

*Jon Curley read this poem on the occasion of the great poet and critic Michael Heller's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration at Poets House in NYC (see photo and caption a few items down the front page). His theses are testaments to Heller's mind and character.*

## **80 Theses in the Direction of a Milestone Birthday Anniversary on the occasion of Michael Heller's 80th**

1. Devotion to vocation.
2. Devotion to Community.
3. The inner, outer, x-ray vision
4. Kindness most uncommon
5. Radical honesty
6. Radical uncertainty
7. Oppen's sincerity ignited into being
8. Adhering vigilance
9. A mentoring majesty
10. Refusal to comply
11. Resistance to complacency
12. Recognition of the Wound
13. Inclination to joy
14. Retention of world-historical skepticism
15. Passionate inquisitiveness always
16. Charting the Tribe
17. Assuming no assumptions
18. Shedding selves
19. Restoring orders
20. Claiming then Refuting
21. Embracing and disavowing simultaneously
22. Recombining Mysteries
23. Allowing no pre-conceptual constraints
24. The radiant laughter
25. Gargantuan patience
26. Perpetual impatience if the call is art and the call is of response
27. Faithfully impious
28. Relentless raid on the inarticulate
29. Summoning songs from the abyss
30. Waging desacralized holy war
31. Not a company man
32. Not a company poet

33. Never not a companionable poet
34. Steadfast against the darkness
35. Wrecking received notions, calcified conceits
36. Story spinner, memory animator
37. Revelator in and out of Word
38. The dedicated Lover
39. Bringing Orpheus his lyre
40. Harvester of Insight
41. Dear Neighbor
42. Dearest Friend
43. *Il Miglior Fabbro* is an understatement
44. Witness and Alchemist of Witnessing
45. Setting Stock
46. Setting Fire
47. Inventor of the Mondrian Stomp
48. Fellow flaneur
49. Anti-systematic organizer
50. Acolyte of Myth, Despiser of Mythology
51. Courting Intensity
52. Makes Yeats' argument for choosing between the work or the life a sham
53. Younger than Most Everyone in this Room
54. This Room hold a collective presence reflective of Him: incredible!
55. Interpretive care, not zeal
56. Forever thwarting the punctuation of the seemingly resolved line
57. Moves the lever so pressure never abates
58. Showcases tension in dimension, inner and outer, and therefore hyper-authentic
59. No truce with the Furies
60. Not ironic, pedantic, parodic, sarcastic, or quietist: Amen!
61. Leaves no matter settled
62. Leaps—no matter—into the danger of thought
63. My personal trainer inside and outside art
64. Lucid Dreamer
65. Modelling modes on precedents' demeanors, not designs
66. Allergic to obfuscation
67. Bulwark against the quicksand of easy identifications and definitions
68. Composer par excellence of elegies and encomia: think Walter Benjamin, think Bialystock Stanzas.
69. Equipped with a decency rare in this country in 2017 or 1917 or 1817 or ever.
70. Refuses even when the temptation to succumb is there.

71. Will not bite you but will better you
72. Never blinked even when Word and World bade him to do so
73. Keeps looking out, ahead, over his shoulder, into the past. To the future!
74. Sustaining member of the school that regards poetry not as an equation but as eternal struggle
75. Demonstrates always that holy does not need to be holy or belief-borne to be holy
76. Dominates the echo in my mind
77. Festoons the runes and ruins of reality with the garlands of observation, reflection, and therefore, redemption
78. A man I so admire that language proves inadequate. A geometrical shape might do the trick
79. A lasting, loving, learned exemplar especially because he so probes the contingent, the abiding awful, and woefully ignorant enterprise and industry of our social being. This might be hyperbolic or entirely wrong but I was named after Jonathan Swift, you Yahoos, and this invention is an invitation for you to think how Michael Heller humanizes and guides us too.
80. Finally, Mike, you are a Continuous Constellation of Light. Forget the birthday candles—look into the sky. See those stars? Those are your legacy, in and out of life, in and out of poetry.