

***Rain Inscription* by H.L. Hix**
Reader's Guide
Jennifer Judge- October 2017

Synopsis

Rain Inscription gives vivid testimony to the paradox that human making is both lasting and fleeting. Each of its three sections (a sonnet Q&A with contemporary cultural studies, a renewal of the sayings of Herakleitos and Jesus, and a group of dialogues with contemporary artists) extends an already capacious dialogue beyond its prior limits.

Author Bio

H. L. Hix has published an anthology, *Wild and Whirling Words: A Poetic Conversation* (2004), and 12 books of poetry and literary criticism with Etruscan Press, including *As Easy As Lying: Essays on Poetry* (2002); *Shadows of Houses* (2005); *Chromatic* (2006); *God Bless: A Political/Poetic Discourse* (2007); *Legible Heavens* (2008); *Incident Light* (2009); *First Fire, Then Birds* (2010); *Lines of Inquiry* (2011); *As Much As, If Not More Than* (2014); *I'm Here to Learn to Dream in Your Language* (2015); *American Anger: An Evidentiary* (2016); and *Rain Inscription* (2017).

In addition to having been a finalist for the National Book Award for *Chromatic*, his awards include the T.S. Eliot Prize, the Peregrine Smith Award, and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Kansas Arts Commission, and the Missouri Arts Council. He earned his PhD in philosophy from the University of Texas at Austin, taught at Kansas City Art Institute, and was an administrator at The Cleveland Institute of Art, before accepting his current position as professor in the Philosophy Department and the Creative Writing Program at a university in Wyoming, "one of those square states." He has been a visiting professor at the University of Texas at Austin and at Shanghai University, and a Fulbright Distinguished Professor at Yonsei University.

1. Choose a poem, or a section of a poem that resonates with you in a personal way. What images or themes appeal to you?
2. How do you think the three sequences, "Leading Questions," "Logoi Sophon," and "And the Voice of Materials" relate to each other?
3. What do you view as major themes in *Rain Inscription*?
4. Hix infuses several elements of nature in the poems. Discuss how Hix uses nature to express that human making is both lasting and fleeting.
5. Several poems in *Rain Inscription* reference birds. Choose three poems that mention birds. Compare and contrast these poems.

6. Do you think the poems involving birds give reference to a more spiritual meaning?
7. In the poem “yellow throated,” Hix mentions how the birds are common but they hide themselves from humans, only letting their presence known by their songs. Discuss how/when the yellow throated bird and humans are similar.
8. The poem, “what happens to all those tears?” discusses the fate of tears. What do you think should happen to tears instead of them just disappearing? What powers could be given to tears?
9. In the section, “Leading Questions,” Hix provides answers to questions posed in prior texts. Choose two of these questions and write your version of answers.
10. The phrase “Logoi Sophon” is from the ancient Greek tradition of sayings of the wise. Which sayings in this section resonate with you?
11. “And the Voice of Materials” presents prior, formalized dialogues with contemporary artists. Think of conversations (with your partner, colleague, friend, doctor, lawyer, etc.) in your daily life. Write a poem based on one of your conversations.
12. Discuss how the section “They ask as Anyone might” is reminiscent of prayers.
13. Also in “They ask as Anyone might,” why do you think Anyone, Sayer, and Hearer are in capital letters?
14. Hix evokes a sense of regret in several poems. Which poems do you think best convey this sense of regret?
15. In “Unfoldings,” Hix states, “Surely that rain tells a story.” What if rain were given a voice? What stories would it tell?
16. How does “Lustrations” contrast with the other poems in *Rain Inscription*?
17. Choose a phrase from any poem that resonates or stands out to you. Use this phrase to create a poem.
18. Discuss the poems that leave you with questions. What would you ask H.L. Hix about the poems?
19. In “Logoi Sophon,” Hix presents sayings from Herakleitos and Jesus, then provides a version of answers. Could other notable scholars or deities take the place of Herakleitos and Jesus?
20. Why do you think the sayings of Herakleitos and Jesus worked in this section? Why or why not?