



INSTEAD OF A POEM

I wish this was just you and me
watching a whole field blaze up
in the honey-gold light of late August—

just the two of us, out on that big rock
covered with lichen at the edge of the woods,
passing a smoke back and forth

and listening to the same
noisy quarrel of sparrows
rising and banking against the late clouds

as a green tractor drones in the distance,
dropping perfect little ingots of hay,
one by one, in its wake,

until finally the sun sinks so low
behind the pink, and then blue,
then almost black trunks of the birches

that when I look back
I can't seem to make out your face,
though even in the dark

I can tell that you're smiling
and somehow not saying
all the same things I don't say.

Diamantis Seitanidis (trees), Marion Ettlinger (portrait)

The National Poem

PATRICK
PHILLIPS



Raised in the foothills of north Georgia, Patrick Phillips has produced three collections of poetry, each of which contends with the lives of his rural, working-class forebears—a body of work that has made him a finalist for the National Book Award in Poetry and earned the admiration of some of America's best contemporary poets. Those include the late Philip Levine, a Detroit native who explored the tribulations of blue-collar America for nearly 60 years. "The art here is in hiding the art," he wrote of Phillips, "and he is the rare poet with the tact and the chops to accomplish that." Indeed, Phillips's limpid poems proceed unhurriedly, marked by swerves that softly startle and endings that feel ineluctably true, always informed by an attentive heart. Here, one feels his reverence for time-honored callings, and the parallels between writing poetry and baling "perfect little ingots of hay."
—Alice Quinn