



common

seven poets & a wealth of readers

volume 1, spring 2011

Common Threads: Seven Poets and a Wealth of Readers
Volume 1

Compiled and edited
by
Kevin R. Morrissette & S.D. Mullaney
for
MassPoetry

April 2011

Contents

Acknowledgments	3
Editors' Note	4
A Note for the Discussion Leader.....	7
In the Waiting Room	8
<i>by Elizabeth Bishop</i>	
Samurai Song	11
<i>by Robert Pinsky</i>	
The Lost Pilot	13
<i>by James Tate</i>	
Occupation	16
<i>by Suji Kwock Kim</i>	
Vita Nova	18
<i>by Louise Glück</i>	
Love Song: I and Thou.....	20
<i>by Alan Dugan</i>	
New England Ode.....	22
<i>by Kevin Young</i>	
About the Poets Featured in this Volume.....	24
Thoughts about Reading Poetry.....	29
Further Sources for the Reading & Writing of Poetry	36
Credits.....	38
About the Massachusetts Poetry Outreach Project.....	39
About the Editors.....	40

Acknowledgments

We extend our thanks to the poets for giving us permission to use their poems for this edition and to the committee, who sorted through volumes of poetry by familiar and emerging poets with connections to Massachusetts. Their final selections that create this microreader represent a rich tapestry of talented poets who have, and still continue, to grace our state. The MassPoetry Common Threads Selection Committee included Rhina P. Espaillat, Harris Gardner, Raffael deGruttola, Alice Kociemba, Gail Mazur, Lloyd Schwartz, Sharon Shaloo and Michael Ansara.

A special thanks to MassHumanities and the Massachusetts Cultural Council whose early and continuing support made MassPoetry possible.

Finally, we thank *you*, the many organizers of and participants in this initiative. This is the first of what we hope will become an annual communal poetry experience. Thank you for joining us in this first experiment in common poetry reading and exploration.

Editors' Note

Welcome to the first volume of *Common Threads: Seven Poets and a Wealth of Readers* from the Massachusetts Poetry Outreach Project (MassPoetry).

As Common Threads goes to press, our world continues to grow more connected and more turbulent. We are grappling with monumental natural disasters, from deadly earthquakes and tsunamis to debilitating hurricanes. We are contending with man-made disasters as well: armed conflicts, and restricted freedoms; oil spills and nuclear accidents; acts of physical and cultural terrorism; violence in communities and acts of personal violence. We are an increasingly polarized citizenry with ever more strident debates about who we are and what our democracy should be. We search for a path to an America that is prosperous for all. We argue furiously about the proper role of individuals, corporations and government in our lives.

Municipal, state, and national budget deficits sometimes lead well-meaning people of various viewpoints to question the value of publicly-funded arts, education, and broadcasting. Public schools, public libraries, and public higher education are charged to do more with fewer resources. As private citizens and as members of a commonwealth, what can we do? And what does all that have to do with poetry?

Poetry causes us to scratch our heads. On one level, we may ask: what does this particular poem mean and how is it related to my life? On a larger level, we may wonder: why has poetry lasted so long as an art and what is its relevance today?

MassPoetry is dedicated to the belief that poetry and literacy are inseparable soul-mates. We see poetry as part of the solution to the challenges we face, not mere escapism or flights-of-fancy. Humans make meaning out of their sufferings and their joys. In response to the chaos around and within us, we seek to find meaning through form. We seek common forms to communicate our discovered wisdom with others.

Poetry is a pure study of *form* within language, and the study of composition shows us that form finds form. From the street to the club to the academy, poetry's permeability and flexibility nourish an art which celebrates language itself. Poetry isn't the solitary act we perceive it to be; it's a personal and communal, even a political act. The most robust poems surpass the written text which shapes them. They live when performed, when read aloud, when conjoined with visual arts, or when otherwise *enacted* in the real world.

Poetry is enacted every day in diverse cultures and through varied venues, from the highly individual to the highly organized. In our

Commonwealth, venues include (but aren't limited to) slam competitions, open-mic communities, and various flavors of spoken word/performance/exhibition poetry. Examples also include well-circulated or emerging authors reading aloud from their latest collections, writers gathering to read the work of a shared favorite poet, and collaborations between poets, artists, and musicians. They include energetic and challenging creative works from students in public and private schools. They include large-scale festivals such as the upcoming Massachusetts Poetry Festival on May 13-14, 2011, sponsored by MassPoetry, and co-hosted by Salem State University, the Peabody Essex Museum, and the City of Salem among many others.

Poetry also finds even greater life by being reborn in the virtual world. The emphasis of this young millennium on digital, online social and cultural media has allowed *text* to escape *book*. So poetry, too, has escaped familiar environs: the classroom, the coffee-house, the literary magazine, the well-connected critic. Poets and audiences today engage ever more widely through direct, two-way communication: witness the online distribution of digital video/audio/texts as well as the posting of profiles, events, and advertisement which connect "Friends" or "Like"-minded users to one another and to artists. Today, poetry is being composed and distributed real-time via Text message and/or Tweet. By composing chains of 140 or 160 character building blocks of thought and meaning, such poets practice economy of language, while reinforcing the ephemeral nature of form, interpretation, and matter. Audience and author may immediately respond to one another.

Readers and artists, students and teachers alike navigate an overwhelming riot of sharable, searchable, downloadable information. Everyone seems to be colliding, and as poet Sherman Alexie notes all must be "reborn inside the collision of cultures" through literacy. The information-literate seek and know the bass-lines, through-lines, harmonies, dissonances, individual notes, and competing melodies. However, current literacy requirements demand stronger faculties of discernment, i.e., critical reading, thinking, and expressive skills.

It seems easier to quantify (and thus justify public expenditure on) math, science, economic, and professional forms of education. It is harder to demonstrate the vital role the arts play in improving the underlying skills *which feed and govern those more easily quantified skills*. Arts, and poetry as part of them, have always allowed us to increase critical thinking, emotional and cultural wisdom, self-esteem and skilled self-expression, engagement, and to figure out meaning/relationship between facts, understanding real-life consequences.

MassPoetry offers you *Common Threads* and the Massachusetts Poetry Festival, as well as other programs including the placement of poets in schools, taking poets into communities, summer workshops for

teachers, and shortly, a new interactive poetry of place website. *Common Threads* seeks to connect a small amount of text – seven poems – to as large and broad a community of readers as possible. This micro-collection connects seven poets who've written, lived, or worked in Massachusetts to thousands of people in libraries, homes, schools, senior centers, and other settings, all reading and discussing the same poems. MassPoetry hopes that after April's experience with these poems and their poets, many of you will come together to experience the work of additional poets at the Massachusetts Poetry Festival, May 13-14, in Salem.

