

D.W. MERRIMAN

POEMS FROM MY TWENTIES

About This Collection

This is a collection of poetry I wrote and revised from 2005 to 2016. These poems have not been revised by a professional editor. There may be typos or grammatical errors. To share these poems I have decided to print a small batch of books and pass them along to friends. I may also share this collection online. Please enjoy.

“In this world we walk on the roof of hell, gazing at flowers.”

— Issa

THANK YOU

PART ONE

**OF TOUCHING SO MANY
THINGS AND HOLDING
NOTHING**

Poetry

Sometimes I find the entire thing stupid:
an art form with no color, sound, or weight,
the poem itself nothing more than a suggestion
of something to consider or imagine.

The sculpture covered with bird shit
in the garden where people drink wine
and give their appropriate, lingering looks
at least kneels on the grass, at least takes its space,
and no two hands can touch it differently.

Butts

Each bone-colored finger is pulled delicately
out of the pack like a ribbon. Palms
cupped in prayer keep the flame
from being flattened by wind.
I suck the quiet whinny of smoke
as, gamesomely, horse hooves stamp my lungs,
and the fire from the end of the cigarette
crawls towards me in servitude.

In the short grass, in the dirt,
each speckled, copper-colored,
once-screaming stump I litter
means absolutely nothing to me.

Kierkegaard's Coffee

Years after reading the biography on Søren Kierkegaard
by Joakim Garff

I only remember how he drank his coffee,
first heaping sugar to the top of the cup
then pouring it hot through the cracks
like lava cutting through a snowy pit.

He stirred the drink until it formed
a concentrated sludge
shot with one heroic gulp.

With curtains pulled over the windows,
in amber candlelight,
he reached for his journal,
a flimsy but adequate vessel
for the hunchback's immortality.

My memory of Søren is the imagination
of another man's imagination. Therefore,
it is a light laugh, like a dream
without significance, laughing about
something unimportant. Søren is dead.

Water as Mind

How pleasant it can be watching
the rhythmic slopping
of the sea!

Now snowbirds by the busload
plop their clammy butts on shell hash
for the pearl mystic turquoise
“televisionesque” waves to flutter
and make spittle at their feet. The expression is
a body of water. In Wallace Stevens:
a body wholly body. From bodig:
chest, trunk. I write: *The trunk of the water;*
cold and sapid with salt. Is this correct?

For a year I lived on the coast of Florida.
Best were the afternoons, walking the shoreline,
beginning my meditation practice.
I remember fondly the clomp and suck
of sand on my bare feet, then squatting,
my arms deep in its emerald throat,
for the ritual of encountering water.
The waning rain, the musk of salt,
the frill of sea foam piling and breaking —
Not a body, I write. *Not a body. Not a body.*

Brief Interviews with Idiots

Q: And what about the earth?

Nothing left but pulverized tree trunk,
silt, and worm shit. This bloated rock
decked to the nines in oil, in gold,
in afghan diamonds, is worth a hell of a
lot more pockmarked and on fire.
Just as we bite into the apple core
itself after finishing an apple
eventually we must puncture the crust
and suck the black blood straight
from the artery of the earth.

Q: And what about the war?

Suckered, scammed, filched,
fucked over, abandoned,
forgotten, another horse shit
platoon of half assed soldiers
way over its head drops dead.
Another. Another. The phrase
is "death toll," as if 25 cents
were chucked from the window of a car.
"The ultimate price." 400k per head
to the families. Pocket change,
a perfunctory toss. Just powerful men

trying to get where they're going.

Q: And what about the heart?

Schopenhauer

“People we do not love, we hurt and forget.
People we love, we hurt and do not forget.

“We hurt everyone. It is no consolation
everyone does this, and that, more mysteriously,

“out of suffering arises meaning.”
Her hands, after speaking,

climbed on top of each other, as if two cranes
made of folded paper attempted flight.

It was already evening. I had been listening
for several hours, holding those hands.

David Foster Wallace

Part of your art was obsessed with authenticity,
to give a correct, concise, unencumbered statement,
but the other part was interested only with orgasm,
being understandably in love with the sound of your voice.

Those breathless sentences! Those big, lovable, panting,
slobbering, doglike sentences. Silly and patient and kind.
Joycean without the difficulty or grandeur. Nabokovian
without the ridiculousness and refinement of luxury hotels.

God, David, you had a thoroughbred, and you knew it.
The public knew it. You demanded everything from that voice:
a fractal intelligence, a virtuoso's brinksmanship, and enough
anti-pretentiousness to pin a rocket down to earth.

I think you loved your own voice more than the world.
And understandably. The world's misery outweighs its pleasure.
Compare, as Schopenhauer said, the feelings of two animals,
one of which is eating the other. Preferable is the polished babble.

The elegance and earnestness and strength of your voice
is why they trotted out the hagiography:

Now the strange, sad man is dead and his voice remains!

Now we can worship this "David Foster Wallace" without irony!

When I thought about killing myself

it was my voice that demanded it. Like lightning, it arrived:
“I fucking hate myself. I’m going to kill myself.”
Who was giving the order? Which faction in me had declared war?

