

Poets and Poems

Most Nights I Stay Up

Most nights I stay up and daydream
about things I should do, write, be.
I don't sleep. Not because
my wife is snoring like a panda bear
or my baby wakes like clockwork
crying with desire to be fed. No,
my wife rolls over in the mess of blankets
and dutifully plugs my daughters mouth
before they both fall to slumber once again.

No, I hear the rumblings of my unsatisfied mind
crying out to be fed by chasing progress.
I crave success for a competitive spirit.
The machinations I devise to carry out
the building of my empire are simple.
They are not above my ability to carry out,
and yet they are undone by morning birds
the grey light of dawn that underwhelms,
yet promises to keep me occupied with other things.

I leave myself unsated and hungry
as I scurry about my day,
depositing plans and ideas
in the archives of forgetfulness.
They will be reopened the next night,
the hunger coming back, calling, crying,
waiting to be fed.

Eulogy

Today I mourn forgotten poems
that still linger as regret.
That night I thought alone
while my wife and child slept,
and unwittingly composed
as I tried to join their slumber.
The fertile moments there
quickly blossomed into lines
I knew I must remember.
But I lay there trapped,
unwilling to disturb
my family's dreams and reverie.
And those lines once crystal clear
crumbled in the dark, unwritten.
Morning revealed the ruin of my
doves? rice? vestiges of creation.

The verse on the bus was lost
among the pushing throng of people.
I felt rhythm humming in my mind
tenuous but true.
The words were simple, but elegantly
parsed, a waltz I'd only just learned to dance.
I tried to harden the foundation,
repeating all the steps,
but the jostle of a stranger
pulled me out of place.
I searched in vain to recapture
the motion of my thoughts,
but the floor had opened up
and I am still tripping on the cracks.

I am looking now at a line I wrote,
a scribble from another day.
I know it holds the key
to a longer string of words,
the meaning and the impetus
for a poem that could change world.
The potential locked inside the line
is both haunting and alone,
untouched, pristine, unsullied by my hand.
Perhaps I should leave the mocking line
and allow it to rest in peace, but I cannot.
"Today I mourn forgotten poems."

Finding Poetry

When building my mosaic
I walk on the beach, watching
the waves lick the sand, waiting
for seashells that are empty of
pearls, and when I find one, I
put it in my pocket, and continue
until the weight feels right, continue
until I can put them together.

Poetry Analysis

I can see the pain in their faces,
the cringe in their foreheads
wrinkling as though witnessing
horror. They avert their eyes
and refuse to look me in the face
like beaten dogs.

This is the face of the uninitiated,
my students informed we will be studying
poetry.

And so we trudge on
like beggar soldiers
in Wilfred Owen's
Dulce Et Decorum Est.
I make them dig
into Seamus Heaney's
family issues.
I show them Shakespeare's
arrogance, and the reasons
he was right to be.

When their faces change
from excruciation
to grudging respect,
there is a thrill
of accomplishment.
I've climbed a mountain
and here amidst the thin air
I can see the world moving.

Somewhere between Shelley and Milton,
I wonder,
if they read my words
what would they say?

I hold my poems at a distance
aware my arrogance is showing.

I want them to see my thoughts
spilled across their papers,
the images I weave burned
upon their minds.
In some way my teaching
has left a mark,

branded my thinking upon theirs
and I wonder if my poetry
would go deeper,
more permanent.

But I am not yet worthy
of teaching myself.