A collection of contemporary poetry
What is the role of the poet in contemporary times? Is there still a place for the bard or the prophet? the visionary or the nature-seeker? the reclaimer of history and myth or the often unwanted reporter of all aspects of our society and life? Poetry has been in existence since the first beat of a human heart, a rhythm born out of passion and strife, then thrown into this dangerous yet wondrous world we all call home. The spirit and life of our human heart survives through these chroniclers and rhythmmatists, lovers and iconoclasts, these respected outcasts who crown themselves with the thorny cap of the poet.
These days, poets do not enjoy the patronage of some well-off, art-struck philanthropist—the poet is subject to the whims and follies of the world of publishers, academicians and critics to support the writer's habit, this addiction to words. Our living poets are most likely to be found in the halls of academia, nurturing and expanding their own craft while, simultaneously, nurturing the young aspirations, year after year, of students. Poetry is a living, breathing expression of the human condition, a testament to our obsession with life. Not surprisingly, we find thousands upon thousands of texts that contain this ancient heartbeat: anthologies, magazines, and single books or volumes, filled. Style, precision of detail and diction, rhetoric and music, the terrible beauty of nature, passion and blood, fire and water—the list of poetic ingredients is endless, a rich tapestry that is woven, taken apart, and woven again with every beat of the poet's pen.

These recordings of human activity, be they the evocation of the Muse by the seventh century B.C.E. poet Homer, or by twentieth century poet Carolyn Kizer, demonstrate the timelessness of poetry: respect and gratitude are owed to the poetic instinct for its constant struggle to save our souls, our humanity. The poetry that is so lovingly and carefully housed within the A.M. Todd Rare Book Room is a tribute to the continuation of the heart. We all beat a rhythm that is familiar and enjoyed. We are all connected through the rhythm of poetry.
The seventeen poets featured in this exhibit reveal the range and depth of life and spirit that poetry delivers. The poets featured in this exhibit have all read their work here at Kalamazoo College. Born during the years between the two World Wars (flanked by William Stafford, b. 1914, and Jon Anderson, b. 1940), this generation of contemporary poets earned recognition for their work during the late 1950s and throughout the tumultuous '60s and early '70s. In response to the publication of Mark Strand’s Darker in 1970, the Antioch Review makes a plea for the reader to embrace the poet: “We must rejoice to accept this important collection by a major poet of our days.” Twenty years later, Strand became the 1990-91 Poet Laureate of the United States.

These men and women pay homage to their teachers, the poets they have read and studied, emulated and discounted, embraced and recanted, all answering the sacred call: to ensure the continuation of the soul through the constant beat of that original heart. Poets are agitators who keep the heart pumping by nudging it every now and then, reminding it that our humanity, dignity, and the energy to live all thrive because of the life that surrounds us, not because we, as we’d like to think, surround life.
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