We ask you not only to read these poems, but to experience them. We've added some background information, which we invite you to consider as you create time and space during National Poetry Month to connect these poems to your life. We encourage you to read these aloud and listen to recordings of the poems on our website, www.masspoetry.org. We hope you find the included questions and observations helpful in stimulating group discussion. But even more importantly, we hope you come to ask *your own questions* about the poems and share *your own answers* with one another and with us.

*Kevin R. Morrissette and
S.D. Mullaney
University of
Massachusetts Boston
March 2011*

A Note for the Discussion Leader

In this volume, you will find general questions you may apply to all the poems. The questions are designed to engage the readers in activities and discussions centered around each poem. They are “guideposts” to engage readers in the discovery of meaning and to explore the craft of poetry. Each poem is then followed with questions specific to that poem. You should feel free to use any or all of the questions, or make up questions and activities on your own that would best suit the needs of your group (you may even want to share them with MassPoetry to enhance everyone’s experience). The poems are then followed by brief biographies of each poet with links to more detailed information on the poets, a general guide to reading poetry that may be used with this micro-collection and future works of poetry your group may wish to explore and, finally, suggestions for further reading. These suggestions include dictionaries, handbooks, and a textbook, all of which evoke the pleasures one may derive from poetry.

General Questions for the Poems

1. Try “rewriting” the poem either as a summary or as a story to help you “get inside” the poem and understand what the poet is saying. Share these with your group and think about how they are similar and different. Discuss the different images upon which group members choose to focus and why these images are important.
2. Look at the lines of the poem. Think about the ways in which each line begins and ends. Are the words nouns or adjectives, conjunctions or pronouns? Do the words, on their own, cause the reader to pause and reflect on the importance of the line or do they carry the reader forward through the line (or onto the next line)?
3. What about punctuation? What purpose does it serve the line? Look into the line itself and think about how commas and dashes, parentheses and semicolons direct the reading of the poem.
4. Read the poem out loud and listen for the accented syllables. Is there a musicality to the mixture of accented and unaccented syllables? Does the poem sound dissonant or melodic? How does the sound of the poem affect your understanding of it?
5. With music comes tone. What does the tone of the poem suggest? Is it quiet and reflective, loud and bombastic, angry, sad, joyous? Is there a shift in tone and a variety of emotions working together or at odds with each other?

In the Waiting Room

by Elizabeth Bishop

In Worcester, Massachusetts,
I went with Aunt Consuelo
to keep her dentist's appointment
and sat and waited for her
in the dentist's waiting room.
It was winter. It got dark
early. The waiting room
was full of grown-up people,
arctics and overcoats,
lamps and magazines.
My aunt was inside
what seemed like a long time
and while I waited I read
the *National Geographic*
(I could read) and carefully
studied the photographs:
the inside of a volcano,
black, and full of ashes;
then it was spilling over
in rivulets of fire.
Osa and Martin Johnson
dressed in riding breeches,
laced boots, and pith helmets.
A dead man slung on a pole
—"Long Pig," the caption said.
Babies with pointed heads
wound round and round with string;
black, naked women with necks
wound round and round with wire
like the necks of light bulbs.
Their breasts were horrifying.
I read it right straight through.
I was too shy to stop.
And then I looked at the cover:
the yellow margins, the date.

Suddenly, from inside,
came an *oh!* of pain
—Aunt Consuelo's voice—
not very loud or long.
I wasn't at all surprised;
even then I knew she was
a foolish, timid woman.
I might have been embarrassed,

but wasn't. What took me
completely by surprise
was that it was *me*:

my voice, in my mouth.
Without thinking at all
I was my foolish aunt,
I—we—were falling, falling,
our eyes glued to the cover
of the *National Geographic*,
February, 1918.

I said to myself: three days
and you'll be seven years old.
I was saying it to stop
the sensation of falling off
the round, turning world
into cold, blue-black space.
But I felt: you are an *I*,
you are an *Elizabeth*,
you are one of *them*.
Why should you be one, too?
I scarcely dared to look
to see what it was I was.
I gave a sidelong glance
—I couldn't look any higher—
at shadowy gray knees,
trousers and skirts and boots
and different pairs of hands
lying under the lamps.
I knew that nothing stranger
had ever happened, that nothing
stranger could ever happen.

Why should I be my aunt,
or me, or anyone?
What similarities—
boots, hands, the family voice
I felt in my throat, or even
the *National Geographic*
and those awful hanging breasts—
held us all together
or made us all just one?
How—I didn't know any
word for it—how "unlikely"...
How had I come to be here,
like them, and overhear
a cry of pain that could have
got loud and worse but hadn't?

The waiting room was bright
and too hot. It was sliding
beneath a big black wave,
another, and another.

Then I was back in it.
The War was on. Outside,
in Worcester, Massachusetts,
were night and slush and cold,
and it was still the fifth
of February, 1918.

Discussion Questions

1. At the most literal level of the poem, a young girl sits in the waiting room of a dentist's office. But as a metaphor, she is waiting for other things. What might those things be, and how does Bishop bring them together in her poem?
2. Bishop contrasts the cold Worcester winter with tropical images from pages of a *National Geographic* magazine. If you knew that she spent much of her adult life in Brazil, does knowing this either help you to understand the poem better or change your view of it?
3. "I said to myself: three days / and you'll be seven years old." These two lines seem important to the speaker of the poem. Why do you think that is?
4. The last two stanzas suggest a return movement from the imaginings of the tropics back to Worcester in February. What changes seem to have occurred in the mind of the speaker from the opening lines to these last two stanzas? How do these stanzas reflect such changes?

Samurai Song

by Robert Pinsky

When I had no roof I made
Audacity my roof. When I had
No supper my eyes dined.

When I had no eyes I listened.
When I had no ears I thought.
When I had no thought I waited.

When I had no father I made
Care my father. When I had
No mother I embraced order.

When I had no friend I made
Quiet my friend. When I had no
Enemy I opposed my body.

When I had no temple I made
My voice my temple. I have
No priest, my tongue is my choir.

When I have no means fortune
Is my means. When I have
Nothing, death will be my fortune.

Need is my tactic, detachment
Is my strategy. When I had
No lover I courted my sleep.

