

Robert Pinsky

*Passengers going to Hoboken, change trains at Summit.* Even in his crib, he considered the rhythm of speech; as a boy, he studied the drumming of sound. He would fiddle with the saxophone for a time but later find melodies in syntax. *Passengers going to Hoboken, change trains at Summit...*

On stage in Ottawa, Pinsky's no longer larger than life. He presses his palms together before and after he speaks. He stretches his arms to show the length of lines, holds up fingers to count syllables. His memory amazes me. *I turn words inside out*, he says, and I believe him. I even watch him do it. He turns the library's herringbone floor into a poem about Cajun migration.

Truth is, I never liked his poetry much. But I enjoy the man. He doesn't lecture. He makes the afternoon light with stories. I laugh to learn of his boyhood reverie, hearing the conductor's drone, *Passengers going to Hoboken, change trains at Summit*—his hand moves up and down as he speaks—so rapt he'd forget where he was going, forget to get off the train.

SNEHA MADHAVAN-REESE