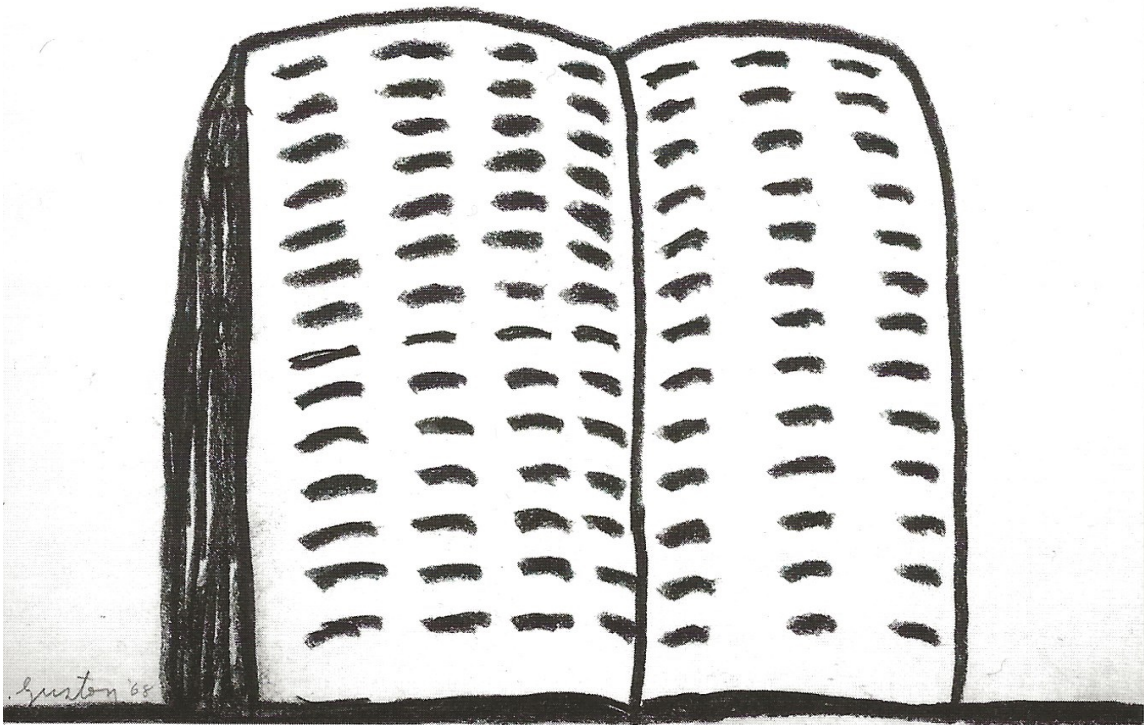


# WILLIAM CORBETT THE WHALEN POEM



•  
  
Jack Spicer

His mother was a Clause

His father

John Lovely Spicer.

Too perfect

For a man who said

At his end,

"My vocabulary did this to me."

He was right about poets

We're not pitchers but catchers

And the words not being ours,

Having stuff of their own,

We are wise to don

The tools of ignorance.

•

14 September 2007

Dear Elliot:

Your answering the call  
For a Boston poet laureate  
With my name honors me.  
Thank you friend and neighbor,  
But, alas, our Athens of America  
Is clueless. No one told  
Mayor Menino that you don't  
Apply for an honorary  
Position. Someone decides it's  
Your due and gives it to you  
Or you don't get it at all.

In my 38 years here  
The Hub hasn't cared jackshit,  
Not a Revere bowl, bean,  
Cod, not nothing no how  
For poets named Robert Lowell  
Named John Wieners or any art  
Save the Symphony.

No one expects anything else.  
This call for applications  
Puts a bureaucrat's face  
On Boston's smug philistinism.  
Ugly.

Turn away friend, not worth  
Your time or mine.

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More I grow old less  
My students know of  
DeKooning, Parker, Mailer,  
Baldwin, Holiday, Mantle ...  
Why should they?  
I don't know what they do.  
Turn the page, Siri Jane,  
Monk's 90th birthday  
You speak my tongue.

11:x:07

## EXTREME OCTOBER

Drought in Georgia  
San Diego fires  
I always go commando  
Deserving everyone's love.

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I spent the summer of 2007 reading the galleys of Philip Whalen's *Collected Poems*. I was in Vermont and had the leisure to read slowly, ten or so pages a day. About halfway through the master's poems I began to write *The Whalen Poem*. I kept at it until just after Halloween. No book I have written, poetry or prose, has given me the deep pleasure I felt in writing *The Whalen Poem*.

WILLIAM CORBETT

WILLIAM CORBETT is a poet and memoirist who lives in Boston's South End and teaches writing at MIT. He edited *Just the Thing: Selected Letters of James Schuyler*, directs the small press Pressed Wafer, and is on the advisory board of Manhattan's CUE Art Foundation. In 2008 Hanging Loose published his book of poems *Opening Day*. His most recent book is an essay on the painter Albert York.

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