I was a prisoner, chained by the leg,
indecisive about sawing it off.
Jesus Christ, David. I did not know you.
I’m sorry about this. Again, this is a poem about me.

Joy

Joy not in being alive, because life is miserable.
Joy despite life, despite its routine dissatisfaction.
Joy which, somehow, would exist without us.

Joy the way an infant feels it, arriving from nothing,
being its own messenger and message,
decomposing eventually, without reason.

Having Children

Sometimes, like spotting a mistake in sleight of hand, the illusion is ruined. You have suddenly stopped loving them. This is normal. The question: *What if?* Do not worry.

None of the decade-old ambitions banging at your door will stay to change your life or collect their debts. They will stop by, take a few things, and leave.

It's sort of like after the funeral when your relatives show up to sift through the valuables in your grandmother's house with that particular kind of boredom and muted greed.

Two words could describe this, *burden* and *emptiness*, as if life were merely something to be filled, like a vase, with two or three beautiful things.

Less

Everything less than we had imagined
and less satisfying. Everything
briefer, lighter, less significant.
Pain, too, and disappointment
less. Everything less and least,
coming and leaving, happening once,
and therefore never happening at all.

Meditation

To be centered is nice.

To be quiet and aware and self-contained.

To be like a jar on the kitchen table
full of strawberry jam.

Peaceful without amusement.

Concentration without tension.

Like a suddenly-solid thing, like air becoming rock,
I quietly sit down on the ledge of the cliff

of myself, sitting down on the ledge of the cliff
of the ledge of the cliff of myself.

PRISM

I am not afraid. Government agents
have never threatened me. The streets
seem peaceful, even in New York,
and the weather has performed normally.
Propaganda is mild. Dissent roams free.
Food, shelter, money, these things remain,
and my phone calls have yet to return to me
in some threatening Kafkaesque document.

Instead I suffer conventionally. I hate myself,
but I am too cowardly to go to war
and declare that a part of me must die.
I have hated myself for so long
and with such a perfunctory spirit
I no longer notice it. Like the couple
that can't remember a time
when they didn't argue. So it continues.
A nation of perpetual squabbling.

How many members are elected
to the legislature of a human being?
Since its policies come and go so frequently,
I am beginning to question its national spirit.
David William Merriman. I have decided so little,
and yet there is still the same eternal arguing.
A bloodsport: human beings with each other,

human beings with themselves.

Leonard's Song

Leave me alone in my room
with the windows shut and the door shut.

I have been thinking about suicide all morning.
I have been sleeping with the peppermint wind
and the honey sun.

I drink when I wake. I walk to the beach.
The apotheosized sunset I missed sleeping.
Frilled with sea foam, waves rustle and shush,

barely embroiled, cold to my hands.

In my toes: shards of shell, flecks of nacre.
I'll finish my bottle here, next to the sea grass,
neighbor to private property, pissing

like a tired dog. A child's garrulous smirk,
a rapist's leer. I totter home. I am drunk,
drunk, drunk. Trees bow to me.

The Revolutionary

It was only a matter of time before he was murdered.
The method befit a revolutionary: gagged
and shot in the back of the head. Seven hundred roses
were laid upon his grave. For the first time,
he wanted nothing, resisted nothing.

They remembered his unshakable courage, but honestly,
it was nothing more than a brute's morals
and the persistence of a zealot.
In his diaries he wrote of raping women.
They would use this against him, historians,

to paint a "complicated picture," sell new books.
But now, look. Beside his statue, saluting in the garden,
the homeless man drinks his Coca-Cola. The birds are talking.
The miracle of life is boring, as always.
Maybe someone, somewhere, attempts pity and kindness.

Conditions

When a lion escapes into the city and dies from gunfire,
when a martyr's worshipped bones are sold at Sotheby's,
when blindness becomes preferred in the hideous metropolis,
when a sow in the abattoir gains, for a single moment,
accidental human consciousness,
when a prison is filled with the songs of our childhood,
when the young couple making love concludes that life is meaningless,
when legal tender is hurled like trash into the street,
and when poetry becomes popular again, I will return to you.

In the Parliament of You

You have style, sweetheart, but take off your clothes in solitude and think of God. What in you knows how to be small, what has the secret importance of a star? Discovering your humanity would be like stepping into the bonfire.

Even just the tail end of honesty would carpet bomb the cleverly arranged metropolis. I am trying to survey what you are fully. I can't even see your buildings, only washed colors and smog, from an airplane slowing down to land. This might be a metaphor for both physical and emotional distance.

I ask you questions, and you become the questions, like you are damp sand and I am the ocean, like I have only been granted access to the perimeter, the demilitarized zone, and I am not allowed pictures, questions, opinions, sudden movements.

I hope to god there is a revolution in you, that the walls you built are tagged, climbed, bulldozed, that some politician's speech announces your demolition and dissolution.

You are now several countries. I think I am in love with one of them, the serious one, with an immaculate train schedule and clean streets, with abstract sculptures guarding the public gardens like scarecrows against the stupid. Just the way you design something. Like you paint something.

