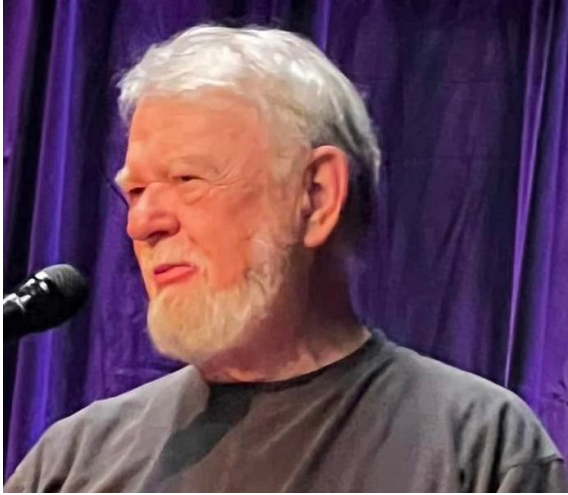


## Gary Metras – Five Poems



### 3 DEGREES

A friend lives in a hilltown.  
At the end of a long, windy road.  
I am in the valley, a small city,  
changing from factories to galleries.  
My house is right beneath  
the mountain, where animals  
walk down then through the field  
into the yard to bring me their wildness.  
He is in the woods, where winter  
fells trees to gift the stove.  
But we are not so different.  
We split the 23 miles to lunch  
at a farm market, their baked bread,  
butchered and cured meats  
savored between the talk.  
We share the now in our lives.  
The past slides in and out, childhood,  
best books, favorite poems.  
But not the future, that dangling  
something or other out there.  
Yesterday, late March, we lunched.  
17 degrees at his house, 20 at mine.

## From THANKS & PLEASE

...Then every  
morning at six sharp, a dozen wild turkeys  
that I've placed in the meadow will pace  
one after another down and up and through  
the grass until it grows so tall they can't be seen,  
but before that, those large, dark bodies, like arks  
hauling precious cargo through a green-tinged sea,  
enliven that early hour with those slender necks  
supporting that small head and even smaller brain  
in that jouncy, head-bobbing march. One day  
there will be one less turkey. The week after,  
another gone. That's because I've put a fisher  
on their tails, trailing them, stalking, though  
she crawls almost invisibly through the grass.  
No one will see her, not even the turkeys,  
who forage in the field at six o'clock sharp each day.  
By seven they've wandered back into the forest,  
their dark feathers blending into the deep shades  
of oak and ash and hemlock bark. That's when  
I'll walk into the field, search for dropped feathers  
to decorate the hat I'll buy, or to use in trout flies  
I tie, tails and wing cases for nymphs, just little  
glittery worms to entice a fat trout fit for the grill.  
I'll tell the neighbors about the fisher in the meadow,  
how it is not a cat, but a weasel, the largest weasel  
and that it follows the turkeys in daylight,  
memorizing their names and gaits, how at night  
it climbs their roosting trees to steal their dreams,  
and how some nights a fisher will shriek its  
victories with a voice that could pierce steel planking  
and cause the toe-claws of Harpies to twist  
and turn black. They won't believe me. They'll say,  
"Please, fishercats are an old myth. There haven't  
been any around here for over a century." They'll ask  
how come they never see them, that only I do.  
I'll tell them how, each week, there is one less  
turkey in the flock. They'll shake their heads  
and retreat behind doors to wallow in their own  
mythologies.

**FOR THE STUDENTS MARCHING AGAINST GUN VIOLENCE**

When you walk in chilly air across grass  
or down city streets, make your voices loud,  
make them true. Make your presence,  
your lives speak eloquently, and true.

Your mothers and fathers in Congress  
or board rooms, your aunts and uncles,  
grandmothers and grandfathers in Congress,  
in courts, and in the White House  
say they care, but they don't.  
They care about something else more.  
They love this other thing, more.

Now is your time to help us, give us hope,  
give us an avenue to follow, the energy  
to make changes to show we, too, care.

Now is your time to help us all see  
the sun above the clouds.  
The sun that will shine upon your shoulders.  
The sun that will warm your spirits  
and our old hearts that so admire you.  
Your courage shows us, embarrasses us  
for what we could not do, but you will.

## **BIRTHDAY**

For my 75th, I go fishing,  
hoping the river will gift me  
with a beautiful trout.  
Nothing. After the eighth  
change of flies, still nothing.  
I say, "Nine is a good number,"  
and tie on a small brown bug.  
My line in the river drifts,  
then twitches. I think it has  
caught the bottom, reel in  
a little, and the river pulls back.  
Then I see the flash of a fish  
deep in the water. It pulls

the line and I let it. I reel in  
and it pulls. We play this game  
a couple minutes until it sits  
in my net, a rainbow trout  
grand enough to decorate a wall.  
I release it, thank the river,  
and drive home to cake with candles.

## CLOCKWISE & COUNTER

for David Giannini

The pencil is mechanical. You can  
turn the graphite out, then in, when  
you've marked the heart's bloodless trail  
down some leg of paper. Or signal  
the mind's wavering between  
ebb and flow of words and emotions.  
Stark. Make it stark, like a rock  
on the shore of everything greater  
than itself.

Would they believe if you  
quietly tell whomever will listen that  
each book you own, even your friends',  
is a journal where the pencil, too, has  
journeyed, has marked, scored, underlined  
words, lines, stanzas that lit a spark  
and that, sometimes, an asterisk,  
like a dark star gone nova,  
like a waved crashed against the fleshy shore  
of self into a poem scribbled on the last  
blank page.

Ah, the word. *La parola.*  
*Das Wort.* Yours, mine, all those others  
cradled on shelves.

Two fingers are all it takes  
— twist to reveal a nib of graphite; twist  
opposite to conceal. Reveal and conceal,  
soundlessly, unlike the sputtering words  
between a tide's surge. Clockwise. Counter-  
clockwise. As if time counted anything

All the mechanical  
night a pencil in the hand. And two fingers  
is all it took to turn the heavy page.

Gary Metras's ninth book of poems, *Marble Dust*, is due in 2024 from Cervena Barva Press. His 2021 book, *Vanishing Points*, Dos Madres Press, was selected as a Must Read 2022 Poetry Title by the Massachusetts Center for the Book. His essays, reviews, and chiefly poems have appeared in hundreds of journals since the 1970s, including *America*, *Poetry*, *Poetry East*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, and *Yankee Magazine*. For 40 years he was the publisher, editor, and letterpress printer of Adastra Press. He is a retired educator, having spent 37 years in class rooms full of teenagers. In 2018 he was appointed the inaugural poet laureate of Easthampton, MA.