Featured Poet: Leon Stokesbury

Leon Stokesbury's first book, *Often in Different Landscapes*, was a co-winner of the first AWP Poetry Competition in 1975. It was published by the University of Texas Press the next year. His third book of poems, *Autumn Rhythm*, was awarded The Poets' Prize as the best book of poems published by an American in 1996. Stokebury is a successful anthologist, and his latest book, *You Are Here: Poems New & Old*, came out last year from the University of Arkansas Press.

Stokesbury will lead a workshop on *The Dramatic Voice*. Description: This basically refers to how to read and write any poem that is consciously written and meant to be read as a poem in the voice of someone other than the poet. Dramatic monologues, monologues, dramatic dialogues, and experiments in the field will all be studied. The masters, such as Browning and Frost, will be central, as will more recent poets like Andrew Hudgins, Denis Johnson, and, yes, even Leon Stokesbury. How do these poets accomplish the voices they do? We shall see.

Below is one of Stokesbury’s poems:

**THE DAY KENNEDY DIED**

Suppose that on the day Kennedy died you had a vision. But this was no inner movie with a discernible plot or anything like it. Not even very visual when you get down to admitting to what actually occurred. About two-thirds through 4th period Senior Civics, fifteen minutes before the longed-for lunchtime, suppose you stood up for no good reason—no reason at all really—and announced, to the class and to yourself, “Something. Something is happening. Something. . .coming. I can see. . .something. I can see. I . . .”
And that was all. You stood there: blank.
The class roared. Even Phyllis Hoffpaur, girl
most worshipped by you from afar that year,
turned a vaguely pastel shade of red
and smiled, and Richard Head, your best friend,
Dick Head to the chosen few, pulled you down
to your desk whispering, “Jesus, man! Jesus
Christ!” Then you went numb. You did not know
what had occurred. But thirty minutes later,
when Stella (despised) Vandenburg, teacher
of twelfth grade English, came sashaying
into the cafeteria, informing, left and right,
as many digesting members of the student body
as she could of what she had just heard,
several students began to glance back at you,
remembering what you’d said. A few pointed,
whispering to their confederates, and on that
disturbing day they moved away in the halls.
Even Dick Head did not know what to say.

In 5th period Advanced Math, Principal
Crawford played the radio over the intercom
and the school dropped deeper into history.
For the rest of that day, everyone moved away—
except for the one moment Phyllis Hoffpaur
stared hard, the look on her face asking,
assuming you would know, “Will it be ok?”

And you did not know. No one knew.
Everyone wandered back to their houses
that evening aimless and lost, not knowing,
but certainly sensing something had been
changed forever. Silsbee High forever!
That is our claim! Never, no never!
Will we lose our fame! you often sang.
But this was to be the class of 1964,
afraid of the future at last, who would select,
as the class song, Terry Stafford’s Suspicion.
And this was November—even in Texas
the month of failings, month of sorrows—
from which there was no turning.
It would be a slow two-month slide until
the manic beginnings of The British Invasion,
three months before Clay’s ascension to the throne,
but all you saw walking home that afternoon
were gangs of gray leaves clotting the curbs
and culverts, the odors of winter forever
in the air: cold, damp, bleak, dead, dull:
dragging you toward the solstice like a tide.