

NEWSLETTER

2024

THE FAVORITE POEM PROJECT

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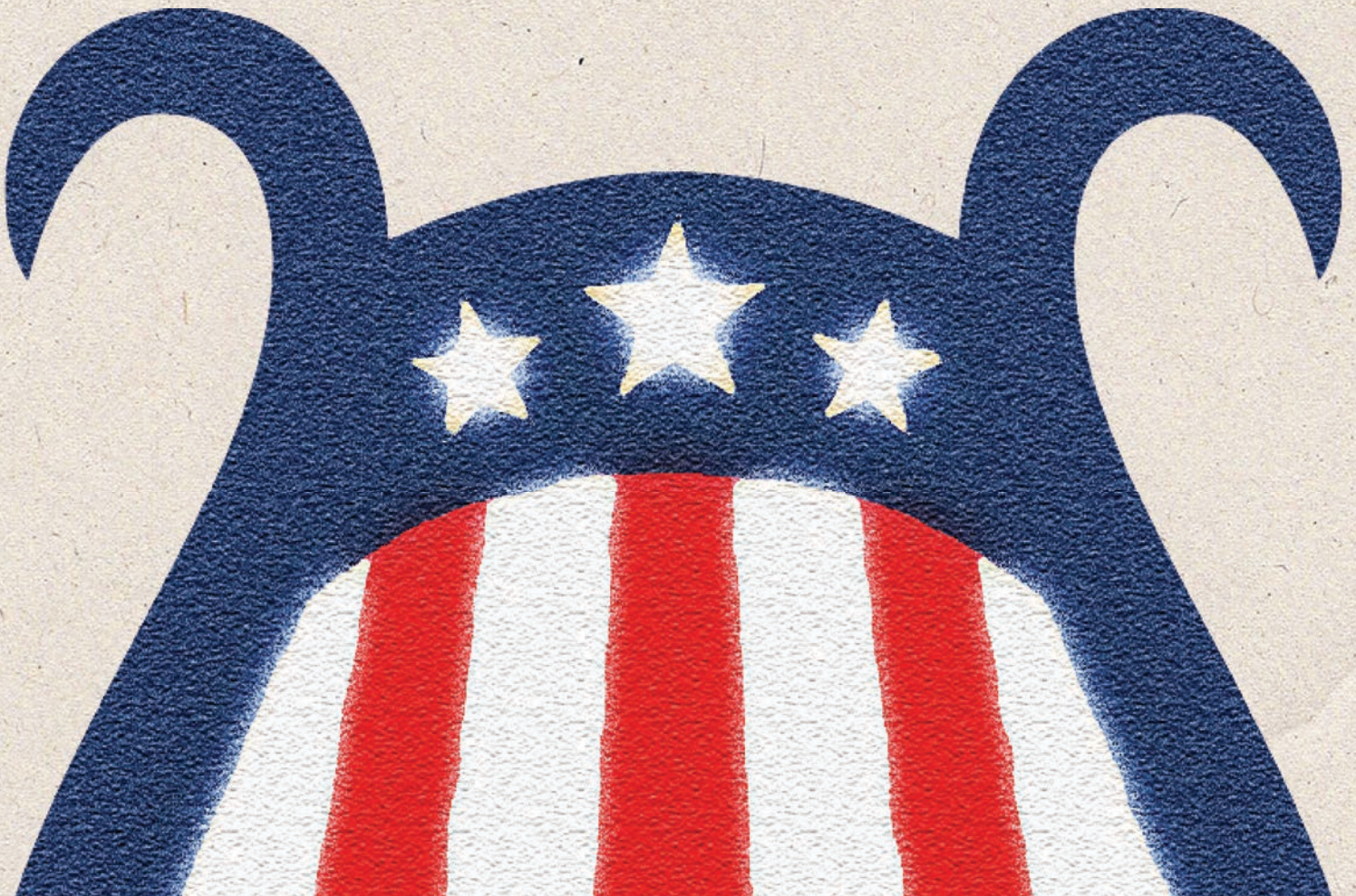
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A NOTE FROM ANNETTE FROST