Discussion Questions

1. What makes a samurai a samurai? Look this word up in a dictionary or encyclopedia. Think about what this word means, the type of person it describes, and then think about how it helps you gain a better understanding of Pinsky's poem.

2. As the title suggests, this poem is a song. It has a very musical quality to it. Count out the number of syllables in each line, then the number of stressed syllables in each line. Now look at the numbers; there is a careful consistency of stressed syllables in each line, but there is a slight differentiation of the total number of syllables in each line. Read the poem aloud, overemphasize the stressed syllables, and listen

for the overall rhythm of the poem. Describe this rhythm and discuss how the rhythm accentuates the meaning of the poem.

3. Throughout the poem, the speaker is reflecting on the giving up of material possessions, and these possessions are replaced with abstract ideas. What is the speaker trying to teach the reader here? If you're that reader, what has it taught *you*? Is this lesson an "important" one?

4. The last line of the poem reads, in part, "... I courted my sleep." What does the poet refer to here when using the word sleep? Can you think of other poems (or poets) who have used the imagery of sleep in a similar fashion?

The Lost Pilot

by James Tate

for my father, 1922-1944

Your face did not rot
like the others—the co-pilot,
for example, I saw him

yesterday. His face is corn-
mush: his wife and daughter,
the poor ignorant people, stare

as if he will compose soon.
He was more wronged than Job.
But your face did not rot

like the others—it grew dark,
and hard like ebony;
the features progressed in their

distinction. If I could cajole
you to come back for an evening,
down from your compulsive

orbiting, I would touch you,
read your face as Dallas,
your hoodlum gunner, now,

with the blistered eyes, reads
his braille editions. I would
touch your face as a disinterested

scholar touches an original page.
However frightening, I would
discover you, and I would not

turn you in; I would not make
you face your wife, or Dallas,
or the co-pilot, Jim. You

could return to your crazy
orbiting, and I would not try
to fully understand what

it means to you. All I know
is this: when I see you,
as I have seen you at least

once every year of my life,
spin across the wilds of the sky
like a tiny, African god,

I feel dead. I feel as if I were
the residue of a stranger's life,
that I should pursue you.

My head cocked toward the sky,
I cannot get off the ground,
and, you, passing over again,

fast, perfect, and unwilling
to tell me that you are doing
well, or that it was mistake

that placed you in that world,
and me in this; or that misfortune
placed these worlds in us.

Discussion Questions

The Lost Pilot

1. The speaker of this poem is looking at a photo of his father who is “trapped in time.” The father will never grow older. Can you think of someone in your life who is “trapped in time,” someone you have not seen for five, ten, twenty years or more. Describe that person to the group and who you think that person would be today if you suddenly ran into him or her. Conversely, if you’re in middle school or high school, imagine what you and your friends will be like in twenty years or more. How have you changed?
2. This poem is written for someone who has died. Such a poem is called an elegy. Think about someone in your life who has died and write an elegy for that person. Share these poems with the group.
3. The speaker’s father is forever “orbiting” about. This word touches upon the central theme of the poem. Discuss the ways someone you love who has died continues to orbit about you and how thinking about that person influences or deepens the meaning of this poem for you.

4. Notice that the poem is written in three-lined stanzas known as tercets. What effect does this have on you, the reader, visually? What if it were written as all one stanza, or broken up into four-lined stanzas known as quatrains. Think about the importance of grouping lines into stanzas and their impact on the reading of a poem.

Occupation

by Suji Kwock Kim

The soldiers
are hard at work
building a house.
They hammer
bodies into the earth
like nails,
they paint the walls
with blood.
Inside the doors
stay shut, locked
as eyes of stone.
Inside the stairs
feel slippery,
all flights go down.
There is no floor:
only a roof,
where ash is falling—
dark snow,
human snow,
thickly, mutely
falling.
Come, they say.
This house will
last forever.
You must occupy it.
And you, and you—
And you, and you—
Come, they say.
There is room
for everyone.

Discussion Questions

1. The poet uses the word, house, as a metaphor. When you think of this word, what thoughts or images come to mind? What thoughts and images does the poet connect to this word, house? What effect does this have on your reading of the poem and your understanding of the meaning(s) of the word house?
2. This poem is about conflict. How might you better understand the poem by reflecting upon and discussing the recent world conflicts of the past fifty or sixty years? Does this influence the way you read the poem? Why or why not?

3. Why do you think the lines are so short? What sort of impact do they have on you, the reader?

4. The poem's speaker, in reference to the house, says to the readers, "You must occupy it. / And you, and you - / And you, and you -." What does it mean for us to occupy this house or are we being challenged to *defy* occupation?

Vita Nova

by Louise Glück

In the splitting up dream
we were fighting over who would keep
the dog,
Blizzard. You tell me
what that name means. He was
a cross between
something big and fluffy
and a dachshund. Does this have to be
the male and female
genitalia? Poor Blizzard,
why was he a dog? He barely touched
the hummus in his dogfood dish.
Then there was something else,
a sound. Like
gravel being moved. Or sand?
The sands of time? Then it was
Erica with her maracas,
like the sands of time
personified. Who will
explain this to
the dog? Blizzard,
Daddy needs you; Daddy's heart is empty,
not because he's leaving Mommy but because
the kind of love he wants Mommy
doesn't have, Mommy's
too ironic – Mommy wouldn't do
the rhumba in the driveway. Or
is this wrong. Supposing
I'm the dog, as in
my child-self, inconsolable because
completely pre-verbal? With
anorexia! O Blizzard,
be a brave dog – this is
all material; you'll wake up
in a different world,
you will eat again, you will grow up into a poet!
Life is very weird, no matter how it ends,
very filled with dreams. Never
will I forget your face, your frantic human eyes
swollen with tears.
*I thought my life was over and my heart was broken.
Then I moved to Cambridge*

Discussion Questions

1. What do the dog and its name, Blizzard, suggest? How does this work as a metaphor for the poem?
2. Love is a very important emotional need in our lives, and in this poem, the two human characters appear to be incapable of meeting this need (giving and receiving) for each other. Think about ways in which you try to give and receive love, what happens when the love you offer is not accepted, and how these emotions work their way through the poem.
3. The word, anorexia (and its placement in the poem) is significant. What is anorexia, and what power does it hold within the poem?
4. The last two lines of the poem greatly differ from the rest of the poem in tone as suggested by the italics. What do you think the poet is suggesting here? What kind of change is taking place in the life of the speaker of the poem?

