

'A Cabbage in the Rain'

D.H. Lawrence's *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* at 100

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*Let's love today, the what we have now, this day, not
today or tomorrow or
yesterday but this passing moment that will
not come again.*
– James Schuyler, 'A Few Days'

When they are considered at all, the poems of D.H. Lawrence tend to be praised for their engagements with the natural world. Lawrence's 'great gift', writes Marjorie Perloff, was his 'Wordsworthian ability "to see into the life of things,"' lifting a phrase from 'Tintern Abbey'. 'He seemed able to enter into other lives, and not only human lives', recalled Jessie Chambers, with whom Lawrence had his first significant relationship: 'With wild things, flowers and birds, a rabbit in a snare, the speckled eggs in a hole in the ground he was in primal sympathy – a living vibration passed between him and them, so that I always saw him, in the strictest sense of the word, immortal.' In her memoir *Not I, but the Wind* (1936), Frieda Weekley – Lawrence's wife, widow, and sparring partner – paints a similar portrait of her husband the naturalist. 'When [he] first found a gentian', she notes, recounting an episode from their alpine honeymoon in 1912, 'I remember feeling as if he had a strange communion with it, as if the gentian yielded up its blueness, its very essence, to him.'

Even before the publication of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* – which celebrates its centenary in 2023 – Lawrence's poetry is frequently grounded in enigmatic run-ins with the natural world. 'A Doe at Evening', from *Look! We Have Come Through!* (1917), dramatizes an encounter with a single, silhouetted deer, 'a fine black blotch / on the sky'. The poem speaks directly to Lawrence's 'great gift' for seeing beyond the veneer of outward appearances:

I looked at her
and felt her watching;
I became a strange being.
Still, I had my right to be there with her.
Her nimble shadow trotting
along the sky-line, she
put back her fine, level-balanced head.
And I knew her.

Lawrence finds himself under an equal scrutiny, gazed at – even *into* – by the deer, a disarming experience that transforms him into 'a strange being,' somehow exposed, unbalanced like the uneven metrical arrangements of each quatrain, whose lines can't seem to make their minds up about which pattern of feet to take. But the experience also permits Lawrence to claim new knowledge of the deer, albeit with the acceptance, in the

poem's final stanza, of his own animal nature:

Ah yes, being male, is not my head hard-balanced,
antlered?
Are not my haunches light?
Has she not fled on the same wind as me?
Does not my fear cover her fear?

The questions here are doubtful, unsure of themselves, but they suggest – 'Ah yes' – both revelation and discovery. More importantly, they speak to an equalization of some kind, the poet and the deer sharing not only the same evening but 'the same wind' and even something of the same anatomy, 'level-balanced' against each other.

'A Doe at Evening' interrogates the natural world, staring long and hard at it, meeting its gaze. But it also seems to hinge upon the difference between looking and knowing, observing and understanding, or – to use the language of the poem's second stanza – between 'watching' and 'being'. Rather than entering into another life, as Jessie Chambers has it, this poem seems to finish on a note of flat uncertainty, as if the revelation that was promised had suddenly 'fled'. A case of *Almost, but not quite*.

Many readers have found the natural world to be somehow deciphered in Lawrence's poems, its 'very essence' laid bare, to echo Frieda Weekley. Time and again, however, we encounter a blockage, a failure to discover any kinship with the world at all. As Lawrence suggests of a group of autumn cyclamens, recalling a trip to Lake Garda in 1913, his writing is filled with 'little living myths that [he] cannot understand.' Far from seeing into the life of things, more often than not we find their essences eluding him.

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The poems in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* are frequently considered to be the peak of Lawrence's poetic achievement. Written between 1920 and 1923, they span one of the poet's most restless periods of international travel. Beginning in San Gervasio, outside Florence, the poems head south to Sicily before migrating back to Austria and Spain; returning to Italy, they set sail for Sri Lanka, then Australia, and arrive, at long last, in New Mexico, where the voyage of the collection ends. The book is divided

into several sections, grouping the poems into a system of ecological classification, from 'Fruits', 'Trees', and 'Flowers' to 'Reptiles', 'Birds', and 'Animals'. With a handful of exceptions, the poems consider natural subjects, offering a deep investigation into ideas of otherness and symbolism.

