

13. Poetry

Now as a candidate for studies in poetry, literature, and life, I was accepted on condition that I judge myself to be a perpetual failure. Of course the contract was written up in those secret parts of the psyche that only become visible after a lifetime of their writing themselves out in the day-to-day. It is difficult to hold this dimension in tandem with – at least on a conceptual or discursive level – another dimension of my cognitive life, namely, the forever victorious truth-telling one. That the latter was and is hyperbolic by nature might go some way to explaining its shameless immodesty, its resilience to the troubling and troublesome aspects of the other dimension. For it was the part of me that saw itself as uniquely committed and conquering in a both definite and indefinite way. In the way of ignoring whether this corresponded to empirical reality or the testimony of others so long as it broke upon the waves of life like the prow of a ship. Such was the way I looked upon it even when I cast a critical eye upon it and so then in such a way that my critical eye was quickly laid claim to or hijacked by the hyperbolic and added to its collection of trophies. In fact what wouldn't this side of me drag in and claim to be a trophy? So much as I did everything to the best of my ability, so much did it claim.

Just as my thoughts swirl about, so does everything I have thought and done in the past. A poor poet is part of what I have been and, if poetry is a kind of getting hold of the swirl, then it can serve as a foothold on the mountain I'm about to climb. Why was I driven to it only thus far and no farther? Why was I not consumed with a passion for it like some who no sooner finish one poem than they must start another? Why was my attention to it rather fidgety and ambivalent in comparison with others? Why did I ask myself such questions even while I read poetry, preferring short pieces to long ones? A short answer would be that my taste ran to the narrative and dramatic as opposed to the lyric. The clash of characters as opposed to the dissonant play of sentiments. Knowing that I wasn't much different from most people in this regard didn't stop me from feeling that I fell short. Or from feeling obtuse in the face of a poem I couldn't understand. Here was the cryptic presumably intelligible to some – because it was printed out and published – but not to me. Poetry as the unintelligible was then a thorn in my side and none of its sonority struck me as particularly soothing, as the force of the thing in itself. Somewhat was I like the person who stands before a piece of abstract art and demands that it mean something. It couldn't be just as it was but had to link itself to a larger whole. Had to articulate itself on a background before I could relish it.

Poetry was supposed to tell me something about the whole. Poetry was supposed to invest itself in me, fill up my understanding, make me

correspond ever more fully and perfectly with the divine whole. To be god-like while retaining my proper identity was at least outlined in this experience or expectation and relates to an ineradicable division between a desiring or status-seeking self and a duty-bound one. Even to bring this matter up is to precariously balance between these two selves, feeding self-enhancement only so much as to nourish the subject of truth-telling and doing the latter secretly and radically for the sake of the former. For the sake of what ultimately has something unmistakably illusory and illogical about it. Particularly as one gets older and feels oneself becoming one more dried husk amongst others.

But our youthful dreams commence in youth and, as youthful dreams, haven't much more than our youth in sight. Or at least the headiness of youth and having these dreams is primarily what is in sight and, even when it takes in an imagined elderliness or old age, it is with the warmth of watching a sunset rather than the coldness of having lost this very headiness. But if I have pushed the latter a bit further than others along the track of time, it is not unrelated to a poetic bent of serviceable and even utilitarian aspect. The charge of being as open as the sky, as much as the latter is involved with exposure, risk, and uncertainty, couldn't go without some form of protection. Couldn't bear itself without some transfiguring trick of the imagination. Which is as much as to say that plates of shining armour were required to make me think myself a knight and not a knave, a superior human being and not a sophisticated worm with apertures at both ends.

*O, to be like the sun in the dying day,
And fall to the earth without decay.
Or to be like the leaves in the autumn glow
And raise coloured splendour while sinking below.
Were man's end this final, flourished beauty,
I'd renounce all hope of a vague eternity.*

Poetry as the revelatory leading towards the propositional, as the essential inseparability of the two, is what philosophy misses, must miss, must make its eternal foe, must make the denial or suppression of its eternal lie. Philosophy lies in this lie of a foundation or firm setting, its permanent home on loan to it from eternity. This lie springs forth as a possibility that allows for another possibility, namely, truth-telling as the manifest, the self-conscious, the awareness of itself, the control of language, the thought of even poetry itself. A wondrous gift forever fatally flawed like the rose that must wither or canker in the bud.