Love Song: I and Thou

by Alan Dugan

Nothing is plumb, level, or square:
the studs are bowed, the joists
are shaky by nature, no piece fits
any other piece without a gap
or pinch, and bent nails
dance all over the surfacing
like maggots. By Christ
I am no carpenter. I built
the roof for myself, the walls
for myself, the floors
for myself, and got
hung up in it myself. I
danced with a purple thumb
at this house-warming, drunk
with my prime whiskey: rage.
Oh I spat rage's nails
into the frame-up of my work:
it held. It settled plumb,
level, solid, square and true
for that great moment. Then
it screamed and went on through,
skewing as wrong the other way.
God damned it. This is hell,
but I planned it, I sawed it,
I nailed it, and I
will live in it until it kills me.
I can nail my left palm
to the left-hand crosspiece but
I can't do everything myself.
I need a hand to nail the right,
a help, a love, a you, a wife.

Discussion Questions

1. The speaker of the poem is building something, but what is it? Is it important for the reader to know this piece of information? Why or why not?
2. The poem states that nothing is “plumb, level, or square” but becomes so after settling. This sounds like a contradiction in terms or a

paradox. What is the poet attempting to illustrate here? What life experiences might you point to, to support your answer?

3. The title of this poem indicates it is a love poem. Do you agree that this is a love poem? If you disagree, why? What is the poem saying that leads you to question the title? As a love poem, what about the content makes this an unusual love poem?

4. The speaker of the poem invokes the name, Christ, mentions God and hell, and nails his left hand to a crosspiece, but needs the person to whom he is speaking to nail his right hand to the crosspiece. What do you make of this religious imagery in the poem? What does it say about loving relationships?

New England Ode

by Kevin Young

*i.m. Richard Newman
d. 2003*

Straight-backed pews
painted white
Compost, not trash
Boston marriage
Public school or Private
Paper, not plastic
Frappe, not milkshake
or malted
Rotary, not roundabout
Where do you summer?
Native, native, tourist
My loneliness
study group meets Thursdays
Shore, coast, overfished
Soda, not pop
Wetlands, not swamp
No Sunday Sales
Irish Twins
I'm a vegetarian
though I still love lamb
Pulpits high up
Spas, bubblers,
dry cleansers
Pineapple fences
Red tide
Sparkling or still
Woodchucks, not groundhogs
My dog & I
are both on a diet
Pay at the counter
Do you smell fire?
This is our year
All we need
is some good pitching
The Begonia Club
Volvo Volvo Volvo
Volvo Honda Volvo
The town my great-
grandfather founded
is just a tiny one
Fans, not a/c
Indian pudding
Patriot's Day, Bunker
Hill Day, Evacuation Day,
Lime Rickey

Curse, not pennant
Hiss, not boo
Pews you unlatch
to climb into, then lock
shut behind you

Discussion Questions

1. This poem is called an *ode*, which Merriam Webster defines as “a lyric poem usually marked by exaltation of feeling and style, varying length of line, and complexity of stanza forms.” Does the poem entirely fit that description, and if not, why is it still an ode?
2. If this poem is an ode, can it also be an *elegy*, which M.W. defines as “a song or poem expressing sorrow or lamentation especially for one who is dead”?
3. The poem is a listing of images rather than a narrative. How would the poem change if a more narrative structure is introduced?
4. Some lines consist of one thing contrasted with another thing. Does this always mean they’re opposites? Other lines contain one thing, still others form complete sentences broken up over two or more lines. These three types of lines are mixed together throughout the poem, alternating in an irregular order. What do the three line types themselves, as well as the way they’re presented together, suggest to you about the meaning of the poem?
5. The images here speak to a specific way of New England life, employing local colloquialisms and their general equivalent elsewhere. What images do you recognize and understand, which ones are unfamiliar to you? What might these observations say about New England past, present, and future?

About the Poets Featured in this Volume

Elizabeth Bishop (1911 – 1979) is considered one of the foremost poets of the 20th century. A former Poet Laureate of the United States (1949 – 50), her numerous awards include a Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. Born in Worcester, Bishop's relationship with Massachusetts was simultaneously deep-rooted and far-flung. Tragedy marked Bishop's early life; her father's early death forced her and her mother to relocate to Nova Scotia, where Bishop's mother was later committed. Elizabeth Bishop was then five years old. Despite this, she reported being happy in Nova Scotia. However, Bishop was not long thereafter called to live with her paternal grandparents in Worcester. Dreadfully unhappy, she suffered both physical and mental ailments. Bishop then moved to the Boston area to live with her mother's sister Maud Shepherdson where she began to regain her health and develop her poetry.

Years later she met poets Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell, who both encouraged her in her craft. Bishop lived in Key West, New York City, and Mexico; she also spent years living in Brazil with her partner, Lota de Macedo Soares. The pair returned to the U.S., where Soares later took her own life. Despite her grief, Bishop returned to Massachusetts to teach at Harvard University, where she worked until shortly before her death. "In The Waiting Room" appears in her final collection of poetry, *Geography III*. Throughout her work, one can observe themes of geography, family, nature, intimacy, loneliness, and loss—all conveyed with precise wit, insightful surprise, and accessible humor. Elizabeth Bishop died in 1979 at Lewis Wharf, Boston. She's buried at Worcester's Hope Cemetery.

Further information:

[Elizabeth Bishop: Poets.org - Poetry, Poems, Bios & More](http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/7)

(<http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/7>)

[Elizabeth Bishop: Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_Bishop)

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_Bishop)

[Elizabeth Bishop: The Poetry Foundation](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/elizabeth-bishop)

(<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/elizabeth-bishop>)

Robert Pinsky (b. 1940) loved the Arts from a young age. Originally from New Jersey, he was the first in his family to attend college, enrolling at Rutgers University. While there, Pinsky taped a hand-written copy of W.B. Yeats' "Sailing to Byzantium" to his wall for inspiration. After receiving his Ph.D. from Stanford University, Pinsky

returned for a time to Massachusetts to teach at Wellesley. He reversed his coastal affiliation once again by later joining the faculty of the University of California at Berkeley.