The collection has proven popular. Lawrence himself considered it to be his 'best book of poems', and many have gone on to become among his most anthologised pieces of writing. Among their admirers is Joyce Carol Oates, who conducts a radical defence of Lawrence's poetry in her book *The Hostile Sun* (1973). Oates interprets Lawrence's writing, in part, as a reaction to the Romantic view of Nature as a means of symbolic or spiritual access to divinity. For Oates, the poems are resolutely anti-spiritual. Lawrence 'is not trying to project himself into these creatures', she writes, 'nor is he really trying to interpret them. They remain alien, brute, [and] essentially unknowable.'

The poems quickly introduce us to Lawrence's persistent language of inquiry, a precise and at times almost casual mode of questioning, as in the following lines from 'Bare Almond-Trees':

What are you doing in the December rain?
Have you a strange electric sensitiveness in your
steel tips?
Do you feel the air for electric influences
Like some strange magnetic apparatus?
Do you take in messages, in some strange code,
From heaven's wolfish, wandering electricity, that
prowls so constantly round Etna?
Do you take the whisper of sulphur from the air?
Do you hear the chemical accents of the sun?
Do you telephone the roar of the waters over the
earth?
And from all this, do you make calculations?

'Like iron implements twisted, hideous, out of the earth', as he describes them in the opening stanza, Lawrence's almond trees don't, won't, or can't answer him. Their silence is solidified by Lawrence's strange metallicizing process, turning them first to iron and then to 'sensitive steel'. Their branches become 'steel tips', feeling out 'Like some strange magnetic apparatus' (resembling a lightning rod), straining for 'messages, in some strange code', receiving and transmitting like a 'telephone'. The trees possess a set of meanings Lawrence has no way to understand; the mechanical and electrical (not to mention *metrical*) tools at his disposal are simply not up to the task. As Keith Sagar writes of 'Cypresses', another poem in the collection, 'If the trees are messengers, [then] their message is undecipherable, cannot be rendered into discursive language.'

We come away from *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* compelled by the resistance of Lawrence's subjects to be pinned down by the poems. As he puts it at the end of one of the collection's best-known pieces: 'But I, I only wonder / And don't know. / I don't know fishes.' By tracing the movement of signifiers and signifieds, Amit Chaudhuri has illustrated the sheer refusal of Lawrence's language to mean (and *only* mean) one thing,

revealing how the imagery of one poem may inform and/or revise another. For Joyce Carol Oates, the collection amounts to a kind of 'worship', whereby Lawrence ultimately embraces his inability to understand the natural world's 'strange code[s]'. To go one step further, it's as if Lawrence wants to find a way to let the natural world speak for itself, a quality he champions in the painter Paul Cézanne: 'Cézanne's apples are a real attempt to let the apple exist in its own separate entity, without transfusing it with personal emotion', he writes in the introduction to a book of his own paintings, suggesting that Cézanne's 'great effort' was 'to shove the apple away from him, and let it live of itself'.

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Birds, Beasts and Flowers was completed in New Mexico in February 1923. While Lawrence had long desired to visit the United States – he wrote to many friends expressing his idea to establish an artistic colony in Florida and had been working sporadically on a survey of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American writing, later published as *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923) – he and Frieda, arriving into San Francisco on a ship bound from New Zealand, would not reach America until September 1922, a week shy of Lawrence's thirty-seventh birthday.

Lawrence had been invited to New Mexico by Mabel Dodge Luhan, a New York writer and self-styled patron of the avant-garde who contacted him on the strength of an extract of *Sea and Sardinia* (1921), and urged him to come and tackle the American Southwest. He had been critical of Europe's direction following the First World War, and America had been on his mind as the obvious site of the century's future. Rejecting the tired, monotheistic and increasingly mechanised world of the European continent, a canvas of crumbling monuments, Lawrence discovered inspiration in America's indigenous communities. Here, he found an alternative tradition, older than the ancient Greeks, which seemed to value, above all, a profound spiritual connection between the human and the natural worlds. 'How marvellous is the living relationship between man and his object!' he wrote in 1925, 'be it man or woman, bird, beast, flower or rock or rain; the exquisite frail moment of pure conjunction, which, in the fourth dimension, is timeless.'

