
Where a Painter is a Poet

J. M. Beach

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2002

Why do you paint?
For exactly the same reason I breathe.
That's not an answer.
How long hasn't there been any answer?
As long as I can remember.
And how long have you written?
As long as I can remember.

I mean poetry.

So do I...

Well, let's see...oh yes, one more question: where will you
live after this war is over?

In China; as usual.

China?

Of course.

Whereabouts in China?

Where a painter is a poet.

-e. e. cummings; "Why Do You Paint?"

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"Why Do You Paint?" was the preface to Cummings' 1945 art exhibition at the Memorial Art Gallery in Rochester, New York.

cummings, e e "Why Do You Paint?" AnOther E. E. Cummings. Ed. Richard Kostelanetz and John Rocco. New York: Liveright, 1998. 280.

Preface

This book is an attempt at simplicity of form and content merged in an expression of my own poetic sensibility. Like Cummings, one of my favorite poets, I seek to merge my poetic consciousness into whatever form it takes upon expression. Painting, sculpting, writing, speaking, moving, all are modes or mediums of Poetry. They should never be confused for the sacred act itself, which they always are. A painter is a Poet just as much as writer is a Poet, that is, if they seek to commune with the world through the sacredness of expression. When we express, we shape, we make, we create our own conscious existence and name our reality: the Word made flesh. Poetry is a ritual act of recognizing our inner divinity calling forth the sacredness of life to merge the subjective agent with the objective world. In this sense expression, or what others may call language, is a union. What I have left behind is a trace, a record, of my communion with the world around me, both past and present, both living and dead.

The poems are numbered expressions according to the order I composed and placed them in this collection. The form is purposely eclectic and of little importance. If Cummings and the Modernists have left me nothing else, they left me with the assurance that form can be manipulated as much and stretched as far as we are willing to take it. Even so far as to lose the ability to communicate. It then becomes an incomprehensible "Yawp"—A blessing or a curse between the poet and the page, and little else. And if the poet is insincere, it becomes a mere exercise. An insignificant scribble or scrawl.

I hope my poetry never sinks to that level. Better leave the mouth shut and the pen sheathed than to waste effort on aesthetic masquerades meant to impress those who think their appetites refined. I seek a raw and honest glimpse at Life and express the dark glares, the ironic gestures, and the heavenly hopes that I see through a poor Poet's eyes striving vainly for the light.

Read me. Then leave me for your own world to know and create. One can appreciate, but never live another's life.

Find your own words to forget mine.

j.m. beach
january 1, 2002

I

This house, not strong,
But it will do.
A Rafter nailed
And here a screw
To twist a joint,
To hold a beam
In what I live.
It might not seem

Stable, it is.
It works. And I
Have plans
To create and ply
Again. To live
Where I do feel
At home: *Construct*
Until I'm done,
A metaphorical reality.

II

The unforgiving brightness speaks
As flowers can only hope.
Color captures as the wind
A feeling blown unexpected.
The corporeal glory glows,
A world on the verge
Bursting when one can see.
Come, come to believe
The final semblance of being
Growing before your open eyes.
Touch if you dare,
It will extinguish you.

III

a sun the color of blood
rose from the earth this day
to wash away with its infinite fury
all myopic clockwork breath

death this sun brought death
a blindness more intense than sight
a radiant knowledge immanent
between fear and faith immobile

struck down on quivering knees
to breathe again by will alone
to stare with burning frailty
to rise slowly and stumble on

IV

Sometimes it follows,
but we trail to find it
never looking behind.

Sometimes it leads,
ahead and we miss it
looking for this or that.

Sometimes it's found,
ahead or behind
we stumble upon it and seize.

Sometimes it's lost,
if we find it or not,
it doesn't seem anyway,
it is.

V

Rhymes or subtle word play
Does not a Poet make.

It takes much more to be
Then writing cleverly.

Poets born with truer sights
While blindness most subsist.

To walk a different path than most,
Create where none exists.

Poets born or made
Develop a *Way* of life.

Poets follow through to find
When none can lead but them.

VI

life is death, dying
and new blossoms together
growing, giving out as one
drop and sprout.

life is organic strength
as limbs break, go on strong,
light and water mix to bless
this living communion.

life is natural prayer ushered in
unseen by most,
divinity comes and goes
a space between the ebb and flow.
life in all, holds its contradictions, whole.

IX

Tell me, what is Poetry?
-concentrated language

And what is the Poet?
-the living Word become catalyst

And what is the poem?
*-that which the Poet leaves behind
for you to find a Way
into Poetry*

Tell me then, where is art in all of this?
*-all of this is lost in art,
the Poet speak of Life.*

X

it dawns a broken wing and where is there to fly?
the sand is traveled in dying circles,
security slowly slips away.

in the wind no curses found, no mercy,
nothing but the stinging sand on earth bound broken wings.
as evening sets small fear intensifies,

dark falls as wolves begin to move.
where to cry out, choking on the setting sun.
no meaning to be found in waiting to die.

night swallows the flightless whole.