Pinsky's work examines both poetry and literary composition as a whole. He has published extensive volumes of literary criticism, and his love of poetic craft led him to publish his bestselling translation *The Inferno of Dante: A New Verse Translation*. The volume focuses on reproducing Dante's original *terza rima* rhyme scheme so natural to the Italian vernacular of its time, while maintaining a fresh and natural sound in modern English. He served as Poet Laureate of the United States for three consecutive terms (1997 – 2000). The Laureate is charged with raising public awareness of poetry through national projects; during his tenure, Pinsky started "The Favorite Poem Project," which originally invited 100 average Americans to read and record their favorite poetry for the archives of the Library of Congress. The program received over 18,000 submissions from many walks of American life and is available online. Pinsky currently serves as poetry editor for Slate.com. Like many another well-travelled poet, Pinsky eventually returned to Massachusetts to teach at Boston University.

Further information:

[Robert Pinsky: Poets.org - Poetry, Poems, Bios & More](#)

[Robert Pinsky: Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

[Robert Pinsky: The Poetry Foundation](#)

James Tate (b. 1943) is the recipient of many awards, including the Pulitzer Prize. Tate earned his MFA at the Iowa Writers' Workshop in 1967, the same year in which he won the Yale Younger Poets prize for *The Lost Pilot*. Originally from Kansas City, Missouri, Tate has taught at the University of California Berkeley and Columbia University, and is now teaching at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Tate has sometimes been dubbed a "surrealist" and grouped with poets such as Simeic and Charles Wright. His imagery achieves surprise through associating colorful objects with clashing descriptions. While he can be both funny and folksy, Tate's poetry also mines darker emotions such as fear, obsession, and revulsion.

Further information:

[James Tate- Poets.org - Poetry, Poems, Bios & More](#)

[James Tate- Poets.org - Poetry, Poems, Bios & More](#)

[James Tate \(writer\) - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

Suji Kwock Kim's (b. 1969) first book, *Notes from the Divided Country*, won numerous prizes, including the Walt Whitman Award and THE NATION/ Discovery Award. Her list of fellowships includes a Fulbright and a National Endowment for the Arts US/Japan Creative Artists Fellowship, among others. Defying easy categorization, Kim nonetheless draws on all sides of her Korean-American heritage in her first collection as she illustrates both the horror of national and personal tragedies and a resuscitating vision of resilience. Her poems seem to continuously open—descending a staircase or peeling back a layer only reveals further unexplored territory.

Kim received her bachelor's from Yale University, her MFA from the Iowa Writer's Workshop, and attended Seoul University. Her work has many times been set to music. She's also a playwright, and she's collaborated on opera. You can even find Kim on IMDB.com, where she appeared as herself in "Why Shakespeare?" a video short which discusses the ways Shakespeare and live theatre change people lives. She teaches at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

Further information:

[Suji Kwock Kim: Poets.org - Poetry, Poems, Bios & More](#)

[Suji Kwock Kim: Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

[Suji Kwock Kim: The Poetry Foundation](#)

Louise Glück (b. 1943) has authored nine books of poetry. Her poems are often celebrated for their mastery and use of first-person personae, from an unnamed, divorced mother to figures from myth, fairy tale, history, and scripture. Glück's work has dealt with the tumult and aftermath of death and divorce, facing the death of a husband and father, the unraveling of a marriage, or the aftermath of rebuilding lives which become as stripped down as Glück's own language. Glück also published the nonfiction *Proofs and Theories: Essays on Poetry*.

After attending Sarah Lawrence College and Columbia University, Glück taught poetry at numerous colleges and universities. Her work has received the Pulitzer Prize, the William Carlos Williams Award, and the National Book Critics Circle Award, among others. Other honors include the Bollingen Prize in Poetry, the Lannan Literary Award for Poetry, the MIT Anniversary Medal, as well as Guggenheim, Rockefeller, and National Endowment for the Arts fellowships. She served as Poet Laureate from 2003–2004. Glück taught at Williams College for nearly twenty years. She's currently Writer in Residence at Yale University and a long-time resident of Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Further information:

[Louise Glück- Poets.org - Poetry, Poems, Bios & More](#)

[Louise Glück - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

[Louise Glück : The Poetry Foundation : Find Poems and Poets. Discover Poetry.](#)

Alan Dugan (1923 – 2003) was noted for his intelligent, unsentimental treatment of life's mundane nature. Born in Brooklyn, New York, Dugan attended Queens College and Olivet College, and served in the Air Force during World War II, ultimately earning his B.A. in English from Mexico City College. Even as Dugan captured the commonplace—birth, death, sex, work, money, drink, etc., he presented the human condition without wrapping it in joy or grief, without imbuing it with a sense of perdition or redemption. His words were merely life, death, and all the sordid moments in between. Dugan famously felt no desire to fit in, largely ignoring popular and critical approval. His first publication, *General Prothalamion in Populous Times*, was printed privately. Despite his stance, Dugan received a Pulitzer Prize, two National Book Awards, a Prix de Rome, and the Shelley Memorial Award in Literature from the American Academy and Institute of Arts.

He taught at Connecticut College, Sarah Lawrence College, and the University of Colorado at Boulder. During his career, he also held various jobs in advertising, publishing, and as a medical-supply model maker. As a founding member of the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Massachusetts, Dugan's legacy and impact on Massachusetts poetry continues today.

Further information:

[Alan Dugan- Poets.org - Poetry, Poems, Bios & More](#)

[Alan Dugan - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

[Alan Dugan : The Poetry Foundation : Find Poems and Poets. Discover Poetry.](#)

Kevin Young (b. 1970) graduated from Harvard College, was a Stegner Fellow at Stanford University, and received his MFA from Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. Young counts Langston Hughes, John Berryman, and Emily Dickinson as inspirations, as well as the art of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Young was a part of The Dark Room Collective, a Cambridge-based African-American poetry community which also counted Thomas Sayers Ellis, Sharan Strange, Major Jackson, and Natasha Trethewey as members. Young has written six books of poetry and has edited four anthologies: *Giant Steps: The New Generation of African American Writers*, *Blues Poems*,

Jazz Poems, and *John Berryman's Selected Poems*. His “Black Cat Blues,” originally published in *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, was included in *The Best American Poetry 2005*. Young has also won a Quill Award, the John C. Zacharis First Book Prize, two Patterson Poetry prizes, and been a finalist for both a National Book Award and a Los Angeles Times Book Award.

Splitting his time between New England and Atlanta, Young now teaches writing at Emory University, where he is the Atticus Haygood Professor of English and Creative Writing as well as the curator of the Raymond Danowski Poetry Library.