Like you arrange your room. Like you meticulously
think of how it should be done. Like your fingers,
how they kiss the thing you are making.
I think I am in love with that. I think in the parliament
of you I am not only voting, I am shouting.

Pillow

Kiss me, kiss me, kiss me,
stuff your fist inside me,
and wring my soft stomach.

When your body's having fits
take your drunk drooling mouth
and plant in into me, grind into me,

fill my dirty cover with your hair
and lips and yawning chin. That jaw.
That neck. That hair and breath.

Oh, if only I could own a body
instead of merely forming into one!

Heaven

The popular conception of heaven is unpopular among theologians. You know, everyone has wings, and for all of eternity we're perfectly happy chatting in the clouds with our relatives. Everyone must wear sandals, and when we deign to stand it is always on impeccable marble flooring or the glass bottom terrace crowded with the nostalgic.

God had one simple idea: dig up His most loyal, patch their limbs together with holy magic, and haul 'em up in bulk. When they arrive, make them stand and wait outside. A queue at the door. Let the more democratic devil take the rejects in his public pool. I imagine getting inside heaven has the same sort of elation and disappointment as a bottle club at 11pm. Congratulations. You've made it. It's mostly empty.

Sex with a Depressed Person

If I had to say in the shortest
most transparent
most honest way
how it is with you
how your body acts
how I presume you are thinking
in the wordless rapport
of the early movements
after dinner and drinks
and clumsy banter
with my hands in yours
and your words on my neck
and the sighing movement
like a tree branch
no longer buoyed by wind
making its small, exhausted
move, collapsing to the bed,
it would be: *Oh well.*

Oh well, he is taking me here.

He is doing this to me again.

The way a child puts her head
on the car seat with her mother driving
when her mind begins to wander.

Oh well, I will let my body go.

I will be carried up the mountain.

Teenager's Mistake

He was in bed with her. He was a fish
tapping his head against a glass tank.
Always the same translucent boundary
would reveal to him and forbid him
from what he desired most: her body.

Call it a concession to his sadness
how still she laid there, pushing his head
away, pushing his hand away, eventually
turning off the lights,
conceding to bivouac by his side, blanketless,
wanting him gone by morning.

When she woke, the sun,
glowing like a liver in hospital light,
stood in her mauve curtains
like a screaming stone, like her old drunk uncle,
as if her twelve-year-old sister, arms akimbo,
were chanting *morning! morning! morning!*

The Violent Thing

The violent thing forgets it is violent.
It comes to the village begging for bread.
None of us forget. None of us forget.

The sunrise purples buildings. White terror
hides in the architecture here. The violent thing
sleeps and sniffs and snorts. Oh boy.

Some talk of killing it, but it's only chatter.
Some dream of sleeping with it steal its soul.
The wise men, the wise women, treat it like the trees.

Girlfriend

I love you, but you steal from me.
You take my kisses, which I freely offer,
but also my footprints, my morning coffee,
the sunlight which should have warmed my bed.
The thoughts I have, the color of my sentences
somehow you've trespassed on. I breathe,
and I wonder where you are breathing.
You touch my face, and I wonder
why my heart rises up at once like a classroom hand,
like dog to treat, like sucker to scam.
Oh, have everything. Oh, even filch my name.
Staple it to your first one. Parade it around town.
Sleep in my condo. Swim in my bedsheets.
You, so comfortable below the rind,
treating my secrets like a grab bag,
holding my cock like a house key.
Sheepishly I have caught you often
laying my life out on the coffee table
in elaborate blueprints, plans, and deeds.
Paperwork. An architect. A lawyer.
What have I signed? What is being
repossessed? What about me now
is on loan and contract? Honey?

Monster

1.

I don't have any friends, 'cept these new ones.
There's not a woman I love, 'cept this new one.
Why would *they* last any longer? I'll leave them all the same.
Or they'll leave me. They'll resent me, eventually.
For not being like them, for not giving them what they want.
One of us will give up eventually. Nothing human lasts.
Our bondage to other people is like snowbroth on a driveway.

2.

Hurting other people, I have become a monster.
Every evil thing I touch now clasps my hand knowingly.
Too cowardly now to resist all yearning. Come, gluttony.
Come, greed and laziness. Come, drunkenness and theft.
Here I am. You may abduct me freely. I will be waiting here
with my gut out, with my bags of ordered food,
with lice in my hair and god knows how much money,
as I continue, wordlessly, destroying my life.

Dignity and Shame

My shame is on the ground. My shame is waiting for its beating
like a battered dog, like a drunk's dumb kid.

Half-starved, knees on the prison floor, recalcitrant and stern,
something which could be called dignity is holding it closely.

Sticking its neck out for it, so to speak. Offering to take the blows.

I beat and I beat and I beat my own dignity, like a soldier
who shoots blindly into a crowd, ecstatic with the fear of death.

What is left when I cease my own violence, out of exhaustion?

