

DANA GIOIA

At the Crossroads

Here are the crossroads where old women come
Under the rising moon to cast their spells,
And where young lovers meet to argue out
The secret terms of their surrender.

It is a place that everyone sees differently—
The salesman scouting, soldiers tramping home,
The scholar napping by the riverbank
While someone else's fortune drifts downstream.

But if you stand at crossroads long enough,
You'll see most of the world come stumbling by—
Businessmen, preachers, cats—all going somewhere,
Even the Devil striking up a deal.

I used to wonder if they ever got there.
Be careful here in choosing where to turn.
You learn a lot by staying in one place
But never how the story truly ends.

Dana Gioia was selected as the California state poet laureate for 2016–2017. He is the author of four collections of poetry, including *Interrogations at Noon* (2001), which won the American Book Award. His critical collections include *Can Poetry Matter?* (1992), which was a finalist for the National Book Critics Award. He has written three opera libretti and edited twenty literary anthologies. He served as chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts from 2003 to 2009. He holds the Judge Widney Chair of Poetry and Public Culture at the University of Southern California. His *99 Poems: New & Selected* was published in 2016 from Graywolf Press.

CHARLES PRENTISS

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