

A LITERARY PRACTICE · MARQUETTE, MICHIGAN

The Art and Memory of Henry Zender

*Workshops, manuscript shaping, readings,
and unmechanized writing*

RUSSELL THORBURN · POET

*his eyes look away every time when the photographer tells him
to count to three and not blink, but there's a freighter on the
Detroit River. Herons stalk the riverbank, like diplomats of a
lost country, and he daydreams about his wife when she's
washing up in the morning.*

FROM "HENRY ZENDER" · ALL THAT MY BODY CAN BEAR

A room for the unhurried word

Russell Thorburn — five books of poems, an NEA Fellowship, and the Upper Peninsula's first poet laureate — keeps a small workshop for poets and prose writers who would rather slow a sentence down than rush it along.

Why Henry Zender

Henry Zender — tavern keeper on the Detroit River, three daughters and a son waiting for him on a Lutheran afternoon — was Russell's great-grandfather. He survives in a single photograph and in the rooms of family memory. The name belongs to this practice because what we do here is what the photograph could not: look back without blinking, count to three, and let the freighter pass.

The work offered here is built around four small disciplines — teaching, shaping, reading aloud, and writing by hand or on a manual typewriter. Each is a way of refusing the machine for long enough to find what the page wants to say.



From the writing desk

Russell's third Cornerstone Press collection, *All That My Body Can Bear*, completes a trilogy that began with *Let It Be Told in a Single Breath* and *And the Heart Will Not Quicken*. A book of fiction — *Strange News from Another Hotel* — is underway, drawn from his years as a desk clerk at the Old Marquette Inn in 1980, the winter John Lennon was killed.

ABOUT

About Russell

Poet of the Upper Peninsula and Detroit, of Lake Superior and the Italian patisserie.

Russell Thorburn is the author of five books of poems. His writing draws on his own experiences while imagining fictional characters and personal heroes — *Whitman on the beach of Lake Superior*, *Federico Fellini at the Old Marquette Inn*, *Sam Spade at an Italian patisserie in Birmingham, Michigan*.

Somewhere We'll Leave the World, published by Wayne State University Press, opened that imaginative geography. In *Let It Be Told in a Single Breath* and *And the Heart Will Not Quicken*, published by Cornerstone Press at the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point, he picked up where he had left off — with recurring characters and a younger self in dislocations of time and space. His forthcoming third Cornerstone volume, *All That My Body Can Bear*, completes the trilogy.

He has received numerous grants, including a **National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship**, and he was the Upper Peninsula's **first poet laureate**.

The Memory of Henry Zender

Henry Zender, Russell's great-grandfather, kept a tavern across the street from a historical Lutheran church on the Detroit River. In the one photograph that survives him, he stands uncomfortably before a hooded photographer who represents, in the manner of the early twentieth century, something like death.

*his eyes look away
every time when the photographer
tells him to count to three and not blink,
but there's a freighter on the Detroit River.*

FROM "HENRY ZENDER"



RUSSELL THORBURN · MARQUETTE,
MICHIGAN

Henry Zender is the patron of the work because what he could not do in front of a camera — hold still, look back, name the freighter — is precisely what we are trying to do on the page.

Honors & appointments

- **National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship**
- **First Poet Laureate**, Michigan's Upper Peninsula
- Numerous additional grants and residencies

Works

Five books of poems, a forthcoming third Cornerstone volume, and a debut book of fiction in progress.

The **Cornerstone Trilogy** — three collections from Cornerstone Press at the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point — shares themes of love, war, and place, with the Upper Peninsula and Detroit interwoven through every poem.

All That My Body Can Bear

FORTHCOMING • CORNERSTONE PRESS • MADE IN MICHIGAN WRITERS SERIES

The third volume. Apollinaire wanders Whole Foods at seventy; Whitman bathes in Lake Superior with Ginsberg and Burroughs; Fellini visits the Old Marquette Inn where John Lennon is staying — and Henry Zender stands before the hooded photographer on the Detroit River.

And the Heart Will Not Quicken

CORNERSTONE PRESS, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-STEVENS POINT

The second Cornerstone book, where the hotel poems begin and Levon Helm, Robbie Robertson, and Richard Manuel return alongside a younger self.

Let It Be Told in a Single Breath

CORNERSTONE PRESS, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-STEVENS POINT

The first book of the trilogy — recurring characters and personal heroes moving through the poet's remembered Michigan.

Earlier collections

Somewhere We'll Leave the World

2017 • WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS • MADE IN MICHIGAN WRITERS SERIES

The book that opened the imaginative geography the later work has continued.

Misfit Hearts

A BOOK-LENGTH SEQUENCE

Chronicles the making of *The Misfits* through the filming-location photographs of Clark Gable, Marilyn Monroe, and Montgomery Clift.

Selected recurring figures

A partial index of the people who keep arriving in my fiction and poetry: Walt Whitman • Allen Ginsberg • William Burroughs • Czeslaw Milosz • Jim Harrison • Lawrence Ferlinghetti • Apollinaire • Langston Hughes • Leonard Cohen • Borges • Hemingway • Brautigan • Kafka • Federico Fellini • Marcello Mastroianni • John Lennon • Levon Helm • Robbie Robertson • Richard Manuel • Sam Spade • Henry Zender.

Strange News from Another Hotel

A debut book of stories — Cornerstone Press, 2027 — out of one hotel and one long winter.