Of Touching So Many Things and Holding Nothing

Memory is the alcoholic gambler forgetting what he has won or lost,
Hands in the garbage heap, hunting for evidence.
And what of the things he finds? Nothing, nothing worth keeping.
Life's extraordinary emptiness comes from the mania of never-keeping,
Of touching so many things and holding nothing.
Even my most beloved year, the year I was in love,
Like a stray dog that comes only to eat, does not trust me, will not see me.
And the bad years — uninvited, they too come and go.
I am more the comings and goings of a public space than I am a person.
I am more the collection of whims than the constitution of a man.

Mitchell's Song

The town is closed, the teenagers are asleep.
Even the wind has given up, and the sun
Slumbers somewhere.

I am home with my computers, unhappy with my life.
I have lived it carefully. I have been the candleholder,
Never the candle.

PART TWO:

**ANYTHING CAN BE SAFELY
KNOWN AND NOTHING WILL
OVERWHELM US**

Junkie

“All of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair.”

– Sol LeWitt

1.

Purge the world of bourgeois sickness, and neatly queue
the next bold snort, the bronzed crud
scraped from the huaraches of angels,
enough to pale me periwinkle blue.

My passe-partouts: ecgonine, Popov.
In slum liveries, in half-sleep madness,
I lie in Emin’s bed, giggling.

On my nightstand: an oak tree glass of water,
“readymades” of heroin, a portrait of Iris Clert.

Ceci n’est pas une pipe; ceci n’est pas cocaïne.

What I had once muzzled is now roaring!

What I had once feared now fears my glory.

Certain: international fame! Certain: the cessation of all error!

I say, “This is art,” or “This is philistinism,” and it is so.

I point, I declare, I “do” “nothing,” and I am done!

In a crack decuman, in the marsh of a yellow bathroom,

I sit on the pot — rose madder red fingertips, pipe in hand,
heartbeat like a sparrow’s — not yet believing

my decision and will will lose their perfect accordance.

2.

Just the baggie of eale drams, please. All humdrum doldrums,
dolors, and cholers blasted in a nostril ope.

The walnut-sized lump in my arm, ruddy Scottish smack
kindly cut with fentanyl, could kill a man.

I am in love with it, I am mad for it to be in contact with me.

My kingdom of pinchbeck riches — crushed Tylenol,
Molly crumbled in a meth pipe — the stupidest paths to moksha
seem to me decent and humane.

Look at my arms, my bruised legs. Survey this pale plot.

Each protuberance proves a proffer, each young royal vein
is so vine-ripened - as one would pluck a fruit

I jam the needle in. Jug jug jug jug jug,

So rudely forc'd! Grab a spoon! (Ono has three or four).

3.

This is the part of the poem befitting an artist's statement.

My aim is deliberately ridiculous and ontologically violent.

I have written a manifesto on this very subject

and, in proper fashion, a manifesto in exclamatory disgust
against both my original manifesto and the manifesto

I am currently writing, which states quite precisely:

"Vertigo from proximity, as if two magnetic poles
collapsed into one another, should be the aim of all literature."

In this spirit, I present you a working script of my latest play:

4.

Setting: A crack hovel. Work by Manzoni on the floor,
human or dog. Audible from the adjoining room:

a reenactment of Fraser's Untitled. One and three chairs.
Lighting à la Martin Creed. Characters: Low-socioeconomic
bottom-feeding drug donkeys and welfare queens.
Nota bene: The script does not exist until a complaint
is written against the imagined content of the script.
The complaint itself will then become the content of the script.

5.

Next piece: The Broken Gourd of Urge.

Pipe on lip, having flarfed in the sheets,
bare-assed with the window open, I hobble out of bed,
begging for a suck. Butane is perfect.

A yellowed baggie fished from a toilet bowl.

A pen, a freezer bag, Freon gas.

S=U=C=K, S=U=C=K, S=U=C=K.

On the brink, on the brim, on the cusp -
and then the headache, and then all hell.

Ambition

My ambition, my slave,
Have you revolted against me?
Are you squeezing my neck
With your workman hands?
Are you so ready to plant your boots
In my mouth? May I inhale your orders?

Whatever you are using to threaten me,
It is fine, bring it closer.
I am an empty runway
For your warplanes.
Any resistance you are free to slaughter.

Solitaire

I do not like sharing consciousness with other people,
having their memories inside me and mine in them.
It reminds me of my childhood, many nights half-sleeping,
when hours of dreaming and waking confused the two.

The falling rain, humiliated by the ground,
must continue its incessant falling. Nothing can be alone.
Even my dreams are populated with other people.
My thoughts are the thoughts of others, and my mood

is so easily bullied by other moods. How am I anything
more than communal, common, disposable?
Another piece of debris floating down the river,
property of everyone, made by everybody.

I don't believe I have one single thing to myself.
Not a human body. Not even my consciousness.
Stupid reader, am I anything more than the excess of *you*?
What could I *possibly be* that didn't depend on *you*?

And *who are you*, exactly? How is your existence any different?
Walking around in your mind, I find absolutely nothing new.
What was unique in me has been lost into you,
and what you are, I am unfortunately becoming.

