

How to Write a Love Poem After Love

Begin with poetry so you can end  
with abandon.

Be tired as slow sips. Sink  
with daylight, wounded as an old love seat.

Be content with naked walls.  
In their light beige, recite absence by heart.

Search cold places for food, but do not wash your hands of hunger.  
Roll words around your mouth until they are ripe for swallowing.

Do not breathe if you will miss them.  
Wet beads will kiss your lip like a fumbling child. Taste the salt you sacrifice.

Believe a woman who lies on pillows  
will whip her dying out from under you. Black to white: the rhythm of leaving.

Turn away from words that dress themselves in sound. When she breaks into smile  
disguise lyrics in dead noise, her breath in the plateau of your palm.

When your poem is a burning wick, every breath is a storm. Blaze until the last line drips  
onto your tongue. Until every word is the lash of a sleeping branch and she wakes to fury.

Remember, they are not your words, so write them  
with abandon.

The Peacock Room

The artist James Whistler created The Peacock Room in 1876 in the dining room of Frederick Leyland — a close friend at the time and a patron of the arts. Leyland asked Whistler to renovate the room in his English summer home in such a way that would complement Leyland's collection of Asian pottery. However, when Leyland returned from the United States to see Whistler's work, he was taken aback by what he considered to be an excessively extravagant work of art. An unpleasant correspondence followed that resulted in Whistler receiving less money than he thought he was entitled to, and which ultimately transformed their friendship into a bitter and mutual antagonism. The following are based off of the correspondence between Leyland and Whistler, as well as the artwork by Darren Waterston called Filthy Lucre that reimagines The Peacock Room as an expression of Whistler's contempt of Leyland.

Leyland to Whistler:

*If after this intimation I find you in her society again, I will publicly horsewhip you.*  
— Frederick Leyland to James Whistler

You remind me that friendship  
is always a letter away  
from slaughter  
on a dining room wall.  
Two gold peacocks  
unravelling each other's insides  
over who is more brilliant.

We agreed upon money  
but you wanted art  
to settle. Yours is the tired green  
of sunken earth,  
your anger is gold  
and gold is its own light.  
Take a hammer  
to the mantle, if a hammer is delicate  
enough. Splash gold paint over the struts  
and be peaceful until it petrifies.  
Make those vases curl and crumble,  
bleed and survive  
your anger, like I had to.

You are like a woman abandoned  
by everything but beauty. A peahen  
wild for turquoise.

The ceiling is superfluous.  
Japanese lanterns say *look*  
*at my blushing paper moonlight.*  
In fact, they sound a lot like you, Whistler.  
Your white plumage has  
never broken a heart other  
than your own. Without lustre,  
I wonder how you will face  
your shattered subjects.

My wife is not a nocturne on the Thames  
mourning your candlelight touch  
and my dining room will never save you  
from *that* kind of hunger. Money wants nothing to do  
with grace, only to paint the green feathers  
gold and pluck one for its Panama hat.

A peacock knows when the world  
is ready to fall for his feathers,  
but sometimes art needs weakness.  
Sometimes he falls first.

Whistler to Leyland:

*Whom the Gods intend to be ridiculous, they furnish with a frill!*

— James Whistler to Frederick Leyland

You see, Frederick, painting is so  
much like accepting. My gift came  
of itself in the evening. I watched it  
pause like lips parted by pleasure  
and approach. When it told me  
it was alone, I did not understand.  
Show me, I said.  
So your wife took my hand,  
stroked the canvas bare  
and stripped the gold from our fingers.

What I Want

A single cloud of smoke out the window  
makes the neighbors wonder  
how many blows it took  
to make her conscious  
or him whole  
again.

If you're gonna break it, she said,  
break it hard.

She never told me to take  
what I wanted  
until I did.

Swollen with hunger, we cried  
like potted violets  
left out to dry,  
reached our fingers  
like potted violets  
standing in their graves.

It's no accident  
that a sigh sometimes trips  
over the throat to become  
a moan. And unlike smoke and violets  
I desire to be broken. Desire  
can wait between your fingers  
like a petal  
can wait to whisper  
its purple lie to your skin.

You blow smoke  
out our window.

You drag the last of me  
through your lips.