year, we focused on ways to make our web presence more wide-ranging and useful for our followers. We sponsored an interdisciplinary art and poetry project #ArtSpeakstoArt spotlighting writers here in our BU community. We held all our readings virtually and were lucky to have Peter Balakian, Susan Barba, Gail Mazur and Aaron Caycedo-Kimura as Robert Lowell Memorial Lecture guest poets. Hosting the RLML series online has had the unexpected boon of a wider audience from across the nation and world. We look forward to seeing everyone in-person as soon as we can, but in the meantime we continue to enjoy connecting with many of you virtually, near and far. Follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter if you don’t already [@favepoem](#).

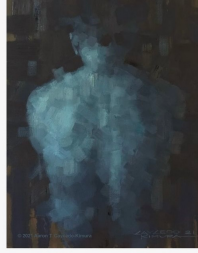
More news on next page!



SELF PORTRAIT  
Ivan Grekov  
Ink, yellow crayon



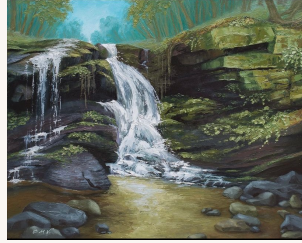
#ArtSpeaksToArt  
Favorite Poem Project



AUBADE  
Aaron Caycedo-Kimura  
24" x 18", Oil on Canvas

#ArtSpeaksToArt  
Favorite Poem Project

DRY RUN FALLS  
Christina Mercier-Vernon  
11x14 inch oil on panel



#ArtSpeaksToArt  
Favorite Poem Project

GOLDEN HOUR  
Elizabeth Nelson  
Photography



#ArtSpeaksToArt  
Favorite Poem Project

## #ArtSpeakstoArt

Eric Parkison guest-directed the FPP in the spring of 2021 and headed up the Art Speaks to Art project. People from across the BU community shared poems they wrote inspired by works of art. You can find the project on our Instagram page [@favepoem](https://www.instagram.com/favepoem).



## Update on New Website

The new website project is still underway including the much-anticipated Robert Pinsky Poetry Archive. We hope to launch our new site in 2022. Stay tuned for updates!

## Featured FPP Video

Our featured video is "The Lost Pilot" by James Tate read by Jessica Cotzin. Listen to Jessica discuss the loss of her father, and how she finds passion through travel.



# *I'm Nobody! Who Are You?*

by Emily Dickinson



Videos and more at  
Favorite Poem Project  
[favoritepoem.org](http://favoritepoem.org)

I'm Nobody! Who are you?  
Are you—Nobody—Too?  
Then there's a pair of us!  
Don't tell! they'd advertise—you know!

How dreary—to be—Somebody!  
How public—like a Frog—  
To tell one's name—the livelong June—  
To an admiring Bog!

From The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson, edited by Thomas H. Johnson. ©1929 by Martha Dickinson, renewed 1957 Mary L. Hampson.  
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# *Traveler, There is No Road*

by Antonio Machado

tr. Mary G. Berg & Dennis Maloney



Videos and more at  
Favorite Poem Project  
[favoritepoem.org](http://favoritepoem.org)

Traveler, your footprints  
are the only road, nothing else.  
Traveler, there is no road;  
you make your own path as you walk.  
As you walk, you make your own road,  
and when you look back  
you see the path  
you will never travel again.  
Traveler, there is no road;  
only a ship's wake on the sea.

## Poetry on the T

This year, in collaboration with MassPoetry, the Favorite Poem Project has launched the #PoetryontheT campaign. If you ride the orange line or red line, look out for our posters. Tag us if you find us! [@favepoem](https://twitter.com/favepoem) [#ridetheT](https://twitter.com/ridetheT) [#FPPontheT](https://twitter.com/FPPontheT)

## 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](mailto:fpp@bu.edu) with the details. We would love to hear from you!





## *Interview with an Educator: Katherine Hollander*

Poet, Educator and Historian

**Favorite Poem Project:** Tell us a little bit about yourself and your background as a poetry teacher: when and where did you begin?

**Katherine Hollander :** I can almost pinpoint the moment: Town Meeting Day, 1999. I was in college and my teacher thought he might have to be late for our afternoon workshop because he was also moderator, or on the select board (I can't remember which now) of the tiny, rigorously democratic town in which our tiny, rigorously democratic college was located, and he asked me and another student to get the workshop started if he wasn't able to be there on time. I thought—whoa. The other student was a junior or senior and already working on a substantial poetry project, and I was just a freshman! But I had an inkling that maybe I could do this, and if he thought I could or should, then that was a clue I should pay attention to, and give it a try.

After doing my MA in poetry, I taught a little bit of creative writing to undergrads at BU; I went on to get a PhD in history and spent many semesters teaching European and world history. Now, I've come back to teaching poetry again. But really I always taught poetry, even in history classes, just as I try, if I can, to teach some history in poetry classes—poems are primary sources, and they can tell us so much about the historical moments from which they come. I always teach Georg Trakl's poems when I teach the Great War in a German or European history

class. One of the best compliments I ever got, from an English major who took a history class with me, was that he said "She had us read history like a poem."