The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln

It was an ecstasy of confusion. He had been shot.
Like the life of a flower in time-lapse photography
his final thought ruminated, then closed.
No one could know with what discord or grandeur
from the slumping body that thought was greeted.

Crammed in the penult, in the palm
at the end of the mind, the lank body,
cleaved of its cleverness, now in the simpler grit
of repose, shushed and dropped
como un zapato sin pie, como un traje sin hombre.

They hurried him out, more gross than regal,
under the caving awnings of merriment.
Then - screaming. Then - mayhem.
Already the minutes were swelling to decades.

What nostalgia for life the dying have.
They are the only ones who are certain
that life was lived and not imagined.

Metaphors Do Not Exist

The couple arguing is exactly the same
as the sculptor massaging his hands with careful violence,
as the wind bending the branch but not the trunk.

The lover's promise is exactly the same
as the initiative to increase shareholder confidence,
as the development of cities, ideologies, and gods.

The child at her deathbed is exactly the same
as the mathematician gazing at a single number,
as a word repeated until its meaning is forgotten.

Time

I am not a statue. You are not a statue.
We are the slow wind, stopping, beginning.
Where are my stone fingers? What remains?

Fuck me into permanent existence
but then let me uproot myself
and unbundle into dirt and sand.

I am the tree roots to shake off and cram
in the jumbo plastic garbage bag,
you the prayer sent to God skimming the sky.

I am the bottle rocket blast off
that didn't work. Pick me up
and put me back in the box with my instructions.

Men and Women

Few men, pursuing a woman, would confess so directly:

“I think I may be in love with you, but I love quickly and often.
I am worried it is only my desire for sex, and that I promise
Only for the pleasure of promising, and that
I think of not only you but also every woman I have ever loved,
And that my obsession for you comes from my obsession for fucking,
And my obsession, equally strong, for finding a second mother.”

And few women, holding a man in bed, would confess:

“I think I may be in love with you, but I know love is often confused
With the giddiness of possessing something. What you mean for my life,
What you might provide me, can in my imagination be so intoxicating
I lose any notion of who you are! For even now, holding you,
With your warm body and the pleasure of your promises,
I know clearly how much I would hate you if you left me.”

Musings in Couplets

1.

The realization that the realization
is enough, will sustain, will encourage,

is not enough, does not sustain,
will not encourage.

2.

Where better to hide the meaning of life
than in suffering, where no one wishes to look?

3.

I have heard people wonder about God's silence.
"If He's anything like us, He'll come out and speak."

But humans suffer quite profoundly, and therefore God,
most profound of all, must have it even worse.

If He is anything like us, then, he's ignoring this problem.
He is trying to forgive himself and forget all about it.

A cold, vast universe, teeming rarely.
An anxious, tortured Lord, too afraid to look.

4.

How often, like lumber waiting to be split open,

I wait, paralyzed, for my cowardice to end.

5.

What is it to hate? It is to demand distance.

And what is it to love? It is to demand closeness.

Demanding this, demanding that.

It is no wonder we are never satisfied,

why we give away whatever we get,

and want desperately what we have given away.

Nicole

I remember being in love with her.

In the afternoons I would stay in bed
and imagine my death. And in the evenings,
in Phoenix, the oldest seed,
the most basic disgust, which is the disgust
of one's self, bud of suicide,

would roll in the empty bowl of myself,
in the color and fold of dreaming.

And in the mornings, spectacular happiness
finding her there, as if a hallucination,
and the smell of her opening mouth,
even if I were alone, greeted by no one.

One-Night Stand

I want you the way a dog
clamors, scrapes his paws,
to be let outside in the storm
to piss. Then running back
inside, shaking.

Suicide

1.

You who have considered it, know
that I too have considered it.

Now it is like wet coal
concealed in my palm,
damp, without potential.

I too had those dreams
of holding myself right up
to the ledge of myself.

How could I have considered
that what I was doing to myself
I was doing to everyone

and that by killing myself
I would have killed everyone?

2.

That pain. Sometimes I wonder
instead of hiding it
and worshipping it in secret

or trying to dismantle it
and silence the alarm

what good would've come
were we to have approached it quietly,

like hunters who have changed their minds,
and merely listened.

Bird

Bird, visiting me on my unlatched window,
if you were to sit on my blankets, I would not
shake you out with a broom. I am rarely happy,
and your arrival, I think, was the coronation
of mood. Outside, wisps of trash
find courage from the wind, then collapse.
Everywhere, effort appears titanic.
Tesla was in love with a pigeon, but I simply admire
your basic mobility. Come here, bird.
Be my body. I want to be very small,
small-brained, my home in the largest sky.

Sausage

I want to know how many pigs and which parts of which,
what they were allowed to eat, how long they lived and where,
how machines disassembled and packaged their once separate bodies
into such neat, uniform tubes. I want to know about the casing,
if it is made from intestine, collagen, plastic, or cellulose,
about how much liquid is drained and how much would drip from the tube
were I to cut it open and touch it. More curious how it would be
eating it raw, chewing it the way it comes, unafraid.

Unwilling to cook the body and forget what it once was.