Lawrence returns to this idea, to the 'exquisite frail moment of pure conjunction', many times throughout his writing. Very often, he reaches for the word 'contact' to articulate his thinking. In an essay on New Mexico, published posthumously in 1931, he describes the attempt of Native American religious rituals to 'come into immediate *felt* contact' with 'the elemental life of the cosmos, mountain-life, cloud-life, thunder-life, air-life, earth-life, sun-life' and so on, a 'sheer naked contact, *without an intermediary or mediator*' (recalling his comments on Cézanne). 'Oh when man has escaped from the barbed-wire entanglement / of his own ideas and his own mechanical devices' reads his poem 'Terra Incognita', 'there is a marvellous rich world of contact and sheer fluid beauty', a 'fearless face-to-face awareness'.

'Contact' is a word implying intimacy, exposure, and the physicality of touch. For Lawrence, it carried the spirit of the American frontier, conjuring images of pioneers making contact with indigenous communities. He may also have been channelling a passage from Thoreau, who, descending Maine's Mount Katahdin, finds himself in a truly wild, untamed environment, which triggered a moment of ecstasy: 'Talk of mysteries! – Think of our life in nature, – daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it, – rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! The solid earth! the *actual* world! the *common sense*! *Contact!* *Contact!* *Who* are we? *where* are we?'

Most importantly of all, 'contact' is a word that Lawrence would have recognised from Whitman, 'the great poet, who has meant so much to me', as he puts it (with surprising sincerity) in *Studies in Classic American Literature*.

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Lawrence's relationship with Whitman's writing (and homosexuality) was far from straightforward: there are several early versions of the 'Whitman' essay in *Studies*, ranging from the enthusiastically praiseworthy to the wildly critical and frequently crass; Lawrence gives Whitman 'the roughest ride ever accorded him', according to poet Robert Creeley. At the same time, the influence of Whitman's poetry is clear on works like 'New Heaven and Earth', from *Look! We Have Come Through!*, 'in some respects the most profoundly Whitmanian poem not written by Walt' for Harold Bloom. The final poem in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, 'The American Eagle', interrupts its meditation with a series of onomatopoeic interjections mimicking the eagle's cry, complete with a loud, capitalised 'YAWP!!!' plucked straight from the pages of 'Song of Myself'.

The word 'contact' appears six times in the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. 'I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked' writes Whitman in the book's opening stanzas, 'I am mad for it to be in contact with me', lines rehearsed by Lawrence in a scene from *Women in Love* (1920) in which Birkin, lying on a hillside, surrounded by flowers, decides to take off all his clothes:

He wanted to touch them all, to saturate himself with the touch of them all. He took off his clothes, and sat down naked among the primroses [...] It was such a fine, cool, subtle touch all over him, he seemed to saturate himself with their contact.

Whitman's 'contact' is a physical encounter between separate bodies, between one thing and another. It seems likely that the word is borrowed from the language of photography, referring to a method of darkroom development in which a negative is placed directly onto photographic paper (known as a *contact sheet*) before being exposed to light. As Whitman critic Ed Folsom has noted, it's important to remember that Whitman's poetry 'emerged at precisely the time photography was literally taking hold of the American imagination', teaching the poet 'to see how all the actual stuff of the world was crucial to its wholeness'. In *The Dyer's Hand* (1963), Auden

acknowledges the photographic quality of Whitman's poetry – somewhat fittingly – in his essay about D.H. Lawrence, noting how 'No detail is dwelt upon for long' but rather 'snapshotted and added as one more item to the vast American catalogue'.

Folsom convincingly argues how Whitman anticipates the 'intense, fragmentary, momentary seeing' of Ezra Pound's Imagism, with which Lawrence was peripherally associated (appearing in Amy Lowell's anthology *Some Imagist Poets* in 1915). For Lawrence, it is the photographic, spontaneous Whitman – the poet of contact, not democracy – who gets closest to understanding 'the pure frail moment of pure conjunction', the same 'living relationship between man and his object' he describes in 1925. In *Studies*, this is a quality he recognises as Whitman's great philosophy of 'The Open Road', and praises the poet's receptiveness (even vulnerability) to the world on its own terms, 'Exposed to full contact. On two slow feet. Meeting whatever comes.'

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Lawrence's own poetry has been criticised for its excessive spontaneity. In 1935, the American critic R.P. Blackmur advanced an attack on his writing, citing its apparent lack of technical ability as an extreme version of the contemporary 'plague of expressive form'. A decade later, lecturing on Whitman to the Churchill Club, T.S. Eliot suggested that Lawrence's poems 'are more notes for poems than poems themselves', while Keith Sagar described the work in Lawrence's collection *Pansies* (1929) as not much more 'than notebook jottings', concluding that the worst 'do not even have the virtues of good prose'.

