



Poetry Weekend

November 15 -16, 2025

Participant Packet

Welcome

Thank you for registering for the 2025 Great Books Poetry Weekend.

The Great Books Council of Northern California is a non-profit organization run entirely by volunteers. Its mission is to provide people of all ages the opportunity to read, discuss, and learn from outstanding works of literature, current and past. Poetry Weekend is one of several events coordinated and supported by the Council. A full listing of their activities can be found on their website:

www.greatbooksncal.org

Join us online on Zoom

Your Zoom invitation is on Page 7. A Zoom invitation will be sent again several days prior to the start of Poetry Weekend. The same link can be used for all sessions.

Whether you are a newcomer or a veteran, we look forward to sharing a stimulating two days with you.

Please contact Paula Weinberger:

p.weinberger41@gmail.com with any questions

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A heartfelt thanks to Poetry Selection Committee members: Louise DiMattio, Steve Doherty, Sy Packman, Wendy Packman, Norman Roth, Cathy Shea, Paula Weinberger, Carolyn Yale.

POETRY WEEKEND SCHEDULE

Weekend Overview

On Saturday morning, guest presenter Nicholas Jones will provide a rich background into the conventions and coded themes of the pastoral.

On Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning, participants will be divided into small groups to discuss poems representative of this period. Group discussions will be held in Zoom Breakout Rooms led by experienced leaders using the **Shared Inquiry** method.

PLEASE NOTE: ALL TIMES ARE IN PACIFIC TIME; PLEASE ADJUST ACCORDINGLY.

Saturday, November 15

9:30 – 10:00 Take this time to join the Poetry Weekend. Someone will be available to help check your sound and video.

10:00 – 10:30 Welcome

A.M. Guest Seminar led by Professor Nicholas Jones 10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. PST	P.M. Small-Group Discussion 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. PST
<p>Delving the Mysteries of Pastoral Verse from Arcadia to the Present</p> <p>Pastoral poetry covers a wide variety of themes from love and ambition to a society in collapse. Its long history begins with the early Greek and Latin poets through modernist and contemporary poetry. The language of the pastoral should be thought of as metaphorical, often a coded representation of human life. Professor Jones will help us explore these conventions.</p>	<p><i>Twilight</i> by Louise Glück</p> <p><i>Directions</i> by Billy Collins</p> <p><i>Fern Hill</i> by Dylan Thomas</p> <p><i>The Lake Isle of Innisfree</i> by W.B. Yeats</p> <p><i>Boat Stealing</i> by William Wordsworth</p>

Saturday: 4:00 – 5:00 pm – Open Mic – Poetry Selection Committee member Cathy Shea will read from her new book of poems, *Ghost Matinee*, followed by an Open Mic where participants can read one of their own poems or share a favorite. (*Please limit poems read to 2 pages maximum.*)

Email Paula Weinberger if you are interested in participating at: p.weinberger41@gmail.com.

Sunday, November 16

9:45 – 10:00 am

Click on your zoom invitation to rejoin the Poetry Weekend meeting.

A.M. Small-Group Discussion 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. PST
<i>On the Fifth Day</i> by Jane Hirshfield
<i>Meditation at Lagunitas</i> by Robert Hass
<i>Ode on a Grecian Urn</i> by John Keats
<i>Postscript</i> by Seamus Heaney
<i>Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota</i> by James Wright

12:00 pm

Brief wrap-up and goodbyes

Nicholas Jones Bio

Nicholas Jones, PHD, is Professor Emeritus at Oberlin College, where he taught for over forty years, specializing in English literature and its connections with music and the arts. Educated at Harvard, Nick is a scholar, poet, lecturer, reviewer, and translator. At Oberlin, he taught courses in poetics and literary theory, focusing on poetry from Shakespeare and Milton through Keats and Shelley to the modern and contemporary periods. In his teaching, he encourages an integrated approach to poetry, connecting close reading and analysis of language and form with contextual study through history, visual art, science and music. While at Oberlin, he led three semester-long study programs in London, engaging students with English literature from the Middle Ages to the 20th century through visits to historic sites, museums, concert halls, and libraries. Since retirement to the Bay Area, he has continued teaching classes through OLLI (Osher Lifelong Learning Institute) on subjects such as Homer, Shakespeare, Milton, and Romantic Literature.