Unwilling to do as we do with deceased family,
shipping them to the crematorium or hiding them under stones.

Strange how that brings closure to us: never again seeing the body!

How that simple equation solves the problem of death. No body, no dead.

Out of politeness, I have omitted going on about this in public.

This is not the only poem which makes impolite conversation.

Poetry, in so many ways, attempts to move the reluctant mind

not to any point or conclusion but to a realm of new thinking,

where anything can be safely known and nothing will overwhelm us.

I want to know which was the first pig to die and how they lead him in,

if he was in a frenzy, bucking away from the captive bolt pistol

familiar with torture, or if, and this is perhaps more poignant,

he was simply happy to leave. To leave a place where one

has been kept for life! To leave Hell, to be ushered out.

Our sense of privacy and comfort come from animal instincts

to maintain boundaries, to avoid pain. It is why pain is indescribable,

how it decapitates language, and what disturbs us
about the unspeaking animal world. And so, only numbers -
the opaque, firmly mollifying, dreamlike fortress of numbers.
45-50% food, 15% waste, 40-45 % byproduct. 100,000,000 per year.
45-50% food, 15% waste, 40-45 % byproduct. 100,000,000 per year.

Murphy

My old friend had dirty hair
kneaded with petting. Unbearable
heaving him up by leg and paw
to drop him scampering in a tub
tousled with cold suds.

I can remember his frazzled yelp,
how he leapt paws up on the window
at the scent of us in our cars.

His one yellowed tooth. His drool, pant,
poop, and slobber. Whimper, scrape, and growl.

Far superior to the faded photograph
of my memory (the dog is dead)

I recall the warmth of his friendship
still against my feet at night,
my feet as satisfied as standing
on a mountain peak.

Reading

Reading is such an ugly activity.
Look at how your eyes move across the poem
like a car that can't leap out of the mud.
Hello! Hello! Hello!
Pull your head up! Wake up! Stop reading!

David William Merriman must vanish.
A faint impression will remain, inaccurate.
Who I truly am, you will never discover.

PART THREE

THE ADMIRER PLACE

Parasite

Begin swallowing me, piece by piece, as if I were the fruit in Hell.
I want nothing more than to be closer to you than all other things.
I want nothing more than to cross the gulf towards your shipyard body.

In your most secret location my home has been calling out to me incessantly
Like a bell drunk with its own ringing. In your most secret location
I will fall asleep, you will feel my feet inside of you, and I will eat you.

Musings in Triplets

1.

A homeless man eating trash
with the perfunctory movement
of woman flossing.

2.

For Schopenhauer
men of genius were like smudged mirrors
on the backs of slaves.

3.

Sure, it is admirable to have depth.
I say, it is just as admirable to be *wide*.
Wide and deep, like a canyon.

4.

In the garden of human senses
the animals find themselves
unable to speak.

5.

Not a single thing is false!
The deepest truth of the universe.
Everything is true.

6.

Those who believe that love is a descent,
like climbing down the mountain, returning home,
are closer to their happiness.

Approaching a Beautiful Woman

An alpha from the other tribe
would kill a monkey creature
like you for such transgressions.
That's your brain's best guess. Wrong,
of course; she simply pretends to ignore
the salesman-esque way you've thrust
yourself into her conversation
and reverts to the kind of courtesy,
absent-minded, she learned as a child.
She would even enjoy it, she guesses,
in other circumstances. But for you
this is the final hour; the body
you were given is burning, burning
with lightness. You feel as if on top
of the pyramid, hands on the sacrifice,
chanting incoherently, the crowd
beating against you more loudly
than the Teotihuacan sun. Oh god.
Oh god. Dance through the coals.
Tiptoe across the water. Oh god.
Oh god. Oh god. Oh god. You leave.

Technology

The sound from the aircraft
reminded no one on the runway
of the transience of life,
no one of grief's ripening.

Bring Me All of the Subtle Things

Bring me all of the subtle things.

I want to talk about the things
you don't want to talk about.

I want to think about the things
you don't want to think about.

Not because they're offensive,
(it's thrilling to be offended)

but because they are subtle,
hard to describe. Bring me all
subtle things. Things so furtive
they must be called things.

Things too tiny for words;
words knock them about.

The uncertainty principle
of the small: everything
that hides from us
seeks our discovery.

Companion

My companion, in the prayer of our friendship
I forget my desires, which are like beggars.

My soul becomes like an oak
allowed to drink both water and honey.

But when I hate myself,
when I am like a thing to be cleaved,
I hate you more than anyone.

The Disorientation of Mind Alone

I want my mind to quiet and my body to begin speaking.
It has been so long the other way around.

The child emperor must order his one hundred thousand men.
The horse must learn the monotony of the whip.
And I too must go by carrot and stick,
myself holding the carrot, myself holding the stick.

Now believing the kenneled dog under a kitchen table
and the pig prodded from cage to truck,
I grasp at nothing but what could be myself
in the disorientation of mind alone.

