

Lisa Malinowski Steinman (1950–)

By Jeanne Sheets-Sagoo

Lisa M. Steinman writes “to make sense of myself and the world,” she told Claire Sykes in the June 2014 *Reed Magazine*. A prolific poet, a teacher of poetry, and a longtime resident of Portland, she has written six books of poetry and three scholarly books. The founder and editor of *Hubbub*, a poetry journal, her work has been recognized with literature and humanities fellowships and grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities (1984, 1996, 2006) and from the Rockefeller Foundation (1987–1988).

Lisa Malinowski was born in Willimantic, Connecticut, on April 8, 1950. She grew up in Storrs, where her father, Zenon Malinowski, was a professor of marketing and her mother, Shirley Nathanson, was the assistant director of Institutional Research at the University of Connecticut. She began writing poetry early, influenced by *The Golden Treasury of Verse* and books by Ogden Nash. In an interview with the *Oregon English Journal*, Steinman recalled Nash’s strong influence on her as a young child, especially his “very strong rhythms and rhymes.”

Malinowski attended Cornell University, where she earned a bachelor of arts (1971), a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing (1973), and a Ph.D. in English Literature (1976). In 1968, she married James A. Steinman, a medical technician; they divorced in 1980. In 1976, she moved to Portland and accepted a position in the English Department at Reed College, where in 1993 she was named Kenan Professor of English and Humanities. Much of her teaching, including her students, has informed her writing.

Oregon poet and literary critic Eleanor Berry wrote that “probing emptiness” is a prominent returning theme in Steinman’s poetry. It does not “convey...the kind of thought that blocks out the world,” she wrote. Rather, “it is fully engaged with the world and its everyday occurrences.” Her first book of poems, *Lost Poems* (1976), sounded like William Carlos Williams, “all modernist,” she told *Oregon English Journal*, but she abandoned that for a style that “let me say what I wanted to say when I read poems out loud.” She has been influenced by Wallace Stevens’s idea that “poetry should help people to live their lives,” maintaining that poets who write with no sense of writing for others are rare.

Steinman is the author of six volumes of poetry: *Lost Poems* (1976), *All That Comes to Light* (1989), *A Book of Other Days* (1993), *Ordinary Songs* (1996), *Carslaw’s Sequences* (2003), and *Absence and Presence* (2013). She also published three books about poetry: *Made in America: Science, Technology, and American Modernist Poets* (1987); *Masters of Repetition: Poetry, Culture, and Work in Thomson, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Emerson* (1998); and *Invitation to Poetry: The Pleasures of Studying Poetry and Poetics* (2008). In 1983, she and James L. Shugrue cofounded *Hubbub*, a poetry journal that was published through 2020. She and Shugrue were married in 1984.

Steinman served as a board member for the Ithaca Poetry Center and the Portland Poetry Festival (1979–1981) and was a consultant for the Oregon Arts Commission (1983). She was also the director of the National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminar for School Teachers (1983, 1985–1992, 1998–1999). She received the Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry from the Nimrod Literary Awards (1987), the Burlington Northern Award (1987), the Vollum Award (1990), the Literary Arts Stafford/Hall Award for Poetry (1993), and the Hazel Hall Poetry Award for *A Book of Other Days* (1994). Steinman retired from Reed College in 2022 and is professor emerita.

Sources

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