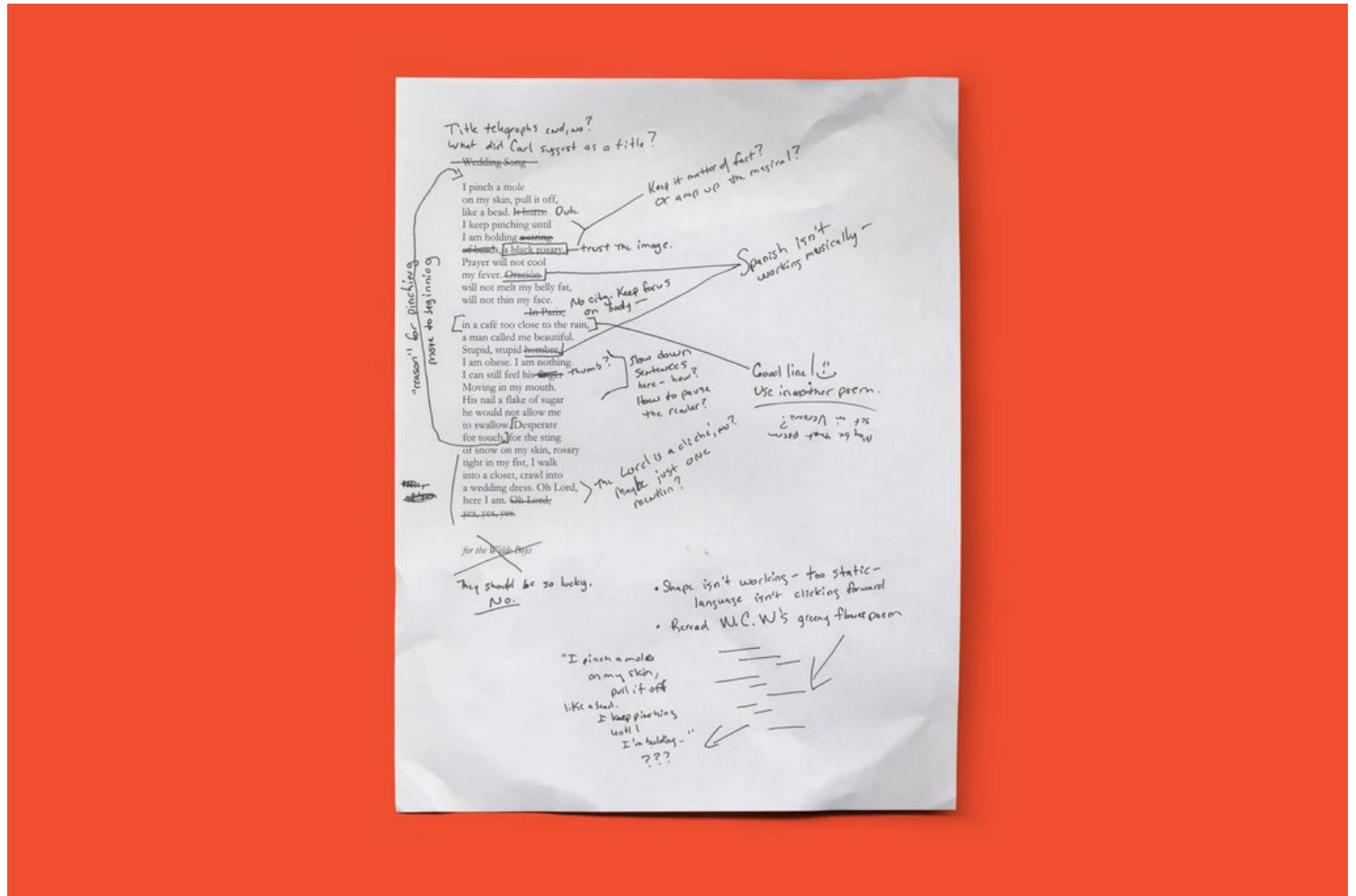


POETRY

Poetry in Action

Aug. 1, 2017

Six contemporary poets share the process behind their poems.