Insomnia

You ask me what I do instead of sleep.
I have reified each of my feelings cautiously,
with the labor of an earlier time,
like building a home out of wood
or paddling down the river with goods to trade.
I have shoved my hands into my self-disgust
like yanking cold ham from a garbage disposal;
chewed ravenously round the bone of my pride,
rotten or clean, for whatever would sustain me;
touched, with a weird curiosity, my wincing feet
on the brambles of old embarrassments.
I have sucked the pink wind of earlier happiness
and shook the bag of stars of my accomplishments.
For only a moment, I palmed the heart of shame,
gnarled and meaningless as it was, shell of something old.
Of all things, it alone taught me nothing.

Consolation

When I am alone, there is
the fruit of grief, uneaten.

Come. Hold up my hands
and kiss my happy fingers,

kiss my eyelids, my breathing neck,
the single color of my bright voice

— kiss it, kiss it! Kiss the air,
kiss my elbows and ears and teeth,

kiss the blankets around us and
kiss my emotion, which does not know itself,

but rages, pleads, bubbles, soars.
Pat the puttering puppy dog

and kiss it goodnight.
I will become a man one day.

The Young, Talented Poet

The young, talented poet, exhilarated that words can signify solid matter,
writes of birds, canopies, ancient cities, men and women in love.

Shrewd as a child, he shows these poems to friends and acquaintances.
He scrutinizes their breathing, eager for any subtle response,

hoping that what he has written will possess them, the way we are possessed
by the feeling of discovery, the connection of two ideas, an unfinished dream ...

“Yes it is good, yes we love it,” they all say, as if the poet’s trees
were really trees, the rivers really rivers, the sunlight really sunlight.

Falling Asleep / Waking Up

1.

My body, reminded of its royalty,
on the mattress at last, on the pillow
at last, the day's last thoughts
like leaves in a waning gale,
falling randomly into the quiet.

Happy to be awake and here
on the bed, hollowed with peace.
Oh, how tightly I held the day,
like a child's hand in the moving crowd,
and how pleasant it is letting go!

Let me be like a rock dropped in the river,
without sound, touch, smell, or vision,
sinking into moving color.

Let me be like a stone in the heath,
so quiet I forget myself,
so still the world has forgotten me.

2.

Brusque uninvited sunlight bullies its way
into the bedroom and the alarm clock app
on your phone inspires you to murder
and the dreamworld conversation you were

captured in dissolves like a pill in water.

Gratitude

If my gratitude could grow — o,
if there were the space for it (which there is),

and if it would continue growing (which it
would), would the invisible God

be real? (Yes.)

Unrequited Love

Without expectation, I expect something.
The lake begins to ripple, unaware
if deer will stoop to drink from it.

So too have I started loving you
in obdurate silence, without purpose,
as a mockingbird will build its nest
for dead eggs.

You

Hello, you. Only you
could be considered you.

You conquered the pronoun
without objection

like a flower conquering
its tiny pot

and by touching me
the way you do

you have encroached
on me, I, us, we.

Confession

I think the money made me lazy
and the food made me fat
and the drugs made me tired and stupid.

Only when I am alone, in kind weather,
sipping hot coffee and thinking freely,
do I feel quiet and fortified,

do I feel as if the world owes me nothing,
like a sheet of paper — clean, white,
waiting for my signature.

Apology

I'm sorry. There aren't many words left.
I will speak simply. You can pretend
This isn't poetry. Better to say: economy.
Better to say: words arranged lovingly.

I know your attention is like a held-open door,
An uneasy finger on the elevator's button.
I know with reading comes always
The discomfort of reading,

The desire to skim, glance, shut.
Still, thank you for being here.
Thank you for admiring the architecture.
You can keep it. All of it. Everything is yours.

Doing

Now each hour must be occupied with doing
and the succession of hours must be the succession of things accomplished
and each vertebrate day must have the courage to stand up and walk.
Too long have I labored over counting my things and past doings.
Too long have I waited for the opportune and the fortuitous.
I will put to motion the imperfect impulse of the present moment.
I will gather my retractions and prepare them for declaration.
Intoxicated with new privacy, I will put my obscurities and secrets to the fire.
The burden of always moving, the abandonment of self-reflection,
I will accept as necessary for the unceasing action that will cure everything.
My mistakes, once precious jewels guarded jealously, I will leave behind
the way generous summer rain flattens the rocky bottom of a lake,
hiding plastic bottles, bulrush roots; to leave a single, clean,
shallow-looking thing.

Anxiety

Like coal polluting the air to power a city
What makes me anxious gives me energy,
Most of which I use against myself
In an attempt to preserve the system, recycling
Hatred for myself into new anxiety,

The rest of it, somehow, must power everything else.
Life is hard work. To be alive is difficult.
To die is difficult. Friendship, love —
Even happiness, undisturbed happiness —
Eventually just leads to toil, the way rivers

Find themselves eventually drawn to the oceans.
Everything we are given, we fear losing,
And what we do not have, we believe will save us.
We all share this. It must be as human as our smell,
How animals sniff us and know what we are.

The Prodigal Son

Like an old man himself, he longs
to return to yesterday's thinking,
to parse once more his gingered past:
women, food, the pleasures of wealth.