Russell Thorburn's first book of fiction gathers eleven linked stories set at the Old Marquette Inn, the year approximately — because you can never be certain in hyper-frazzled fiction — 1980. He worked and lived there, watched John Lennon's assassination reported on the television in Dirty Annie's, and checked Richard Brautigan into the hotel one night. The dead check in too, and take a solitary day among the living.

John Lennon appears to be eating chili at the hotel bar. The former Beatle has been shot outside the Dakota in New York City and his spirit takes refuge in Marquette. He doesn't know why he is here at the hotel but keeps spooning chili. I am seated beside him, a thirtyish man who lives at the hotel and works part-time as a night clerk there.

FROM THE SYNOPSIS

The eleven stories

1. Chili Night and John Lennon
2. Another Bowl of Chili
3. Czeslaw Milosz Reading in the Queen City
4. Of Sperm Whales and Human Desires as Noted by a Dying Woman
5. There Was Only the Rustle of a Loosened Grain of Lava
6. Kerouac and Lucien Carr Go to the Movies
7. A Drunkard Grows Sleepy at the Edge of a Lawn
8. Disguises
9. The Poet and the Hairdresser
10. Richard Brautigan Wanted to Jump from His Hotel Window
11. Long Lost John at the Old Marquette Inn

Inside the book

The Nobel Prize poet Czeslaw Milosz appears in three stories, but the true protagonist is his wife, Janina, dying of cancer on Grizzly Peak Boulevard in Berkeley, waiting for his phone call. In the last story, Long Lost John — a lost Beatle — wants to row out into Lake Superior and disappear, remembering his Irish island of Dorinish. But it is winter, and these dreams dissipate. The intention is to be mysteriously intense, surreal and compassionate — even if someone does get murdered by the end of the story.

Workshops & Services

Four small disciplines — teaching, shaping, reading aloud, and writing by hand.

These are the offerings I keep. Each is conducted in person where possible, by letter or telephone where it isn't, and never in volume. Write to me if anything here calls.

One • Workshops

Small-circle workshops in poetry and short fiction, three to eight writers, meeting weekly or in weekend sessions. We read each other's drafts aloud and listen for what the line wants. Hosted at colleges, libraries, bookshops, or in private homes.

- Introduction to the poem • for beginning writers
- The book-length sequence • for poets shaping a collection
- Short fiction in the fantastic mode • Kafka, Brautigan, Bulgakov
- Place and the personal • writing from where you are

Two • Manuscript Shaping

One-on-one work on a poetry collection or book of stories. I read the manuscript twice — once for the voice, once for the shape — and then we talk: sequencing, the arc, the table of contents as a music. I shaped three of my own books this way for Cornerstone Press.

Three • Readings

I read from the Cornerstone trilogy and the forthcoming book in colleges, libraries, festivals, and bookstores. A reading runs forty-five minutes to an hour, with time afterward to talk. Where the occasion welcomes it, I bring a manual typewriter to the lectern.

Four • Unmechanized Writing

Unmechanized writing means writing by hand and by manual typewriter — pencil, fountain pen, Royal Deluxe, mailed pages — in a practice that refuses, for the hours of the work, the speed of the machine. It is not a nostalgia. It is a way of letting the line of breath catch up to the line of thought. Offered as correspondence sessions, a day at the desk in Marquette, or an unplugged residency.

You walked away with your last call from the bar in your hand. You knew you were no great scholar or writer, but would return to your hotel room with the Royal Deluxe, like Hemingway seated there gazing vacantly at the typewriter keys, hoping for your novel to be revealed.

FROM THE POSTSCRIPT TO STRANGE NEWS FROM ANOTHER HOTEL

NEWS & PRESS

News & Press

Interviews, readings, radio segments, and published poems.

APR 2026 · WNMU-FM, PUBLIC RADIO 90

National Poetry Month 2026 — Russell Thorburn

FEB 2026 · NORTHERN TODAY, NMU

Thorburn's Poetry Features Cultural Legends in Imaginative Scenarios

OCT 2025 · WNMU-FM, NORTHERN ARTS & CULTURE

Russell Thorburn weaves poetry, music, and memory in a new collection

JUN 2024 · NORTHERN TODAY, NMU

Thorburn Records 'Poetic Conversations'

SEP 2023 · THE MINING JOURNAL, MARQUETTE

Marquette poet pens new book

AUG 2023 · WNMU-FM (AUDIO INTERVIEW)

"Let It Be Told In A Single Breath" — an interview with Russell Thorburn

JAN 2022 · STREETLIGHT MAGAZINE (POEM)

A Radio with Guts

OCT 2017 · WMUK, BETWEEN THE LINES

Between the Lines: Russell Thorburn

OCT 2014 · MICHIGAN PUBLIC, BURDEN OF PLACE

Writers from the UP: Russell Thorburn

JUL 2013 · THE MINING JOURNAL, MARQUETTE

Upper Peninsula's Poet — named the region's first poet laureate

FULL LINKS AVAILABLE ON THE WEBSITE'S NEWS PAGE.

Contact

A letter is the surest way.

By email

Russell Thorburn

thorburn.russell@gmail.com

For inquiries

Please write to schedule a reading, ask about workshops or manuscript shaping, or begin a correspondence in unmechanized writing. Messages are read and answered.

What to include

For readings: the institution, the date in mind, and the kind of room.

For manuscript shaping: the working title and a short note on where the book is in its life.

For workshops: where you write from, and what you are reading lately.

| *The simplest thing is a letter. I read everything that arrives, and I write back.*