Further information:

[Kevin Young- Poets.org - Poetry, Poems, Bios & More](#)

[Kevin Young : The Poetry Foundation : Find Poems and Poets. Discover Poetry.](#)

[Kevin Young | Official Web Site | Main Page](#)

Thoughts About Reading Poetry

Here are some thoughts on how to approach poetry, especially if this is a new or renewed experience for you. This isn't the most exhaustive or authoritative list; it's only one place to start. Our approach is organized around three broad questions:

1. What makes a poem a poem—and not something else?
2. How do you discover meaning in a poem?
3. What can poetry be?

What makes a poem a poem—and not something else?

It gets harder and harder to specify what a poem is. It's easier to start with what a poem is *not*, or is *not always*:

- Writing which has line breaks
- Rhymed
- Metered, or having a regularly-patterned rhythm
- Emotional
- Unemotional
- Rational
- Irrational
- Autobiographical
- Entirely fictional
- Hard to understand/inaccessible
- Without a meaning of its own
- Whatever the author says it is
- Whatever you say it is
- Written in fancy or elevated language
- Written in everyday language
- Written in a single language
- Written down
- Templated

Of course, a given poem can be one or more of the things in the list above. It just doesn't have to be in order to be considered a poem. So what is that inherent distinction which turns a composition into a poem and not anything else? One might not be able to specify that something, but one can *suggest* it. Poets have been making such suggestions for centuries. Two of our favorites (both of which utilize the technique of knowing through negation) are:

“If it ain't a pleasure, it ain't a poem.” —*William Carlos Williams*
“Poetry is not a luxury.” —*Audre Lorde*

These definitions suggest that a poem is *pleasure*, put into words and pleasure subsequently taken out of them. The second suggests that a

poem is both an *essence*, which may mean that it captures the fundamental nature of its subject and/or that it may itself be an ordering of words stripped-down to only those of basic necessity, as well as an *essential* part of our human condition. One might then define poetry as a practice of meaning-making which celebrates, through careful attention to form, the wide breadth of human language.

How do you discover meaning in a poem?

“The primary source of information by and about a poem is the poem itself.” —*John Hildebidle*

When examining poetry, remember that *the poem itself contains everything you need*. If the poem is the lock, door, vault, and treasure, you are the key and the beneficiary. It may help to keep the following ideas in mind:

- The words have meaning.
- The form itself has meaning.
- The pieces are related in some deliberate way.
- Each reader brings personal meaning/experience to the reading.
- We compare/contrast/oppose our understandings.
- Through shared responses, we shape one another’s meaning equally and diversely.

It’s less important, and often less accurate, to focus on authorial intent. We cannot assess all that Langston Hughes had in his mind when he wrote “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” but we can measure the effect that poem has on all sorts of readers. What exactly moved Emily Dickinson to write each of her poems remains shrouded in mystery, yet her poems are more cherished than ever for their impact on today’s readers. While you may be tempted to use the authors’ biographical information to help you unlock the poems in this micro-collection, we encourage you to let this information inspire your questions rather than govern your discovery of meaning.

Forms

In his essay “How Does a Poem Mean?” John Hildebidle writes that “poems do not...simply and directly offer moral wisdom or information or even plot and character. They do not ‘mean’ in the same way that most other linguistic utterances do. But this does not mean that they forego meaning altogether.”

Poetry comes in a variety of forms, from a variety of cultural traditions and shared experiences. Some forms are unique to poetry: sonnet, triolet, villanelle, ode, blank verse, terza rima, pantoum, ghazal, haiku, eintou are examples. Each of these has a specific structure and rules: number of lines, rhyme scheme, rhythm and meter, even subject

matter in some cases. (You are welcome to find specific information regarding various traditional forms later in this kit under “Further Resources.”)

Some forms blur the lines with other types of writing: the praise song, the blues poem, the prose poem, and the dramatic monologue are all good cases. Some poems are longer and narrative. While these might develop characters and/or chronicle events, they aren’t quite like a story or novel. Some poems include factual information, have clear messages, and/or make arguments, but shouldn’t be confused with an essay, a sermon, or an article. Some poems are in letter format (an epistolary), yet remain quite distinct from a cover letter for a job application.

Free verse is a form that often borrows many devices created elsewhere, but leaves the structure and rules up to the poet. Beat poetry, spoken word, talk poems, and slam poetry all have conventions and techniques more oriented to performance than page. They need to be heard and seen as much or more than they need to be read.

Still other poems strive to throw form away altogether, or at least to demonstrate that form and message are matters of choice rather than skill. Some poetry is sometimes deliberately ungrammatical and creatively (un)punctuated (L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry, for example). Such poems may come in fragments, made-up words, ur-words, and mixtures of different types of writing and idioms in an imperceptible order. They challenge the conventions and context of poetry. While still a form, these poems are perhaps as formless as a poem can possibly be—without being silence.

Each form has its rules, conventions, favored devices and techniques, all tailored to achieve an intended effect. *Whatever its form, a poem’s form is crucial to its meaning.* The form enhances the meaning, and the meaning fits the form. Poetic form is like a human body: it comes in infinite variations. Yet any person would have a hard time living without his or her skin or skeleton, and the loveliest body is no more than a mannequin without the mind and spirit which animates it.

What form does the poem you’re reading take? Is it a regular or repetitive form? If so, is it some kind of traditional form? Where’s the animating energy? What’s bringing this poem to life?

The Art of Imagery

When prose is described as “poetic,” the characterization is often meant as a compliment. On the other hand, when poems are criticized for being “prosaic,” the characterization is often meant as a negative criticism. Despite the implication, these characterizations don’t prove that poetry is better or more skillful than prose. Both are beautiful. However, they do suggest a quality desirable for any form of writing: *imagery*.

“Show, Don’t Tell” is a mantra for many writers, with good reason. An image captures an idea in a way that relates it to something we can encounter in the tangible world. Thus we can represent something in our heads—a relationship, a memory, a belief, a value etc.—by creating a picture which we can perceive concretely through our senses. Telling conveys information, while

showing through imagery goes further: if I see it, smell it, taste it, hear it, perform it in my imagination, I can do the same in the real world. By using imagery, we support our message by demonstrating it. I can better understand the information that the image signifies and how it's important.

Focus on the Senses

Humans perceive, remember, and communicate through combinations of our senses. Poetic devices are created to take advantage of those senses. Smell, for instance, is the physical sense most closely linked with memory; look for smells in a poem. Rhythm and rhyme have been used to remember and transmit information for millennia. Poet-historians practiced endlessly to get the stories just right, so they could pass on cultural information. Parents and teachers still use nursery rhymes to teach lessons to children. Americans born before 1980 could probably still recite Jenny's phone number: "eight-six-seven-five-three-oh-ni-ee-i-ine."