director of the favorite poem project

Each year we find ourselves returning with gratitude to the truth of the humanities. Poetry, that sweet arrangement of words giving wisdom, sorrow, joy and pleasure might be the oldest of them all. The Favorite Poem Project, regardless of changing tides, continues its simple goal: to celebrate and document the role of poetry in our lives. With the help of our wonderful team, the [Poetry Archive](https://www.favoritepoem.org) at [favoritepoem.org](https://www.favoritepoem.org) is growing in reach and resources. We thank the Boston University Center for Humanities and the College of Arts and Sciences for supporting this large endeavor.

Across the country, libraries, arts nonprofits and individuals are hosting their own Favorite Poem Project readings. Teachers are using our videos to break down the fear felt by so many students and educators, to tap into the actual purpose of poetry: feeling, the pleasure of sounds in your mouth and in your mind. With the Favorite Poem Project in so many classrooms, students' voices are becoming the medium for this old and ongoing art. And here at home, here at BU, we are laying the groundwork for exciting new opportunities for faculty, staff, students and guests; bringing poets to give readings; bringing alumni back to share new work; giving our new poets inspiration for their craft and for its teaching. We'll see you out there.

UPCOMING EVENTS



ROBERT PINSKY AT THE BOSTON BOOK FESTIVAL

Saturday, October 26th, from 2:00-3:00 p.m.

Robert Pinsky will be reading at the Boston Book Festival on the first floor of the Goethe-Institut (170 Beacon Street, Boston). Book sales will be from 3:00-3:30 in the same room immediately following the reading.

FALL 2024 ROBERT LOWELL MEMORIAL READING

November 7th at 7:30 PM

The fall 2024 Robert Lowell Memorial Reading will take place at BU's Hillel House in the 4th Floor River Room with guest **Poet Monica Youn and BU MFA Alum Sara Daniele Rivera**. There will be a reception and book signing following the event in the Castle Room next door to the River Room.



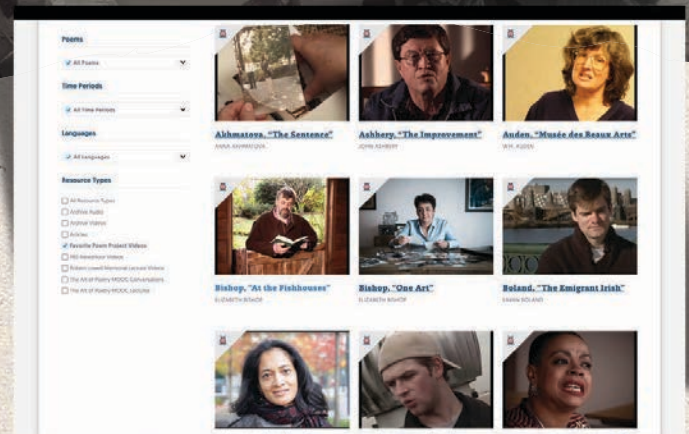
Stay tuned for more details about fall 2024 and spring 2025 PoemJazz performances with Robert Pinsky and musicians.

Annual Student, Friends and Faculty FPP
Reading coming this winter!

2024 RECAP

In February the Favorite Poem Project traveled to Kansas City for AWP weekend! We got to meet wonderful poets and writers as well as find many Boston University alumni publications on display.

The new Robert Pinsky Poetry Archive has been growing. We are happy to see its resources being accessed around the country in and out of the classroom.