It's easy enough to find examples of Lawrence's poetry that confirm the worst of these criticisms – try the posthumous *More Pansies* (1932) – but it seems important to measure Lawrence's attempts at spontaneity not only in the context of his thinking about Whitman but in his desire to achieve in writing what Cézanne had done in paint, to discover the 'immediate *felt* contact' between himself and his experience.

A short essay of 1919, 'Poetry and the Present' is the closest thing to a poetic manifesto Lawrence ever came to writing. Originally published as a preface to the American edition of *New Poems* (1920), Lawrence used the essay as an opportunity to advocate for a new type of poetics. He begins by distinguishing between two presiding movements, one a poetry of the past, the other of the future, both striving for 'perfected moments' of thought and experience, encapsulated, he suggests, by 'the treasured gem-like lyrics of Shelley and Keats'. 'But there is another kind of poetry', he continues, 'the poetry of that which is at hand: the immediate present.' Rather than create the 'everlasting gems' of past or future experience, Lawrence's proposal is to somehow apprehend the energy and spontaneity of the present moment before it crystallizes into something else, to create a 'seething poetry of the incarnate Now'. In 'the immediate present', reads a striking passage, nothing is fixed:

there is no perfection, no consummation, nothing fin-

ished. The strands are flying, quivering, intermingling into the web, the waters are shaking the moon. There is no round, consummate moon on the face of running water, nor on the face of the unfinished tide. There are no gems of the living plasm. The living plasm vibrates unspeakably, it inhales the future, it exhales the past, it is the quick of both, and yet it is neither. There is no plasmic finality, nothing crystal, permanent.

This passage is typical of the essay. Lawrence offers up an ‘intermingling [...] web’ of natural images, from the turbulent running waters, distorting their surface-image of the moon, to the gentle inhaling and exhaling of time and the mysterious ‘living plasm’, an image he returns to often. The repetitious nature of Lawrence’s writing gives an impression of him scribbling down his thoughts as they occur, as if trying to capture them before they disappear, building on images and ideas as he goes, sentence by sentence, maintaining a relentless forward momentum that enacts the very lack of fixity he’s eager to describe, the essay rushing by in glimpses, a river of present tense participles: ‘flying’, ‘quivering’, ‘shaking’, ‘living’.

This is a quality of Lawrence’s writing acknowledged by several readers. In *Out of Sheer Rage* (1997), Geoff Dyer suggests that ‘everything is written – rather than noted and then written – as experienced’ in Lawrence, identifying an immediacy in which ‘The transformation from “notes” to “prose” often takes place within the course of a sentence’. ‘It was characteristic of him that he hardly ever corrected or patched what he had written’, recalls Aldous Huxley in his introduction to an edition of Lawrence’s *Selected Letters*: ‘If he was dissatisfied with what he had written, he did not, as most authors do, file, clip, insert, transpose; he re-wrote.’

The ‘poetry of the incarnate Now’ is necessary to Lawrence, I think, as a way of trying to make contact with the world of things head-on. Because life and experience exist in constant ‘flux’ (another favourite word of his), it seems obvious that poetry should at least try to reflect this, to emulate ‘the quality of life itself’, as Lawrence puts it in the essay. Not only might this enable the poem to partake in ‘the very white quick of nascent creation’, but, crucially, the attempt offers the poet themselves an opportunity to participate in ‘the very substance of creative change’. It is in this moment of creative mutation – the continuous coming-into-being of the present moment – that the potential for ‘immediate *felt* contact’ between the poet and the world is most acutely possible.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, it is Whitman’s poetry that Lawrence sees as coming closest to achieving this. ‘Without beginning and without end, without any base and pediment’, he writes, ‘it sweeps past for ever, like a wind that is for ever in passage.’ ‘There was never any more inception than there is now, / Nor any more youth or age than there is now, / And will never be any more perfection than there is now, / Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now’, writes Whitman in ‘Song of Myself’, a sequence whose line-endings appear to channel Lawrence’s poetics of immediacy: *there is now, there is now, there is now, there is now*.

