

GENERAL SOURCES OF MY POETRY FOR NDR  
(as prepared for Clarinda Harriss; additions in brackets)

[Most of my poems are based on first hand experience and are deeply influenced by my life as a neurosurgeon and brain scientist, as an art lover and critic, as a citizen of New York and Baltimore, as a sailor on the Chesapeake Bay, as a hopeless Romantic and husband, father and grandfather. My attitudes and cultural heritage are deeply European; I write many ekphrastic poems and poems about the Holocaust in its wider meanings.]

I am happy to answer your other question; one that has never been posed to me. I loved Poe and Blake and Donne from childhood and started to routinely write poems in high school (1963) [for the usual reason, a means of getting dates; it didn't work]. I was doing an interview this past year [for *The Baltimore Sun*] and pulled down two books that were extraordinarily important to me and, for the first time, discovered that they came out in the same year! I can therefore actually date when a more nuanced view of "contemporary" work came to me: 1971 and when I first thought I might be a poet. The main stimulus was "Crow" by Ted Hughes (Ilene and I were also collecting prints by Leonard Baskin who did the cover illustration) and Galway Kinnell's "Book of Nightmares". [As a science major and medical student] The only two writers I met in the 1970s (before meeting you in Baltimore!) were Menke Katz (who was publishing my poems in *Bitterroot* in Brooklyn) and Christy Brown (famous from the novel and movie, "My Left Foot") who I didn't know wrote any verse until I met him and had the honor of reading his work to him at a gathering of his friends and supporters (his cerebral palsy wouldn't allow him to read aloud). From Menke's magnificent "Burning Village" I learned that I could draw on my heritage and be a Jewish poet in small part; from Christy I learned that my own physical limitations were no impediment in comparison to his. [Both Christy Brown and Menke Katz are the subjects of poems in my new book, *The Enemy of Good Is Better*]. During the decade that I fell silent (1977-1987) [because of a mean-spirited and unfeeling rejection letter from Menke's publisher], I read voraciously and my gods arranged themselves: Yeats and Stevens at the head, Bishop, Frost, Williams, Berryman and Hughes. Then Nemerov, Richard Wilbur and TS Eliot when I can ignore the politics [and anti-Semitism]. Poets I've come to love include Larkin, Merrill, Lowell, Plath, Amichai, Tony Hecht, James Wright, Weldon Kees, Heaney, William Matthews & Stanley Moss. Also Pavese, Pessoa, Roethke, Jane Kenyon, Tony Hoagland, Mark Doty, Robert Hass, Ed Hirsch & Stephen Dunn. From my own generation (!) I will speak only of the best of my teachers and friends [from ten summers spent at the Sarah Lawrence Writers Seminars], Tom Lux, Billy Collins, Dick Allen, Dennis Nurske. But I am really crazy for almost any kind of good poetry, Carl Dennis, Simic, Bly, Gluck, Thom Gunn, Don Hall, Ashbery at times, Heather McHugh, Justice, Pinsky, Szymborska and all the Wrights (see my acrostic poem at the end of Confetti attempting to kill them all off!). I loathe Pound for many of the same reasons that I can't and won't listen to Wagner: interminable, impenetrable posturing and anti-Semitic to boot. [My teachers at Sarah Lawrence included Tom Lux, Stephen Dobyns, Heather McHugh, Stuart Dischell, Dennis Nurske and Deborah Digges. Tom Lux and Dick Allen have been intimately involved in editing my manuscripts for publication.]

Here are some poems that mean everything to me: "The Second Coming" by Yeats or anything else, "Snowman" by Stevens or anything else, "Masterful" by Bill Matthews, "One Art" by Bishop or anything else, "Examination at the Womb-Door" from "Crow" or anything else, "The Wellfleet Whale" by Kunitz, "Refrigerator, 1957" by Lux, "For My Daughter" by Kees, "The Night House" or "Chopping Onions.....Three Blind Mice" by Collins, "The Diameter of the Bomb" by Amichai, "Otherwise" by Jane Kenyon. etc. etc. I am always glad to read poems by my idols and can imitate Collins and Lux really well!