When you're reading a poem, you may find it helpful to identify which of the five bodily senses are being used through which words or images.

- *Auditory*: rhythm; number of syllables, the pattern of emphasis (meter); patterns of speech (dialect, conversation, idiom, etc.); meaning of the words (do they refer to sound or to hearing); sounds of the words themselves (rhyme, alliteration, consonance, onomatopoeia, etc.)
- *Visual*: meaning of the words (do they refer to something seen or to sight); appearance of the text (line and stanza length, shape, alignment, how it's broken up, punctuation);
- *Olfactory*: meaning of the words (do they refer to something smelled or to smell)
- *Gustatory*: meaning of the words (do they refer to something eaten or drunk or to taste);
- *Tactile/kinesthetic*: meaning of the words (do they refer to something felt or to physical feeling); do they describe or suggest physical movement; body language (gestures, cues, how one might deliver those lines on stage, etc.)

How does the poet rely on a given sense or senses? Does he or she use it an expected way, or does he or she defy conventional wisdom, using sensory detail in a way which puzzles you? How does the author's appeal to your various senses make you feel? Do some details remind you of other things from your life or someone else's? Which details, what things?

A poem may also speak to other human senses: our capacities for abstract thought and for emotion. Certain rational information can't be concretely perceived, yet we can know it to be true. Sub-atomic particles such as quarks and neutrinos aren't directly observable, and while you

read this, millions of them have passed through the tip of your nose. Who's to say that such imperceptible things don't belong in poems?

Mood and tone are often clues which help decipher the emotionality of poem. Both are highly subjective, and depend on the context and characteristics of the audience. The same words will neither always create the same mood, nor convey the same tone from one person to the next. We do know that poetry is designed for some kind of emotional impact, however, so paying attention to how certain phrases, images, and rhythms make you feel at this very moment can help you figure out the emotional effect of the poem. Comparing and contrasting your responses with others in your group can also help you deepen your interpretation.

Here's a monkey wrench: the mood and the tone of the poem might change over its course. How has each changed? Have they progressed, regressed, alternated, backtracked, etc.? Through what words did the author accomplish this change?

And through all this, don't forget to keep asking *where's the fun?*

Line Break and Word Choice

In poetry, each word is deliberately placed where it is. When a poem has fewer words and greater space in which to display them, the placement and choice of the words requires great care. Consider the way in which a one-word line (or stanza) makes that one word very important in considering the poem's meaning. It sticks out, so you can't miss it. If that word were sandwiched in the middle of a line between other words, its placement would shape your understanding differently. What does it achieve by being *that word*, displayed in *that way*?

The same is true of the sentence level aspects of poetry. Compare the following lines, which utilize the same words in different orders.

"That dog saved me when the world caught fire."

"That world saved me when the dog caught fire."

"That fire caught me when the dog saved the world."

Such changes in meaning above underscore how important the order of words and images are to a poem. Similarly, whether and where the line is broken shapes the meaning. Generally speaking, line breaks fall into two categories: *end-stopped*, in which thought, grammar, and punctuation are completed by the end of the line, or *enjambéd*, in which the content is interrupted and continues on subsequent line(s). There are even two types of enjambéd line breaks: *parsed* and *annotated*. A parsed line ends where a unit of thought or specific image can be logically broken up into smaller components. Each piece can stand on its own, but the complete thought or sentence continues for several lines before finishing. An annotated line ends in an unexpected place within the thought, and by doing so can create surprise, tension, emphasis, contradiction, or multiple meanings.

What is the effect of letting a line go very long, so long that it continues onto the next line? How is it if a line is quite short, say less than half the width of a 5.5' x 8.5' page? Does the author change line length within the same poem? How often, in what order, and to what effect does the poem utilize each style?

Information Gathering

"I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who."

– Rudyard Kipling

Notice that the above poem uses regular rhyme and meter to convey information we'd like to remember. The famed Five Ws (+ One H) not only apply to journalism, we can also use them to decipher the story of a poem. The questions below are meant suggestively, not definitively. They're places to start, not places to end.

- Who is the speaker of this poem? To whom is he/she/it speaking? Who else appears in the poem?
- What are these people like? What, if anything, are they doing during the course of the poem? What is happening to them? What else is happening? What is the overall effect or message?
- Where is this poem taking place? Is it a geographic location? A fictional location? An unspecified location? In the speaker's mind?
- When was this poem written? When are the events taking place? In the world of the poem, how much time passes between its beginning and its end?
- How does the poet do what he or she does? Through what words, what forms, what senses? How do specific pieces make you feel? How is this related to your own life experience?
- Why does the poem affect you the way it does?

Compare and Contrast with Other Poems

When you have several poems in front of you, you have the luxury of seeing different ways of handling similar words and images. So if you've thought about those storytelling/information gathering questions, if you've picked up on sensory details, if you can describe how the poem's form is put together, if you've put the poem in the context of your life and the author's biography, if you've noted the emotional/rational/psychological aspects, if you've done these things for one poem, you can do it for all of the poems. Finding the differences and similarities between multiple poems can help you discover the meaning in each one.

Do the authors use similar words or images? Do they use the same senses? Are they talking about the same subjects? If so, are they doing so in similar or different ways? Do the narrators share anything,

e.g., points-of-view, experiences, characteristics, or do they oppose one another? Are the forms similar—the line breaks, the rhythms, etc.?

What can poetry be?

We hope that you use this guide not as a prescriptive definition of what poetry is. We hope that we've demonstrated the futility of such an undertaking while at the same time awakening a curiosity to discover how the craft of poetry shapes meaning. We hope we've shown that while a poem doesn't necessarily mean whatever you wish it meant, your experience with the poem adds both to its original meaning and to your life. In the house of poetry, "there are many mansions." You may reside in any or all of them for as long as you wish, or you could build your own mansion. Please think of this kit as a doorway. There are many other doorways, many other windows.

Further Sources for the Reading & Writing of Poetry

Essays on Poetry

Fenton, James. *The Strength of Poetry: Oxford Lectures*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 2001. Print.

Pinsky, Robert. *Democracy, Culture, and the Voice of Poetry*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2002. Print.

Vendler, Helen. *Coming of Age as a Poet: Milton, Keats, Eliot, and Plath*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2003. Print.