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Very often, Lawrence’s poetry reveals his own pursuit of this immediacy. ‘Hostile critics have called [them] “sketches for poems”’, acknowledges Keith Sagar, ‘but a sketch is often superior, in terms of life, to the finished product.’ As Frieda wrote of Lawrence, ‘Everything he met had the newness of a creation that had just that moment come into being’, a ‘newness’ – or a *now*-ness – that he transmitted to his writing. At their best, his poems retain the unpredictable, even chaotic spirit of this creation, preserved in such a way that future readers might be able to experience the same, as if the energy of Lawrence’s ‘sheer present’ were still radiating from the text itself. As he wrote of his collection *Pansies*, Lawrence saw his poems as ‘merely the breath of the moment, and one eternal moment easily contradicting the next eternal moment’, exposing – in his paradoxical ‘eternal moment’ – a delicate hairline fracture between the ‘contact’ of the present and the borders of eternity. I’m reminded, again, of Jessie Chambers: ‘a living vibration passed between him’ and the natural world, ‘so that I always saw him, in the strictest sense of the word, immortal.’

Lawrence died in France, aged forty-four, in March of 1930. Whether his poetry amounts to an expression of the ‘incarnate Now’ or not, there is a strange prophetic quality to his ideas about the direction poetry is taking in the 1920s. At the very least, it seems a shame that he didn’t live long enough to witness the emergence of a new generation of American poets explicitly devoted to the textures of the present tense. Like him, these poets would celebrate the speed and the stuff of ‘the incarnate Now’, relishing – as Geoff Dyer notes of Lawrence – ‘the shock of the first encounter’, and producing a body of poetry which, above all, ripples with ‘immediate *felt* contact’.

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In his foreword to *Parallel Movement of the Hands* (2022), a posthumous collection of John Ashbery’s unpublished poems, Ben Lerner addresses the ‘endlessly renewable’ quality of Ashbery’s writing. ‘In a John Ashbery poem’, he argues, ‘we set the machinery of meaning-making into motion each time we read, each time we enter the poem’s environment in the present tense.’ The poems take place in a ‘perpetual present’, available to re-experience – as if for the first time – again and again and again and again.

The biography of the New York School poets – a cluster of mid-twentieth-century writers that includes Ashbery, Frank O’Hara, Kenneth Koch and Barbara Guest – is readily available, so I won’t go into detail here (see Brad Gooch’s *City Poet: The Life and Times of Frank O’Hara* (1993) and Karin Roffman’s *The Songs We Know Best: John Ashbery’s Early Life* (2017); for rolling, up-to-date New York School info, Andrew Epstein’s *Locus Solus* blog posts are essential – newyorkschoolpoets.wordpress.com). While members of the so-called ‘School’ have expressed no desire in being taken as a group, they seem to share, at the very least, an interest in the possibilities of poetry’s immediacy and *now*-ness.

Frank O’Hara’s habit of dashing poems off during his lunch hour, in bars, at parties, even once *en route* to giving

a reading (scribbling a new poem on the Staten Island Ferry), has become a marker of these poems' fizzingness and energy. 'The speed and accidental aspect of his writing are not carelessness but are essential to what the poems are about', wrote O'Hara's close friend, Kenneth Koch, 'the will to catch what is there while it is really there and still taking place.' This is a quality of O'Hara's poetry – a quality of constant coming and going, of life on the move – best put, perhaps, by Marjorie Perloff: 'Photographs, monuments, static memories [...] have no place in the poet's world. We can now understand why O'Hara loves the *motion* picture, *action* painting, and all forms of dance – art forms that capture the *present* rather than the *past*, the present in all its moving, chaotic splendor.'

Likewise, Ashbery's poetry has been seen to reflect the textures of the present tense. While his poetry isn't so devoted as O'Hara's to capturing the material stuff of the world as it skids by, several readers (Lerner included) have commented on Ashbery's ability to mimic the real-time contours of experience and thought. 'Clepsydra', whose title refers to an ancient time-keeping device that uses water as its means of measurement, is 'really a meditation on how time feels as it is passing,' according to the poet; for the critic Stephen Ross, it reveals 'Ashbery's ambition to dissolve content into the pure flow of time'. Each line is 'scarcely called into being / Before it swells, the way a waterfall / Drums at different levels', to echo the poem, building an awareness of its liquid movement in 'Precisely the time of its being furthered'.