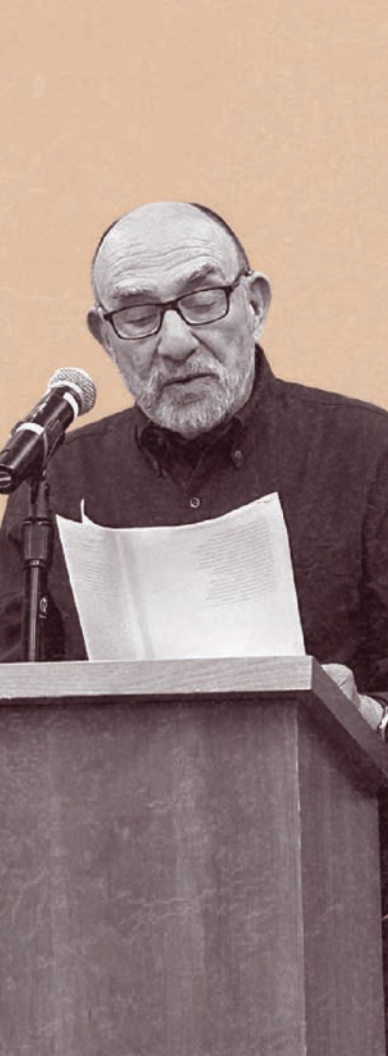


Don't forget to spread the word that our new website has FREE poetry lesson plans for educators. Just click the **Classroom Resources** tab.



Keep on the lookout for a **new BU class** featuring the Favorite Poem Project. **More details next spring!**

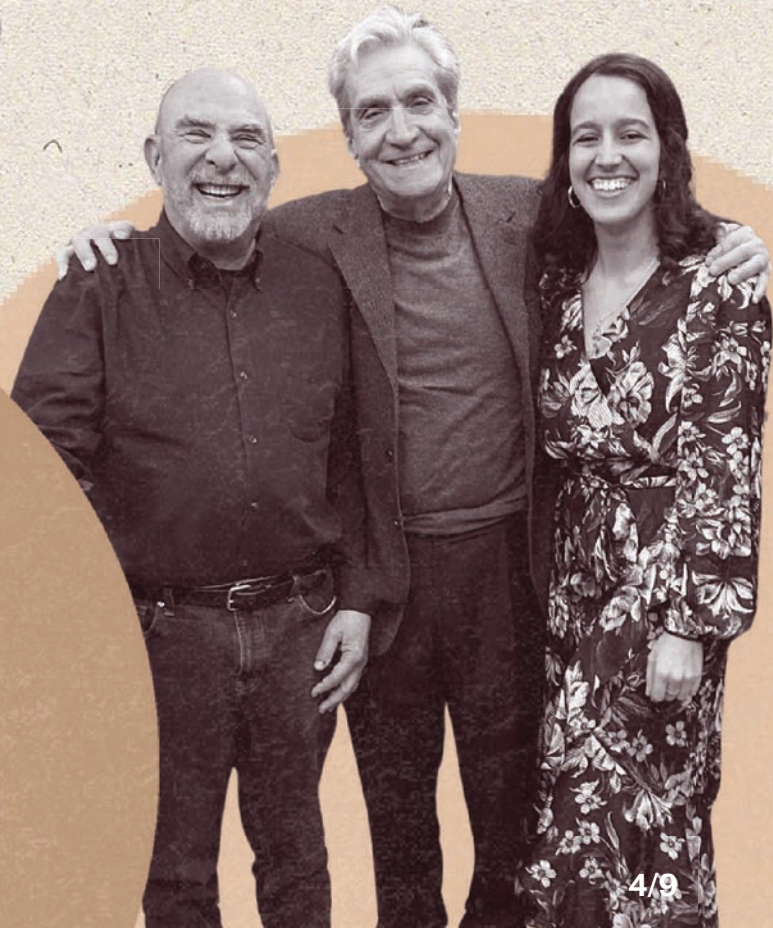




LAST FALL'S RLML WAS ONE FOR THE BOOKS,

featuring readings by poets **Major Jackson** and **Annette Frost**.

