



Poet Max Garland was inducted into the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters as a Fellow on April 6, 2018. On that occasion, he read poems, including *Hydrogen*. A former Poet Laureate of Wisconsin, Garland is currently Professor Emeritus at UW-Eau Claire, where he taught creative writing, literature, and composition for many years, and he is the current Writer-in-Residence for the city of Eau Claire.

Hydrogen

A balloon, a bomb, a drop of water.
The skin around the sun burning outward.
You are truly next to nothing,
and yet everywhere. So neighborly,
so eager to combine:
when oxygen decided to swim,
you only asked how far;
when tears needed a catalyst,
you solemnly stepped forth.
In every cell, plant, or animal,
it's just not the same without you.
It's not the same ocean or body;
it's not the rain or snow. And still,
such a vulnerable element:
just a proton huddled
under the wavering attentions
of a lone electron. A body com-
posed mainly of the distance
between you. A fragile marriage
which, if it ends, may end badly,
and your loss breed a loneliness so deep,
as tiny as you are, the whole world
withdraws in consolation.

— Max Garland

“Hydrogen” first appeared in Max Garland’s poetry collection, The Postal Confessions, University of Massachusetts Press, 1995.