ZOOM INSTRUCTIONS

We'll be meeting using the video conferencing software Zoom that is delivered directly through your web browser, whether that browser is Firefox, Chrome, Safari, etc. You do not need to purchase a Zoom account to participate in a meeting. Should you prefer, you can also join the meeting via telephone instead of by computer or other device. (*People sometimes choose this option if the sound system in their computer is weak.*)

How to Join a Zoom Meeting

An invitation is included in this packet. You will also receive a reminder with the zoom link a few days prior to the start of Poetry Weekend. To join, click on the **Zoom Invitation** link and follow the prompts.

*Whenever you leave the Zoom application during the course of the Weekend, or if you lose your Zoom connection, you can rejoin by clicking on the same **Zoom Invitation** link.*

We request that you remain mute except when you wish to speak.

PLEASE NOTE ALL TIMES ARE IN PACIFIC TIME SO PLEASE ADJUST IF YOU ARE IN A DIFFERENT TIME ZONE.

Saturday and Sunday morning sessions start at 10 AM - Pacific Standard Time. Please join **15 minutes before** to allow plenty of time to test your connection and get set up with Zoom.

The Saturday Afternoon session starts promptly at 2:00 PM. Please be ready in the Zoom meeting room **15 minutes before** start time to ensure the discussions start on time.

The Zoom room will remain open during the lunch break on Saturday. Participants are welcome to chat informally with each other during that time.

Groups

The entire group will be together for the Saturday morning interactive seminar.

The Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning discussion groups will take place in Zoom Breakout Rooms. When you join the meeting, you will be placed into a Breakout Room by the Zoom meeting host.

Questions

If you have questions or concerns about using Zoom, please contact the Great Books Zoom Meeting Coordinator at: zoom.greatbooksncal@gmail.com

Zoom Invitation

Topic: Poetry Weekend 2025

Time: Nov 15, 2025 09:00 AM Pacific Time (US and Canada)

Every day, until Nov 16, 2025, 2 occurrence(s)

Nov 15, 2025 10:00 AM

Nov 16, 2025 10:00 AM

Please download and import the following iCalendar (.ics) files to your calendar system.

Daily:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/tZ0sduyopzooHdTKbLrZZmyN5BbqwW8dsPza/ics?icsToken=DE8cPB44s2DnOAvqawAALAAAE532_ThQohRLFsvbJWEXKcyCUh3dfLSjDbIAxva-MdhCK2CHu7KJtLEoNeOc9rtju9fV2Y-Be1JIJhzAwMDAwMQ&meetingMasterEventId=Fz7shIZUSe-O5xccCI5B6Q](https://us02web.zoom.us/join/https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/tZ0sduyopzooHdTKbLrZZmyN5BbqwW8dsPza/ics?icsToken=DE8cPB44s2DnOAvqawAALAAAE532_ThQohRLFsvbJWEXKcyCUh3dfLSjDbIAxva-MdhCK2CHu7KJtLEoNeOc9rtju9fV2Y-Be1JIJhzAwMDAwMQ&meetingMasterEventId=Fz7shIZUSe-O5xccCI5B6Q)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89115091270?pwd=dxkpZ8L766NdWK9VUabsaSEvaQxd3m.1>

Meeting ID: 891 1509 1270

Passcode: 538495

One tap mobile

+16694449171,,89115091270# US

+16699006833,,89115091270# US (San Jose)

Dial by your location

- +1 669 444 9171 US
- +1 669 900 6833 US (San Jose)
- +1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)
- +1 719 359 4580 US
- +1 253 205 0468 US
- +1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)
- +1 360 209 5623 US
- +1 386 347 5053 US
- +1 507 473 4847 US
- +1 564 217 2000 US
- +1 646 931 3860 US
- +1 689 278 1000 US
- +1 929 205 6099 US (New York)
- +1 301 715 8592 US (Washington DC)
- +1 305 224 1968 US
- +1 309 205 3325 US
- +1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)

Meeting ID: 891 1509 1270

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/join/https://us02web.zoom.us/u/k5jKXLGOs>

SHARED INQUIRY

Shared Inquiry is the form of discussion used by all Great Books events. It is based on close reading of the text and reference to the text to support one's point of view. The leader's role is to provide direction and guidance by asking open-ended questions for which there is no single answer.

Shared Inquiry Discussion Rules

Discussion is restricted to the poems in this packet. Though it's often tempting to refer to other sources or to share information about the poet, to assure participation on an equal basis, we limit our discussion to the text. Time is allotted at the end of the session for outside references.

All opinions should be supported by referring back to the text of the poem being discussed.

The leaders' role is to ask questions, not answer them. Questions are posed for which there are no right answers. Poems frequently have multiple meanings. We ask only that you refer back to the text to support your point of view.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON POEMS

Twilight by Louise Glück

All day he works at his cousin's mill,
so when he gets home at night, he always sits at this one window,
sees one time of day, twilight.
There should be more time like this, to sit and dream.
It's as his cousin says:
Living—living takes you away from sitting.