XI

a quarter past - mark the time
with memories as milestones
each step forward
or back
a marker to remember
the trail to this,
this reckoning - breathe it in

move into the future

to fall or fly

wings still beating

heart still yearning

XII

Everyone is given a handful of seeds,
Let the seeds fall where they may.

A handful here, a handful there,
On rocks and rich soil to throw.

Seeds fail or grow, roots will take hold,
Do not grudge the waste.

Possibility is blown away by strong winds
So grow smarter as years inform.

Learn to place where seeds take hold,
Eden awaits for you to grow.

Scatter your promise wisely,
And you will harvest the bounty of heaven.

XIII

(Beat)

sea waves crash
on the sea shore

(Beat)

the bright sun glows
the strong wind blows

(Beat)

coyotes prowl as
seagulls scurry

(Beat)

the broken shells
the scattered rocks

(Beat)

the tide goes in
the tide goes out

(Beat)

nature's rhythm
keeps its own

(Beat)

learn the pulse
of nature's heart

(Beat)

XIV

Amidst the rumble and ashes
The thunder comes calling
With its streaking flashes,
Electric force cutting through a hurting sky.

Pressures and systems clashing this night
Emitting a violence of rain and wind to bleed.
Run, run for cover across the earth
If cover can be found.

XV

Caught within the spider's web
her prey is wound in pacifying sleep.

the sting drawn when eyes are closed
the poison goes deep to wait.

convulse if muscle fiber can resist
wait, *Will* cannot forestall this fate.

dream as claws reach deep to hold
pray or scream, you cannot move.

print your fury in your last brief movements
as the sun sets forever.

XVI

Rain, where is the rain
When desert thirst cuts in?
Deliverance comes later or not at all
The circle exhausted again.

In sand to trace the paths removed
By shifting winds. Fall
Or walk on and on in hope,
The outcome is the same.

None can escape the natural ties
Of craving flesh and need.
Stand, walk on until limbs cannot,
No one is watching.

No sound is heard when worn bodies drop
When blood runs cold to clot,
The end alone to keep.
In anticipation, trepidation, or vexation

release your hold.

XVII

piece

by
piece

The
fits

puzzle

but

no
fun

no

game
idle

of

Fortune

or

Fate

piece

by
piece

it
together

comes

in

obvious
wise

ways

not
nor

random,

haphazard

congregation

both

sacred

and
profane

approach
mystery

the

in

living awe

XVIII

Weak enough to break is beauty bold
To stare down force with frailty.

A flower's strength to wilt and whither
The hardest heart's brutality.

XIX

The strongest walls to climb the sky
One day, as flesh to dust, will die.

Erect a vigor, blood, and stone on high
To masturbate a rising pride.

Smile to see this domination strong,
But do not rage when it will fall ere long.

The worms subvert and sap the strongest will,
And limbs go limp in hand's ambition still.

Destroy, and in turn destruction comes.
Generation fails where fathers eat their young.

This proud race will long before its time
Come to break and crumble down the line.

Nothing this side of heaven lasts for good
When the depths of hell is all that's understood.

XX

Why your war with dust,
Your protracted dealings
With cobwebs and disorder?

Is efficiency the laurel you seek
Or service to some ideal design
After which to strive and strive and fail?

Or is it not a war,
But a dance between dust and dust?
To weave a motion through

Time and space directed
In hope of harmony and grace
While limits move and work together?

To form a monument against decay?

Question your plan
Of battled movements for war or peace.

Find your secret strength
A hope for will enough to step,

Strong enough to live.

XXI

Deliberate moves do send away
A less deliberate heart.

The art of living deliberately
Among the weak of will
Comes in willing more than most
And then blazing trails.

Deliberate moves do send away
A less deliberate heart.

XXII

Breathe it in,

Follow the wind through the hills
run with reckless abandon,
where is not important, just push
push on and roll over landscapes

Breathe miles at a time
exhale both peaks and valleys,
the secret strength of this subtle earth
waits in the wind, feel

Breathe it in.

XXIII

Rumble the waves that rock the earth
All shores at the mercy of seas.
No permanence from day to day
 But change:
The Sun rises not on the same world twice.

Drift, drift with the mighty movements
Of centuries and grinding waters.
Follow what tides may come
To find all striving together in fury
 Without rhyme
Or destination.

No fate.
No destiny.

Meaning comes from those who survive

And are destroyed.

XXIV

Let the rains fall, renewal,
 washing away impurities through
 the gutters of the world, running
 back through to the mountaintops,
Let the rains fall, renewal.

XXV

Taste the words,
Let the flavor seep
Down the depths of consciousness
To find the inner pathways clear,
To take in the deeper meaning.

