

Pinsky, Robert

JERSEY RAIN

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In addition to writing poetry, Pinsky is best noted for his essays on poetry and for his well-received 1994 translation of Dante's *Inferno*. This is Pinsky's first collection of poetry since he assembled the work of the prior three decades in a 1996 volume. Most of the poems here have appeared previously in the standard literary publications such as *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The New Yorker*, and *Threepenny Review*. In *Jersey Rain*, Pinsky has gathered work on a wide variety of seemingly unrelated and unlikely poetic topics, from Victrolas, computers, and televisions to a phonebook cover from the 1940s depicting a stylized, lightning-wielding Hermes, a vintage Oldsmobile, and an alternately green and pink piano. This collection marks, in the poet's estimation, "a place near the end of the middle stretch of road" where he glances, like a doorpost Janus, simultaneously backwards and forwards. He has a slight tendency to rhapsodize his subjects, and occasionally he becomes wistfully nostalgic, but he keeps himself honest, admitting he often "cannot tell good fortune from bad." At the same time, he pays homage to the "centaurs [who] showed him truth in fabulation." Despite the dire conclusions of some of these poems, as in his ekphrastic "At the Worcester Museum," Pinsky never takes the easy path of existential despair. He persists, with the stoicism of the samurai and the medieval knight, embracing austerity, but never denying life.

With a skilled craftsman's good-natured showing off, he manages to relate an entire neighborhood and family history through the account of a maltreated piano's changing hands.