**FPP:** What do you think is the most challenging aspect of teaching poetry in the classroom?

**KH :** Time. There is never enough of it. Just as we start to really be quiet with a poem, with each other, especially in workshop, and the really interesting things start to emerge, we have to move on to the next. It's important to me that, in a workshop class, each student gets enough, and roughly equal, time spent on their poem every week, so I tend to be a mover-alonger, timewise. But I hate it.

**FPP:** How has the ongoing pandemic impacted the way you teach?

**KH :** It has only reaffirmed to me how profoundly important and essentially good it is to be in a room together, talking and thinking, teaching and learning. I am entirely for every safety precaution that's necessary for keeping teachers and students, families and communities safe—but oh how I understand even more than ever before how pallid and exhausting online learning is compared to being together in a room, teachers and students. We don't need anything fancy, but we do need to be together.



## *Interview with an Educator: Katherine Hollander*

**FPP:** What is one of your favorite poems to teach?

**KH:** I love teaching Josh Mehigan's "The Smokestack" as a way to help students understand form and scansion, as well as simile and metaphor—how simple and "natural" the poem feels while being meticulously structured—and those piles and piles of images! Chloe Martinez's "The God Structure" is a wonder because it shows students how something simple and ordinary—an online customer review of a bra—can be the springboard into a meditation about friendship, the divine, mortality, and grief. I love introducing students to Denusha Laméris's collection, *Bonfire Opera*, and seeing them fall in love with her mastery: How she creates this intimate, confiding tone, these vivid, sensual, conversational poems, from material objects and seemingly ordinary moments, catapulting us into deep emotion and philosophy, humor and sorrow. For so many of my students, that's the first book of poems they read in full, connect to, and really love—they feel it's easy to enter into that book, and I try help them see how brilliant a book it is, to seem so effortless.

**FPP:** You are a poet, educator, and historian—what do you make of this particular moment in history? What can it offer to poetry?

**KH:** One thing that's been very important to me in the last few years is the realization that, with the pandemic, we're experiencing what Hegel might have called a world-historical event, and it is not fun. It isn't pleasant.

It's numbing, it's wearing, it's heartbreaking and mindbreaking. It does funny, awful things to our sense of time. I think there's a tendency in literature, especially our pop culture, including film, to imbue a sense of giddy, urgent glamour into moments like these—the Blitz, say—moments of wartime or hardship. It's not like that. It's a grind. One book that gets the Battle of Britain so right—the tedium, the gore, the seemingly unending, repetitive wretchedness and fear, while also being a very funny, tender, and delightful work of historical fiction is Kate Atkinson's brilliant *Life After Life*; a work of history that gets at the human dailiness of an extreme moment in time is my BU colleague Alexis Peri's fantastic book on the Siege of Leningrad, *The War Within*. I've assigned both these books before the pandemic, and I wonder how they will land with students in the future.

I think of my poet friends and colleagues and we're all writing pandemic poems—of course we are—and yet most of them will turn out to be minor or not very relevant. We won't understand this pandemic, historically, for another fifty or 100 years. We don't know what poems will become iconic, like Trakl's "Groddek" is for the Great War, or Owen's "Dolce et decorum est." But we can try to understand what it means to us and for us. I've been re-reading, in translation, Osip Mandelstam, and also Marina Tsvetaeva's *Moscow in the Plague Year*—she means, by "plague," war and revolution, not an actual illness, though of course that was coming, too—and the clarity and fear in those poems is astonishing and somehow comforting.



## *Interview with an Educator: Katherine Hollander*

I know there will be positives, historically-speaking, that emerge from the pandemic (people like to make comparisons to the Black Death and the Renaissance, and so on) as there have been already for some individuals, but I'm not willing to think of it this way in real time. As of today, 900,000 Americans have died, and millions of people worldwide; I'm not ready to say there's anything good or interesting in that. For me as an historian there is always an aspect of holding space for mourning. It is not the best of all possible worlds. Our poems can make little moments of solace, though, I hope.

**FPP:** FPP: You are a poet, educator, and historian—what do you make of this particular moment in history? What can it offer to poetry?

**KH:** Be quiet. I'd say this to every teacher, especially at the college level. You don't have to talk so much. Let the silence come and see who finds their voice to fill it. Don't be afraid of the pauses. That's when students are really thinking. And it reminds them: It's their class, it's their experience, their education. Also, don't be afraid to say "I don't know." There are lots of reasons to get comfortable with saying it (being truthful in the classroom is one of them) but I think one of the best ones is that it shows students that it's okay for them to say it. Starting with not knowing is how we get to knowing, understanding, feeling confident in what we think, feel or know.

And you have to come back to the "I don't know" again and again, with

poems especially. It's the feeling of going from not-knowing to knowing that is so pleasurable, and so uniquely on offer with poems, yet so inaccessible in so many other realms of our life, whether because the Internet makes information (not knowledge, not wisdom, not comprehension, but information) so gluttonously available, or because we don't allow ourselves to dwell in the not-knowing, or even visit. I like to tell students about taking TS Eliot off the shelf as a young teenager and reading "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and having absolutely not one clue what it was about or what it was doing or how it was doing it, but being filled with the pleasure of that poem, just loving it and being captivated by its kind of swoon of intricacy. Sometimes that is only the start; sometimes that is enough. Recently I was so pleased when a beginning poetry student said of a book he'd read by Joy Harjo, "I didn't understand all of it but I could tell there was such mastery and beauty, I just went with it." I think all of us should hold onto that feeling.



# Favorite Poem Project



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