Truth waits to be found,
Learn to savor its taste.

XXVI

drop down,
roll around,
dance (if dancing is your way)

move with,
step to,
find your beat with the rhythm of life,

find your reason
to be...

walk,
or run,
be serious and fun

be your own
symphony...

drop down,
roll around,
dance (if dancing is your way)

express your animation free
through measured steps,
find your life,

move yourself
through poetry...

XXVII

Winter breathes its chill across the world
the leaves fall as do the spirits of Life
go dormant, go to ground
waiting in hibernation for renewal.
limbs and roots shiver the silent cold
waiting for warmer days to come...

come, come oh warmer springs of Life,
come quickly before all freezes to death.

XXVIII

Capitol "P" Poetry is not to write
but be,
Standard "p" poetry is just forms
to see.

Capitol "P" Poets write of Life
to live,
Standard "p" poets have little more
than words to give.

XXIX

"Christ is dead
you fool,"
said the poet.

I wept.

"For Christ's sake
don't cry,"
said the poet.

My head raised.

"The fucking meaning
is in your heart,"
said the poet,

"not in some dead guy,
not in some old body."

How, I thought?

"Live your own life,
be your own Christ,"
said the poet,
"get off your damn ass,
seek out the suffering."

"Yes," I said.

"Don't thank me,
don't follow me,"
said the poet,
"go to hell,
and bring with you heaven."

XXX

the Ideal is a proposition
based on a *Possibility*
worked towards
and made a *Reality*.

XXXI

A true teacher speaks,

"I am just a stepping stone
on your path to greatness,
use me well."

XXXII

Identity:

one needs the wherewithal
to say, "I am"
and the humility to say,
"I am not."

XXXIII

In poetry "I" is often misunderstood.

"I" is not a personality.

"I" is the Poet, eternally.

"I" is less a persona than a condition.

XXXIV

Beer is but borrowed

as are our bodies
cracked and opened to use
to just pass through

not dust and wind
as the ancients thought
but piss and a flush

down that drain
flows into one
hung over the feeling

savor the buzz.

XXXV

"Despite all my rage I'm still just a rat in a cage"

Trapped, locked in, bolted door
no window and
no hope.

Endless days without
time passing,
no belt, no shoestrings, no escape.

Walls stand as rigid reminders
tile by tile the floor is paced
traced circles unraveling.

Screams pass in through the wind
not alone in this misery
many entombed are waiting.

This existential predicament
leaves no room to maneuver
no out, trapped: rats in a cage.

But rats have been known to gnaw,
to cut teeth and squirm,
to break flesh
bleed through,

to make it
out.

XXXVI

Bear the bruises.
Taste the hate.

To strike, strike out?
But do not hurt,

Do not become the violence
You have suffered.

Do not break,
As you have been broken.

Create the hope to heal,
In your wounds to bless.

The knives like bitter reprieve
Are offered you to strike.

Do not break,
As you have been broken.

Create the space to speak
This outrage from noble suffering,

to suffer no more.

XXXVII

No one will ever know
the true extent of your glory.

They fail to see you now,
ever standing before them.

You exist as an object only,
briefly encountered.

In their cluttered landscape
you have no objective reality.

You exist, and they know this,
but so do ghosts, and shadows, and lies.

You exist as matter to be
recognized when passed by.

Understood perhaps in your colors,
your texture, your form,

But never known for what you are:
an indivisible entity of worth and majesty,

Forever invisible, unsubstantial,
to those who fail to see.

XXXVIII

The Enlightened One awakened
from a deep sleep, stood strong,
and walked the world to wake
all who were tired and weary.

Strength comes when you have no strength
but will to move, despite
the limitations placed before
and after, you will to succeed.

The Enlightened One walked and talked
through the barriers of ignorance,
hatred, greed to plead for the sanity
of selfless love to grow deep.

Beyond the veil of illusionary pride
resides the critical mind
to filter the eye, ear, heart
to make them smart, aware, wise.

Some did despise, some understood,
but few did know and take complete.

The Master taught all he had to give,
unseemly gift of matter hard and rough:

It is enough,
It is all you really need.

XXXIX

Beyond the outer limits bound
To penetrate within,
The precious stone of truth is found
That all is lost to win.

XXXX

As the story goes, a man believed,
Shouted his faith to the waters
And they parted before him.
He passed through the great divide.

As the story goes, a man believed,
Commanded the winds to cease
And walked on water.
He did not drown.

As the story goes, a man believed,
Nailed his reformation on a door
And the door opened before him.
He entered where none would dare.

As the story goes, a man believed,
Preached equality through prison bars
And walked until his freedom found.
His dream sparked deliverance.

Some say, "God" wrote *the story*,
Others say these men authored
Their own transformation.
The verdict is out.

The test is yours to prove.

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