While these examples serve to illustrate a common thread tying the New York School together, there is one poet in particular who seems to answer Lawrence's call for a poetry of the present. Born in 1923, the year of Lawrence's *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, James Schuyler fell in with New York's poets and painters in the early 1950s, following a stint in the US Navy and a spell abroad in Italy where he worked as Auden's secretary. Living for periods with both Ashbery and O'Hara, Schuyler worked at the Periscope-Holliday Bookstore, was a regular contributor to *ARTnews* (his *Selected Art Writings* was published in 1998), and became the curator for circulating exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art. During the 1960s, long bouts of anxiety and mental illness saw him relocate to Southampton and Maine, where he was taken in by the painter Fairfield Porter and his family; as Porter's wife Anne once quipped, Schuyler 'came to lunch one day and stayed for eleven years'. Eventually, friends moved Schuyler into Room 625 of the Hotel Chelsea in Manhattan, where he lived for over a decade until his death in April 1991. Quiet, retiring and crippledly shy, he gave his first public reading, aged sixty-five, at the DIA Foundation on Mercer Street, where he was lovingly introduced by Ashbery: 'I give you a poet who knows the names for things, and whose knowing proves something'.

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The overriding tendency of Schuyler's poetry is a quality of dailiness. Fifteen of his *Collected Poems* (1993) include the date within their title, while a further thir-

ty-three reference a season, month, or temporal marker. His most famous work is arguably 'The Morning of the Poem', a collage of gentle happenings and observations, unfolding in a running commentary, blending anecdotes, shopping lists and newspaper headlines with descriptions of the weather and the views or objects close-to-hand. 'The procedure of Schuyler's poems is to follow the divining rod of the moment in the direction in which it is being pulled', suggests Tom Clark in a review of the *Collected Poems*. As Schuyler writes himself of Fairfield Porter's paintings, '[their] art is one that values the everyday as the ultimate, the most varied and desirable knowledge'.

Schuyler's theme is change. More specifically, it is the strangeness of acknowledging both change and similarity. 'The / Days tick by, each so unique, each so alike', read lines towards the end of 'Hymn to Life', another famous long poem. 'Most things, like the sky', agrees 'Greenwich Avenue', 'are always changing, always the same.' Suspended between careful looking and attentiveness on the one hand and the casual, shrug-like nature of the incidental on the other, Schuyler's poetry, at heart, is a celebration of what is (simply put) *available*. 'What is, is by its nature, on display', he writes in an early poem. '[I want] merely to say, to see and say, things / as they are' suggests another, as if answering Wallace Stevens's question – 'So that's life, then: things as they are?' – with a low-key, half-bemused response: 'I guess so. What else would there be?'

What Schuyler achieves, I think, is something close to Lawrence's 'incarnate Now'. In contact with the immediate present – Lawrence's 'living plasm' – Schuyler's poems are truly of the moment, embracing both the *There* and *Then*. 'Now, this moment / flows out of me / down the pen and / writes', he suggests in 'Linen', collapsing the distance between 'moment' and 'poem', as if it was the same thing all along. In doing so, Schuyler not only manages to locate the frequency of the present, sensing the 'knowledge' in a vase of flowers, a glimpse through the window, the light hitting the tops of trees, but, at the same time, seems to understand (as Lawrence suggested of Cézanne) that the truest route to knowledge might be to let the world speak for itself, to observe it, to notice, but to allow for the possibility that 'Getting the most out of a stone might be to leave it alone', as he puts it in 'The Cenotaph'.

In this way, Schuyler's poems achieve a quality of livingness. Like Lawrence's 'eternal moment', they shudder like a handheld camera, like the hazy, endlessly rewindable footage of a home movie. Very often, reading Schuyler feels like reading something he has only just now finished working on, the ink not fully dry; like encountering a freshness of thought and observation that keeps the poems somehow alive and kicking. As Doug Crase puts it in his elegiac essay, 'The reality Jimmy wanted us always to have was a reality still alive.'

By celebrating life in flux, Schuyler, like Lawrence, pulls off the unexpected, stopping the moment in its tracks, a single, silhouetted deer, suspended in time like a scene in a snow globe. The poems allow us to revisit Schuyler's 'still alive' reality, to view the present alongside him, as if over his shoulder. They encapsulate what

the late James Longenbach (1959–2022) has called the lyric poem's 'repeatable event of itself', recreating the moment 'as we enter it'; 'whether written in 1920 or 2020', the poem is always 'happening now.'

'Nothing is important but life', says Lawrence, 'And for myself, I can absolutely see life nowhere but in the living. Life with a capital L is only man alive. Even a cab-

bage in the rain is a cabbage alive.' 'It's the yellow dust inside the tulips', writes Schuyler in his poem 'February':

It's the shape of a tulip.

It's the water in the drinking glass the tulips are in.

It's a day like any other.