Spring's RLML readers, **Phil Schultz** and **Milica Mijatovic**, exceeded expectations as well. Robert Frost said "Give me a pain, a laugh, a thrill." These poets did.





**IN FEBRUARY WE HELD AN “ANIMAL” THEMED
FAVORITE POEM PROJECT FRIENDS AND FAMILY
READING.**

THANK YOU TO OUR FABULOUS READERS INCLUDING **ALEJANDRO AGUIRRE, KARL KIRCHWEY, VALGERDER THORODDSOTTIR AND XUEFEI JIN** WHO READ POEMS BY **DAVID FERRY, SYLVIA PLATH, THOM GUNN AND MORE.**



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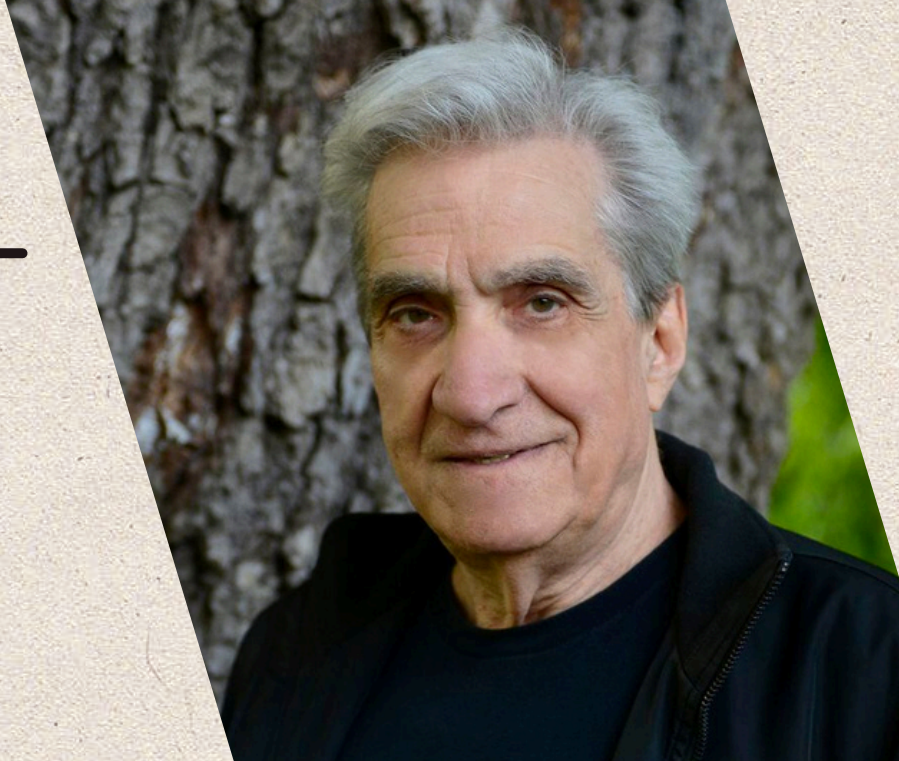
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FAVORITEPOEM.COM

ROBERT PINSKY

Founder of the Favorite Poem Project



FPP: Tell us of a time you felt insecure about your own poetry knowledge, and how an educator encouraged you.

RP: Laurence Ryan was a gentle, scholarly professor in the English Department at Stanford, where I arrived as a very young, not very scholarly graduate student. (I hadn't quite turned 21, and at Rutgers I was a certain kind of English major: articulate show-off who did not know much. Ryan had seen the type, I think as an army officer, then as a professor. He knew how to be kind, even appreciative, while patiently demonstrating to me the deep value of actual knowledge. I think my combination of ignorance and bravado bemused him. Among the benefits of knowledge: some understanding of your own limitations.

FPP: What's a new poem you read recently that revived your sense of wonder in contemporary poetry?