In the window, not the world but a squared-off landscape
representing the world. The seasons change,
each visible only a few hours a day.
Green things followed by golden things followed by whiteness—
abstractions from which come intense pleasures,
like the figs on the table.

At dusk, the sun goes down in a haze of red fire between two poplars.
It goes down late in summer—sometimes it's hard to stay awake.

Then everything falls away.
The world for a little longer
is something to see, then only something to hear,
crickets, cicadas.
Or to smell sometimes, aroma of lemon trees, of orange trees.
Then sleep takes this away also.

But it's easy to give things up like this, experimentally,
for a matter of hours.

I open my fingers—
I let everything go.

Visual world, language,
rustling of leaves in the night,
smell of high grass, of woodsmoke.

I let it go, then I light the candle.

Directions by Billy Collins

You know the brick path in back of the house,
the one you see from the kitchen window,
the one that bends around the far end of the garden
where all the yellow primroses are?
And you know how if you leave the path
and walk up into the woods you come
to a heap of rocks, probably pushed
down during the horrors of the Ice Age,
and a grove of tall hemlocks, dark green now
against the light-brown fallen leaves?
And farther on, you know
the small footbridge with the broken railing
and if you go beyond that you arrive
at the bottom of that sheep's head hill?
Well, if you start climbing, and you
might have to grab hold of a sapling
when the going gets steep,
you will eventually come to a long stone
ridge with a border of pine trees
which is as high as you can go
and a good enough place to stop.

The best time is late afternoon
when the sun strobes through
the columns of trees as you are hiking up,
and when you find an agreeable rock
to sit on, you will be able to see
the light pouring down into the woods
and breaking into the shapes and tones
of things and you will hear nothing
but a sprig of birdsong or the leafy
falling of a cone or nut through the trees,
and if this is your day you might even
spot a hare or feel the wing-beats of geese
driving overhead toward some destination.

But it is hard to speak of these things
how the voices of light enter the body
and begin to recite their stories
how the earth holds us painfully against
its breast made of humus and brambles
how we who will soon be gone regard
the entities that continue to return
greener than ever, spring water flowing
through a meadow and the shadows of clouds
passing over the hills and the ground
where we stand in the tremble of thought
taking the vast outside into ourselves.

Still, let me know before you set out.
Come knock on my door
and I will walk with you as far as the garden
with one hand on your shoulder.
I will even watch after you and not turn back
to the house until you disappear
into the crowd of maple and ash,
heading up toward the hill,
piercing the ground with your stick.

***Fern Hill* by Dylan Thomas**

Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,
 The night above the dingle starry,
 Time let me hail and climb
 Golden in the heydays of his eyes,
And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns
And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves
 Trail with daisies and barley
 Down the rivers of the windfall light.

And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns
About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,
 In the sun that is young once only,
 Time let me play and be
 Golden in the mercy of his means,
And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves
Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,
 And the sabbath rang slowly
 In the pebbles of the holy streams.

All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay
Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, it was air
 And playing, lovely and watery
 And fire green as grass.
 And nightly under the simple stars
As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away,
All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the nightjars
 Flying with the ricks, and the horses
 Flashing into the dark.

And then to awake, and the farm, like a wanderer white
With the dew, come back, the cock on his shoulder: it was all
 Shining, it was Adam and maiden,
 The sky gathered again
 And the sun grew round that very day.
So it must have been after the birth of the simple light
In the first, spinning place, the spellbound horses walking warm
 Out of the whinnying green stable
 On to the fields of praise.

And honoured among foxes and pheasants by the gay house
Under the new made clouds and happy as the heart was long,
 In the sun born over and over,
 I ran my heedless ways,
 My wishes raced through the house high hay
And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows
In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs
 Before the children green and golden
 Follow him out of grace,

Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me
Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand,
 In the moon that is always rising,
 Nor that riding to sleep
 I should hear him fly with the high fields
And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land.
Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,
 Time held me green and dying
 Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

