

TIM MATTHEWS

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Archival print, 16 x 24 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

DANA GIOIA

“Words,
Words,
Words”

It isn't just the words, though we have made
a science of them. Eloquence excels
in polishing the sentiments we need
no longer say.
Words are the cards, not why the game is played.

It isn't just the rhyme, though we surmise
the accidental insights of conjunction—
the superstitious chanting we despise
but can't forget,
shamed by our childish pleasure in surprise.

It isn't just the pain we hope to end.
Old wounds still seep their blood between the lines.
The truest words subvert what we intend.
They bring no ease.
The cost is always more than we can spend.

It is the luck to fail at what we started,
of letting language use us as a vessel
swept on a course we never could have charted—
to hope that once
the angel came, possessed us, and departed.

Dana Gioia is a poet and critic. 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* will appear in 2016 from Graywolf Press.