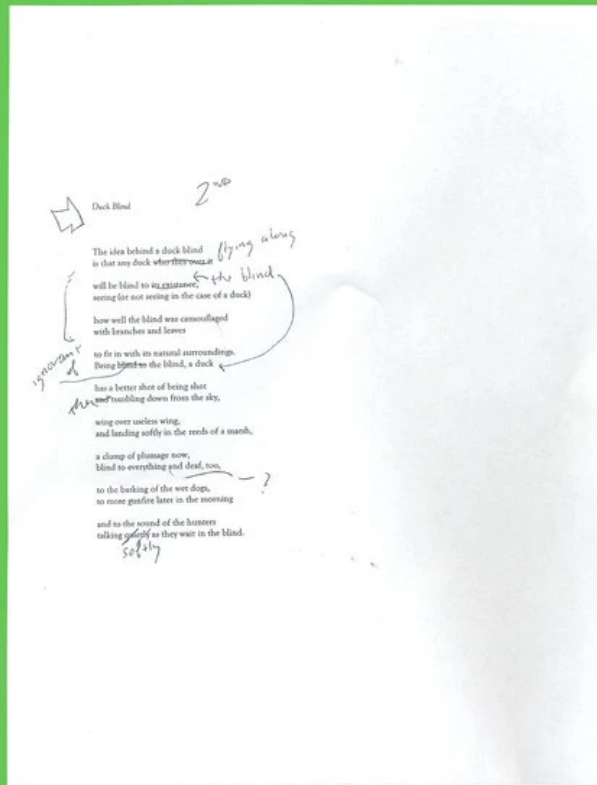
A draft of "Ceremonial," by Eduardo C. Corral.

"Ceremonial"

By Eduardo C. Corral

This is a draft of my poem "Ceremonial," which I wrote in 2012. Revision is my favorite part of writing. Revision helps me envision other possibilities for the language on the page. I know a poem is done when I can identify three distinct pleasures: linguistic, emotional and intellectual. I wanted to privilege emotional pleasure in this poem, though. The annotations reflect that desire.

Eduardo C. Corral's debut collection of poems, "Slow Lightning," won the Yale Younger Poets prize in 2011.



A draft of "Duck Blind," by Billy Collins.