***The Lake Isle of Innisfree* by William Butler Yeats**

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

***Boat Stealing* (excerpt from *The Prelude*, Book 1, 1850 Version)
by William Wordsworth**

One summer evening (led by her) I found
A little boat tied to a willow tree
Within a rocky cave, its usual home.
Straight I unloosed her chain, and stepping in
Pushed from the shore. It was an act of stealth
And troubled pleasure, not without the voice
Of mountain-echoes did my boat move on;
Leaving behind her still, on either side,
Small circles glittering idly in the moon,
Until they melted all into one track
Of sparkling light. But now, like one who rows,
Proud of his skill, to reach a chosen point
With an unswerving line, I fixed my view
Upon the summit of a craggy ridge,
The horizon's utmost boundary; far above
Was nothing but the stars and the grey sky.
She was an elfin pinnace; lustily
I dipped my oars into the silent lake,
And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat
Went heaving through the water like a swan;
When, from behind that craggy steep till then
The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,
As if with voluntary power instinct,
Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,
And growing still in stature the grim shape
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
And measured motion like a living thing,
Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,
And through the silent water stole my way
Back to the covert of the willow tree;
There in her mooring-place I left my bark, --
And through the meadows homeward went, in grave
And serious mood; but after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days, my brain

Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts
There hung a darkness, call it solitude
Of blank desertion. No familiar shapes
Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.

SUNDAY MORNING POEMS

On the Fifth Day by Jane Hirshfield

On the fifth day
the scientists who studied the rivers
were forbidden to speak
or to study the rivers.

The scientists who studied the air
were told not to speak of the air,
and the ones who worked for the farmers
were silenced,
and the ones who worked for the bees.

Someone, from deep in the Badlands,
began posting facts.

The facts were told not to speak
and were taken away.
The facts, surprised to be taken, were silent.

Now it was only the rivers
that spoke of the rivers,
and only the wind that spoke of its bees,

while the unpausing factual buds of the fruit trees
continued to move toward their fruit.

The silence spoke loudly of silence,
and the rivers kept speaking
of rivers, of boulders and air.

Bound to gravity, earless and tongueless,
the untested rivers kept speaking.

Bus drivers, shelf stockers,
code writers, machinists, accountants,
lab techs, cellists kept speaking.

They spoke, the fifth day,
of silence.

***Meditation at Lagunitas* by Robert Hass**

All the new thinking is about loss.
In this it resembles all the old thinking.
The idea, for example, that each particular erases
the luminous clarity of a general idea. That the clown-
faced woodpecker probing the dead sculpted trunk
of that black birch is, by his presence,
some tragic falling off from a first world
of undivided light. Or the other notion that,
because there is in this world no one thing
to which the bramble of *blackberry* corresponds,
a word is elegy to what it signifies.
We talked about it late last night and in the voice
of my friend, there was a thin wire of grief, a tone
almost querulous. After a while I understood that,
talking this way, everything dissolves: *justice*,
pine, hair, woman, you and *I*. There was a woman
I made love to and I remembered how, holding
her small shoulders in my hands sometimes,
I felt a violent wonder at her presence
like a thirst for salt, for my childhood river
with its island willows, silly music from the pleasure boat,
muddy places where we caught the little orange-silver fish
called *pumpkinseed*. It hardly had to do with her.
Longing, we say, because desire is full
of endless distances. I must have been the same to her.
But I remember so much, the way her hands dismantled bread,
the thing her father said that hurt her, what
she dreamed. There are moments when the body is as numinous
as words, days that are the good flesh continuing.
Such tenderness, those afternoons and evenings,
saying *blackberry, blackberry, blackberry*.

Ode on a Grecian Urn by John Keats

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
 Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
 A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape
 Of deities or mortals, or of both,
 In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
 What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
 Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
 Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
 Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
 Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal yet, do not grieve;
 She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
 For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
 Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
 For ever piping songs for ever new;
More happy love! more happy, happy love!
 For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
 For ever panting, and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
 That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
 A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
What little town by river or sea shore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

Postscript by Seamus Heaney

And some time make the time to drive out west
Into County Clare, along the Flaggy Shore,
In September or October, when the wind
And the light are working off each other
So that the ocean on one side is wild
With foam and glitter, and inland among stones
The surface of a slate-grey lake is lit
By the earthed lightning of a flock of swans,
Their feathers roughed and ruffling, white on white,
Their fully grown headstrong-looking heads
Tucked or cresting or busy underwater.
Useless to think you'll park and capture it
More thoroughly. You are neither here nor there,
A hurry through which known and strange things pass
As big soft buffetings come at the car sideways
And catch the heart off guard and blow it open.

Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota
by James Wright

Over my head, I see the bronze butterfly,
Asleep on the black trunk,
Blowing like a leaf in green shadow.
Down the ravine behind the empty house,
The cowbells follow one another
Into the distances of the afternoon.
To my right,
In a field of sunlight between two pines,
The droppings of last year's horses
Blaze up into golden stones.
I lean back, as the evening darkens and comes on.
A chicken hawk floats over, looking for home.
I have wasted my life.