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From the Book and New Media Review Editor's Desk

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From the Book and New Media Review Editor's Desk

Jessica Shumake, Editor

University of Notre Dame

During a recent lecture—at a packed auditorium at St. Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana—the philosopher and public intellectual Cornel West explained that the living's engagement with the voices of the dead is a regenerative act with the potential to make history and hope rhyme. West's riff on the Irish poet Seamus Heaney gave me an occasion to remember the American poet Steve Orlen, who generously gave a reading to a packed auditorium of high school students as they transitioned to college freshmen in the summer bridge program in which I taught. I couldn't have known then that Steve would die four months after delivering the keynote reading at our annual New Start academic conference at the University of Arizona.

Before Steve agreed to give a reading, he asked for my college transition story. My initial answers were too scripted, perfunctory. “No. That's not it,” Steve said a few times as he rejected my half-hearted responses to his earnest question. He pried and intruded to understand why I cared about organizing a conference for low-income, minority, and first-generation college students. He glanced at the bicycle helmet in my lap and asked if I was a beggar seeking alms. “Yes. I am,” I retorted and held out the helmet. “Poet, can you spare a verse?” Soon after fragments of my story poured out. I never imagined myself going to college; my parents had no idea that college was an option for me because they hadn't attended themselves. Steve leaned in, listened, and said: “It's great to meet you. There aren't many real people left in the world.”

During Steve's reading, a student in my writing class, Panzi Jasbi, emailed me from his phone to say: “This poet is amazing. Does he have published works? Can I find him in a bookstore?” Steve earned the collective attention of an audience of proud and tough young people on the cusp of their first year in college; his poems—replete with human tenderness and cruelty—held them, rapt.

Just as my former student was eager to know more, I hope at least one of the eight book reviews in this volume of *CLJ* will hold your attention and move you to read and engage with the book that prompted the contributor to review it. Through engagement with the words of those who have written before us, we come to discover the methods of inquiry of other practitioners, researchers, and thinkers. Steve Orlen describes the process of putting words on the page better than I can and so I quote him with the hope of encouraging readers of and contributors to the section to share ideas for reviews and keyword essays that fit the mission of the journal, which is to serve as a platform that creates space for new voices in community writing:

A present tense, and you are seized with impatience
 For the future you've glimpsed, so you write it down [. . .]
 You wait with dignity for a future enclosed with rhyme.
 As it takes shape, you are inside, observing, inventing.

Work Cited

Orlen, Steve. “The Early Poem.” *Rhetoric Review* 10.2 (1992): 364.