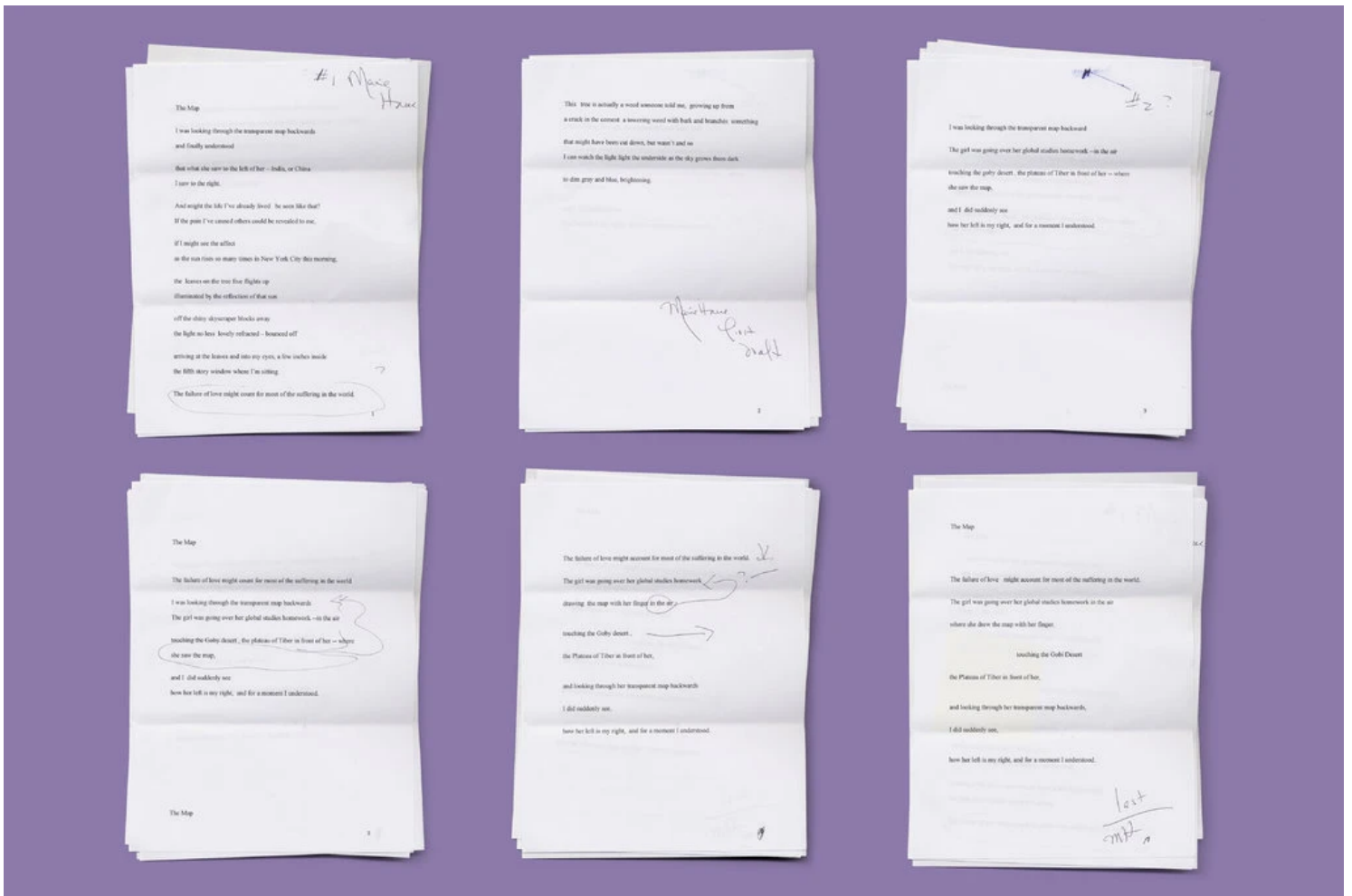
## "Duck Blind"

By Billy Collins

I wrote the first draft of "Duck Blind" on the Amtrak train that runs along the Hudson River from Albany to New York City after spotting, well, a duck blind by the low water at the edge of the river. In writing it, I was nudged along by a Kay Ryan poem titled "Dogleg," but it would be hard for me to say just how.

Billy Collins served two terms as the United States poet laureate, from 2001 to 2003. His most recent collection, "The Rain in Portugal," was a New York Times best seller.





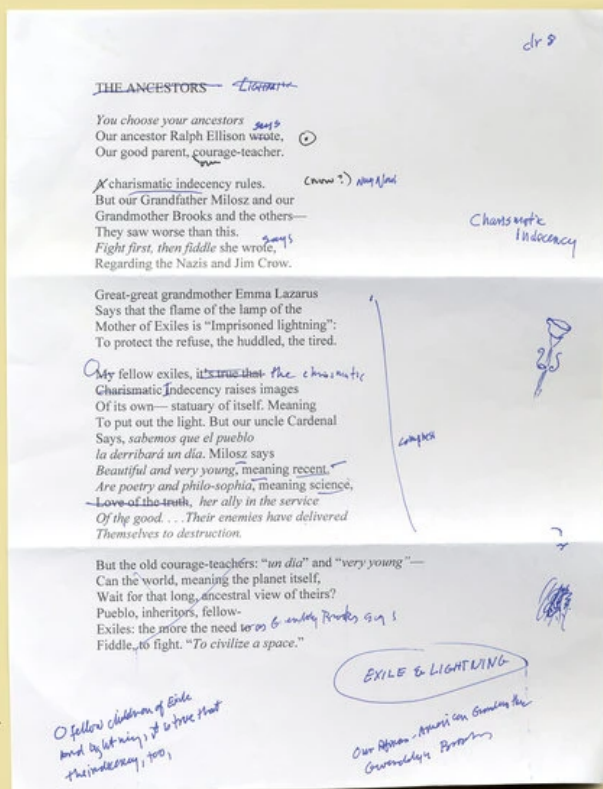
Drafts of "The Map," by Marie Howe.