RP: In Carl Phillips' book *Scattered Snows, to the North* there are poems that evoke the kind of understanding I just tried to evoke—the value of seeing beyond one's ambitions and anxieties, if only a little. In "The Closing Hour," which begins "There are pleasures so ordinary that we barely notice them," the poem comes to a pair of understated alternatives I love, about getting over (somewhat) worry about the impression one leaves on others: "and then I really/ don't remember which came first: "I grew up?/ I grew tired?" Beautiful, smiling under-playing it!

FPP: How do you help students away from their doubts and into their voices?

RP: An important and difficult question. Nothing matters more than conviction. A possible direction: writing calls on the same skills you perfect in daily life: requests, arguments, flirtations, appeals and so forth that we make with family, with strangers, at parties, at holiday gatherings, sometimes in person, sometimes by text or telephone, dealing with a baby or a parent or a customer or a helper . . . we are all better at some of these than others, but they are a storehouse or orchestra of skills. Confess, student—you are good at some of these! The voice you use in that situation is a skill you have developed. Maybe deploy it in a poem—the most vocal of all arts?

FPP: What is the most common critique you give when responding to student poetry?

RP: Where is the pleasure you take in the art? I believe you have heard the enchanting melodies and proposals and questions of Emily Dickinson or William Shakespeare or your favorite living poets. Try to use that pleasure in your own making. Maybe you haven't primed the pump enough by reading your favorite passages in prose— Toni Morrison? William Faulkner? What did you love as a child? Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, his *Child's Garden of Verses*? The book of Isaiah, or Genesis? The Psalms? Dr. Seuss? Joan Didion? Red Smith? Remember that the art begins with, in a way ends with, pleasure. Have fun with it, based on what you enjoy in writing by your predecessors. Real poets love poetry. Poets when they gather quote old poetry to one another. (Academic notions of anxiety about predecessors apply to the academic critics, are just not true of poets—especially great poets, who love to invoke or cite the ancestors.)

FPP: What advice do you have for a new and a veteran teacher of poetry heading into the classroom this fall?

RP: Rely on what you love, personally.

FPP: Was there ever a time you didn't want to teach?

RP: I'm afraid of failing at it, every time. Nearly always, I try to use the fear as motivation.

FPP: How did your own writing change when you become a father? A grandfather? Did it impact your teaching?

RP: The profound effects are too difficult for me to recount here. A practical effect has been to protect my time— how quickly and efficiently can I do the teaching work while also tending to my own babies?

FPP: People talk about writing as a lonely act—how do you feel when you are sitting down at the page? Has it changed?

RP: Among the poets I have known, getting together to talk about the art, to share new work, to trade discoveries and enthusiasms from the old poets— might be Chaucer, might be Gwendolyn Brooks— has been a sustaining counterbalance to the unescapable, absolute loneliness. It's like when musicians get together: to play together, to quote the old stuff, to meet the challenge of something new. It's social, as well as personal, communal as well as lonely.

FPP: When teachers are deciding who to teach their students, what advice do you have for selecting poems and poets?

RP: Worth repeating: teach what you love. I don't believe in tailoring these choices to some theory of audience research, or academic authority. Of course, finding new things to love, expanding and refining one's taste, is important for the teacher . . . and for the writer!

FPP: Zoom events are more and more common. Why should people get out and go to in-person readings?

RP: Electronic presence can add something to actual presence, but the virtual cannot replace the actual—not in any part of life.

FPP: You will be turning 84 this year, and retiring next year—your perspective on the world of poetry and education is vast. Would you like to offer any insight or thoughts to those continuing on in the humanities in your wake?

RP: Try to rise above the present moment. Make the past and the future your guides. Compared to the magnitude of the past and the future, the present is a brief, plausible delusion. Enjoy it, but the greatest pleasure is in the other two, larger realms.

THANKS FOR TUNING IN!



Are you part of the BU community? Do you know of any distinguished visitors coming to BU? Email us and let us know—there may be an FPP opportunity!

FPP@BU.EDU