General Poetry Guides

Deutsch, Babette. *Poetry Handbook: A Dictionary of Terms, 4th edition*. New York: Harper Perennial. 1974. Print.

Fussell, Paul. *Poetic Meter & Poetic Form, Revised Edition*. New York: McGraw – Hill. 1979. Print.

Hirsch, Edward. *How to Read a Poem: And Fall in Love with Poetry*. Boston: Mariner Books. 2000. Print.

Hollander, John. *Rhyme's Reason: A Guide to English Verse*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. 2001. Print.

Oliver, Mary. *A Poetry Handbook: A Prose Guide to Understanding and Writing Poetry*. Boston: Mariner Books. 1994. Print.

Resources for Reading Formal Poetry

Oliver, Mary. *Rules for the Dance: A Handbook for Writing and Reading Metrical Verse*. Boston: Mariner Books. 1998. Print.

Strand, Mark and Eavan Boland. *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 2001. Print.

Voigt, Ellen Bryant. *The Flexible Lyric*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press. 1999. Print.

Resources for Reading Free Verse

Hartman, Charles O. *Free Verse: An Essay on Prosody*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press. 1980. Print.

Turco, Lewis. *The Book of Forms: A Handbook of Poetics, 3rd Ed.*
Hanover, NH: University Press of New England. 2000. Print.

Resources for Writing Poetry

Addonizio, Kim and Dorianne Laux. *The Poet's Companion: A Guide to the Pleasures of Writing Poetry.* New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 1997. Print.

Kinzie, Mary. *A Poet's Guide to Poetry.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1999. Print.

Credits

Elizabeth Bishop, “In the Waiting Room” from *The Complete Poems, 1927 – 1979* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984). Copyright © 1984 by Alice Helen Methfessel. Reprinted with the permission of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc.

Alan Dugan, “Love Song: I and Thou” from *Poems Seven: New and Complete Poetry* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001). Copyright © 1961 by Alan Dugan. Reprinted with the permission of Seven Stories Press, www.sevenstories.com .

Louise Glück, “Vita Nova” from *Vita Nova* (New York: Ecco Press, 2001). Copyright © 2001 by Louise Glück. Reprinted with the permission of the author.

Suji Kwock Kim, “Occupation” from *Notes from the Divided Country* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2003). Copyright © 2003 by Suji Kwock Kim. Reprinted with the permission of the author.

Robert Pinsky, “Samurai Song” from *Jersey Rain* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001). Copyright © 2001 by Robert Pinsky. Reprinted with the permission of the author.

James Tate, “The Lost Pilot” from *The Lost Pilot* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967). Copyright © 1967 by James Tate. Reprinted with the permission of the author.

Kevin Young, “New England Ode” from *Dear Darkness* (New York: Knopf, 2010). Copyright © 2010 by Kevin Young. Reprinted with the permission of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

About the Massachusetts Poetry Outreach Project

MassPoetry is a non-profit organization that was founded three years ago. MassPoetry works to support poets, build new audiences for poetry, use poetry to motivate and empower young people, take poetry to the schools and communities that need it most and all too often have the least access to it, and use poetry to build the creative economy.

MassPoetry was formed in 2008 out of a series of roundtable conversations with poets and cultural organizations in every region of the Commonwealth with support from MassHumanities and the Massachusetts Cultural Council. It organized the first two poetry festivals in 2008 and 2009 in Lowell.

Among its core principles is a stubborn insistence that poets be paid for their work and their time. While MassPoetry does not have any fulltime staff, it does spend over 75% of its budget on stipends for poets, workshop leaders, and poet/ teachers. Another principle is that the organization includes poets across the full range of poetry styles, voices, and approaches, in every region of the Commonwealth, and across all the barriers of language, ethnicity, gender and age.

In 2009 and 2010, MassPoetry piloted a program to place poets in middle schools and a summer training institute for teachers.

In 2011, MassPoetry:

- launched *Common Threads*;
- placed poets in three middle schools to teach after school poetry courses in Revere, Charlestown and Roxbury;
- is holding the 3rd Massachusetts Poetry Festival in Salem on May 13 and 14;
- will offer new workshops for teachers this summer;
- is planning to expand the poetry in the schools initiative to reach more schools, and to include programs outside of school reaching young people in urban neighborhoods;
- will shortly launch a new interactive poetry of place website that allows people to use social media, cell phones and the internet to post and track poems about where they live, go to school, work and play.

We are slowly building our website into a resource for both poets of all ages and styles and for readers of poetry – especially those who are new to reading or writing poetry. Please visit us at www.masspoetry.org.

MassPoetry has over 60 poets on its Advisory Board who provide critical direction and guidance. We work closely with 50 Poetry Partners -- poetry, cultural, educational and community organizations

whose partnership is essential. MassPoetry is a unique experiment in collaboration, partnership and the power of volunteers.

MassPoetry does all this work on a ridiculously small budget. It is dependent upon the support of those of you who believe in what we do. If you have found *Common Threads* valuable, if you support the work of MassPoetry, please go to www.masspoetry.org and make a tax-deductible donation.

About the Editors

Kevin R. Morrissette is a poet and teaches in the Freshman English program at the University of Massachusetts Boston where he received his M.A. in Poetry in 2003. He has presented papers on his academic work in the areas of queer rhetoric and regional discourse at the annual Conference on College Composition and Communication (Chicago, 2006) and the National Association of Humanities Educators (San Francisco, 2007), respectively. The recipient of the 2003 David A. Kennedy Prize for Outstanding Poetry by a UMass Boston student and an Academy of American Poetry Prize (2003), his poetry has appeared in the Harvard Summer Review and the Coe Review.

S.D. Mullaney is currently pursuing his MFA in Poetry at the University of Massachusetts Boston. His first full-length collection of poems, *Follow the Wolf Moon*, appeared in 2005. His poems have appeared in *The New York Review*, *Hanging Loose*, *Breakwater Review*, and *Hoi Polloi*; he is a regular contributor to the online political journal *Pemmican*. Other work has been featured on WOMR 92.1 FM, Provincetown and WERS 88.9 FM, Boston.



MASSACHUSETTS
Poetry
Festival
MAY 13-14, 2011 • SALEM

MassPoetry extends a warm invitation to all of you who have enjoyed ***Common Threads: Seven Poems and a Wealth of Readers*** to join with your fellow readers and attend the next Massachusetts Poetry Festival

For more information go to www.masspoetry.org