## The Map

By Marie Howe

A poem has its own body — it comes into the world and I feel most often like a midwife. And a poem has an unsayable center around which its body grows. The first draft had one or two or three things going on (too talky) but hadn't found its organic heart, its unsayable necessity. A friend suggested starting with the statement "the failure of love..." Then the map appeared and in the space between the two (the statement and the experience) the poem appeared.

Marie Howe's fourth collection of poetry, "Magdalene," was published in March.



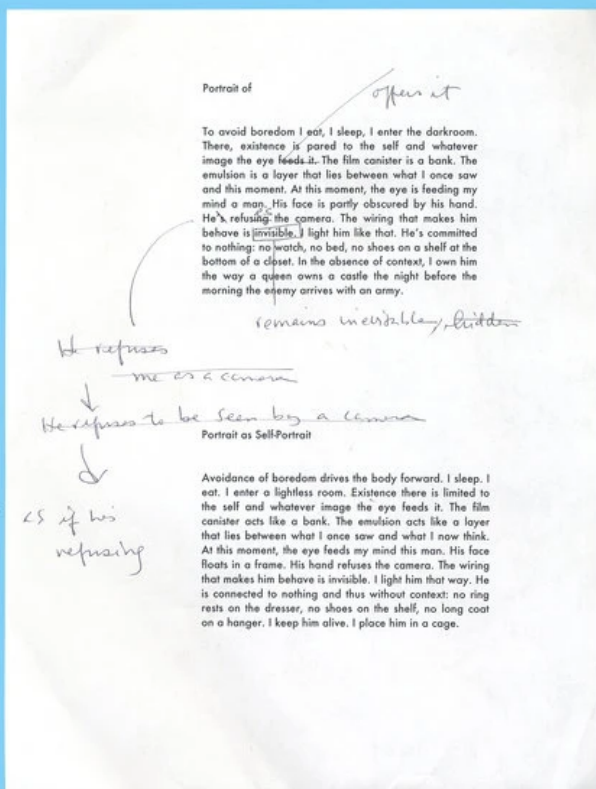
A draft of "Exile and Lightning," by Robert Pinsky.

## "Exile and Lightning"

By Robert Pinsky

"Exile and Lightning" is the only poem of mine published on the CNN Opinion website, headlined "An Inaugural Poem of Protest." PEN and Writers Resist had asked Rita Dove and me to compose poems for the January 15 "Protest Inauguration" on the steps of the New York Public Library. This is "draft 8" of 25 numbered drafts. The poem became a bit shorter, more direct, I hope swifter. With this version, I got the title (it's circled). The sketch of a floor lamp reflects my habit: crude little drawings of stuff around me where I'm writing. Sometimes of the pen.

Robert Pinsky was the United States poet laureate from 1997 to 2000. His latest book of poems, "At the Foundling Hospital," was published last year.



A draft of "Portrait as Self-Portrait," by Mary Jo Bang.

## "Portrait as Self-Portrait"

By Mary Jo Bang

In a photographic portrait, we sometimes forget the maker exists, but how she frames her subject determines what you, the viewer, will see. In that way, the portrait is of two people, the subject *and* the maker. I was thinking of a photograph of László Moholy-Nagy taken by his first wife, Lucia Moholy. In that image, we see a man playfully putting out his hand toward the lens — he might be pushing the camera away ("don't take me"), or he might be reaching out to touch the photographer ("let me take you"). That ambiguity gets written into the poem. As does the fact that the marriage eventually ended.

Mary Jo Bang won a National Book Critics Circle Award for her collection "Elegy." Her eighth book of poems, "A Doll for Throwing," will be published this month.