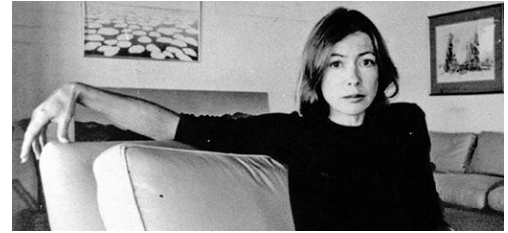


Joan Didion (b.1934)

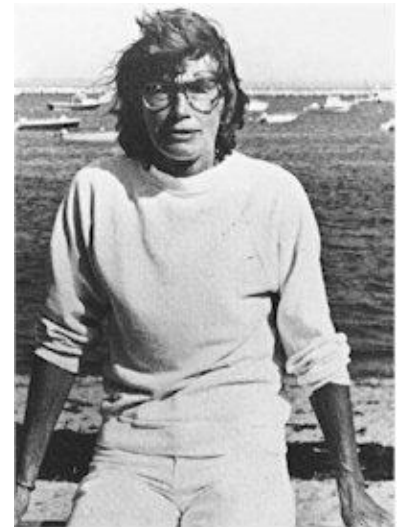
“We tell ourselves stories in order to live.”
—From Didion’s essay *The White Album* (1978)



Mary Oliver (b.1935)

The Summer Day

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean—
the one who has flung herself out of the grass, 5
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down—
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away. 10
I don’t know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day. 15
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn’t everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life? (1992)



Robinson Jeffers (1887-1962)

Hands

Inside a cave in a narrow canyon near Tassajara

The vault of rock is painted with hands,
A multitude of hands in the twilight, a cloud of
men's palms, no more,

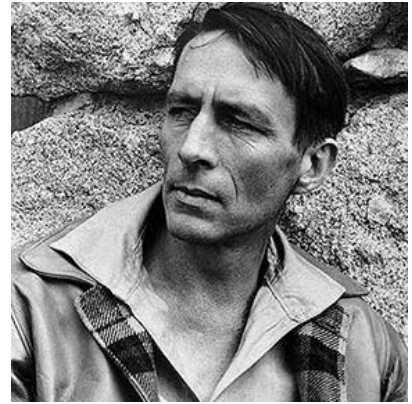
No other picture. There's no one to say
Whether the brown shy quiet people who are dead
intended

Religion or magic, or made their tracings
In the idleness of art; but over the division of years
these careful

Signs-manual are now like a sealed message
Saying: "Look: we also were human; we had hands, not
paws. All hail

You people with cleverer hands, our supplanters
In the beautiful country; enjoy her a season, her beauty,
and come down

And be supplanted; for you also are human."



(1929)

Joyce Carol Oates (b.1938)

"My belief is that art should not be comforting; for comfort, we have mass entertainment and one another. Art should provoke, disturb, arouse our emotions, expand our sympathies in directions we may not anticipate and may not even wish."

—From Oates' introduction to *The Best American Essays of the Century*