But the money is gone. He must beg for more
and in begging promise a new life:
servitude, hard work, perseverance, loyalty.

He expects this resolution to be shallow, passing,
like the russet tint of certain rivers, like convenience
and inconvenience. *No matter what, the old man will feed me.*

The Admired Place

1.

We say, without thinking, it's like a visitation
the way she arrives, often unexpectedly,
a friend you're openly in love with,
and demands an audience.

Sometimes she can't pay attention
or mumbles half-heartedly
until, gripped with mania,
she offers such elaborate plans
fervent note-taking captures nothing.

Nabokov considered her a galley slave,
but for most of us, the Muse is capricious, harebrained,
furtive, genius, mysterious beyond mystery,
worthy of her own novel, worthy of songs and feasts.

Today I will lay down my words to worship her:
my imagination, my very magic.

I will name her Miranda. From mirandus: the admired place.

As she is not a human being but a territory
within myself (or perhaps, in the older meaning,
and using the older thinking, she is the genius
of my imagination) I must also imagine her body:
pudgy, squat, wracked and brown from the sun,
with some freckles as big as rose petals,
her wrinkled autumn sundress, and her unashamed movements
which limn her more than any adjective:

bold, boisterous, boyish, clasping, clomping.
Without this effort, she is only the vapors of color,
like below-brown, below-gray, under-green,
or the guttural rolling whisper below words,
which we think of as her soul humming
or the inaudible sounds of the body.

It is like dragging an anchor out of the ocean
bringing her into consciousness this way.

It must have been how fishermen's wives
waited for their ship at shore
and, with earnestness and futility,
pretended to see through the fog.

2.

What is the shortest distance to another person?
I used to think it was making love, being inside someone,
or holding them and chanting, in tribal ritual, I love you.
But the lovers discover nothing, only a shared myth,
a religion without a holy book, with stern and silly doctrines,
its own customs and quirks and lies and wars. No.
To know someone truly, friendship is required.
Becoming comfortable, losing the spark, etc.
But there are biases to friendship: the problems of allegiance,
of belonging to a team joined against adversaries.
Your family is more objective; your father and mother
wiped shit from you ass, bailed you out of jail,
saw you torture your sister once,
and because they judge us fairly,
we hide from them our newer failures.

No one must know the truth.

The shortest distance to another person, then, is subtle.
The passing moment from family to friendship,
from lovers to friends, from friends to family.
A silent arch of movement. A door left briefly open.

3.

Pages and pages and pages and pages of garbage.
Her whim is aggressive. She is tardy and inconsiderate.
About as bad as I am. Often I find myself
changing her ideas, editing for clarity, disagreeing violently.
Were she to exist we would not be friends.
Let other poets worship their muse, I find mine
half-baked, harebrained, cloudy-headed.
I ask her for a story, and she tells me nothing.
Nothing that would make sense. She has depth
but cannot articulate it. I study her, and become bored.
She speaks, and I do not listen. Long ago I stopped listening.

4.

As if pantomiming behind an arras, she crawls atop him,
his heart beating like a dog's heart.
*I am trying to paint a scene. I am trying to give her
agency and body and desire and conflict and purpose.*
And, indeed, squatting like a dog, she drops her cunt
into his mustache, both to placate and disgust herself.
When she first comes, it is strangely quiet,
like the sound of a mountain, or the implication of a pause.
Could I end my story that way? End it with orgasm?

The dim purr of a patient motorcycle, parked street side.
The inconsiderate grunting of the air-conditioner.
The touch of a warm breeze slapping branch to window.
Miranda! I am watching you all the more closely.
I see you without shame, in the throne of your decision,
sitting atop your childhood like a lighthouse on a hill.
His flat tongue and the weird unease of her dominance
are like one color, both darkening and brightening.
Until finally, screaming. She does not believe, as did Rilke,
what is private in us can scar or amend the universe.

To a Child

Now, be quiet. Take a look.
Deep in the sky.

There is dark gentle heart
nobody can see.

There is a boatman in the ocean
wishing to be home.

There will be roses in your memories
the older you are, the sadder you become.

That is All

And what is worst of all: love was nothing as I expected.
There is hatred, too, and violence there.
Even in my family it was there, and somewhere,
more mysteriously, in my friendships. I found hatred everywhere
and could not destroy it. Not to mention
my own limitations were beyond what I had expected.
To achieve my dreams, I thought I needed to surmount the world.
How could I have known I needed to surmount myself?
Within myself I found a government at war.
Memory and forgetting, incomprehension, confusion, loss,
the question of identity, the duplicity of a single person,
and most of all, how we hurt the people we love,
how we must hurt them, that is all I wish to write about. That is all.

Goodbye

Today I throw away all of my poetry.
It is too personal. No one likes it.
Not the way we enjoy sex
or taking a small boat out into the ocean.
A poem's pleasure is too small.
So, like a collection of small things,
old matchbooks, used pencils,
I will throw away and forget my poetry.

There. It is done. I don't think I'll miss it.