But let's not think that my thoughts weren't more optimistic when I was young and that I didn't believe that there were some things meant to last an eternity. In keeping with this thought in the only way that is possible, I contemplated or conceived eternity in a limited sense, that is, on a human scale and with human significance. To think it otherwise, to think it *inhumanly* was as repugnant and unsettling to me as to the vast majority of people.

At the same time I have the feeling that, if my thinking has changed over time, my sensibilities have remained relatively stable. Which makes me think that my thinking as development was embryonic in my sensibilities, was constituted by them as a particular development. To the degree that I welcomed the poetic in my thinking and put it on an equal footing with the philosophical, I was committed in advance to sounding these sensibilities. And the road to this sounding was no less than all the thinking I have done up to now that, caught up with these sensibilities, I have made my task to articulate most consummately.

Let us start off by saying, first of all, that both my poetry writing and poetry reading were modest affairs. This contrasted sharply with the poetic sense I had of myself and my life. That the one didn't interfere with the other is testimony to some logic of development, some sense of being an explorer rather than a settler in this particular area. An adventurer still working out the name and nature of his adventure. Before I took my first and only course on poetry and poetics that also happened to be my first university course, I had written only a few short poems and read a handful of others. When I look back at one of these early poems, I'm confronted with something that seems to prematurely reflect a worry about my end, a possible end for myself and how to deal with it.

*Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.*

Before I had read much about stoicism or knew anything about nihilism, I committed to memory a poem that seemed to protect me from the worst that life could offer. A talismanic quality was invested in it so that I would be able to recite it later in life to ward off less than courageous thoughts and feelings. Practically but also ethically then it helped to guide me by holding up the only image of confronting one's end in a world grown hellish that seemed elevating and ennobling.

*Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.*

*It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll;
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.*

Perhaps such a poem has little significance for truth-telling apart from how it relates to a certain kind of truth-teller. Horror as the general rout of order or the private levelling and destruction of the most personal is toxic truth. The truth abominated as much as it secretly deepens thought, draws wonder and respect after it if only reluctantly. But what is to be done with such a truth that most abominate so thoroughly as not to want to admit anything but its abomination? Should they be called to order in the name of truth? Should they be moved to abominate less by catching sight of a grand economy most brutal but most full in its deliverance of everything we value? Indeed in its deliverance of all valuing in such a way that only by being torn are we soothed and only by stars looking down on us coldly and indifferently do we look up at them without a matching indifference.

Even throughout all the years that sex seethed in me and was a major preoccupation and place of worship, I found myself married to a first love both cruel and implacable. To put it one way, poeticized sex made for little or no sex in my life or for sex that, when it came, wasn't touched with poetry. On the other hand, it wouldn't be far wrong to say that the poetic side of me was sexualized in such a way that it was drawn to violate, strip naked, and possess the virgin-seeming whore that most truth-telling is. At least now I can see it thus to square accounts, to explain my defeats and disappointments, to appreciate why I didn't go off the deep end and become a bred-in-the-bone liar and dissolute. Sex pulled with ever so strong a pull but, without the poetic side of me being pulled, it was rude, criminal, coarse, catastrophe. No middle ground ever had an allure for me and so I was consequently forced to both suppress and express it. Suppress it as what hardly needs to be explained and express it as one who couldn't remind himself too often of the temptation of letting all go over to the side of the lie.

*We hug our dreams, we unloved ones;
We hold them close and tight;
We love our dreams, we unhugged ones:*

We hold them in the night.

*When sleep is broken and lovers part,
Dreams, sad substance, must fall apart;
Breaking day breaks dreams apart;
Waking day dreamless must start.*

*On night's soft wing dreams do return:
(Some passions smoke, while others burn);
All covered o'er are daytime fires
When sweet dreams bed with deep desires.*

*We hug our dreams, we unloved ones;
We hold them close and tight;
We love our dreams, we unhugged ones;
We hold them in the night.*

In the thematisation of truth-telling I see that I'm forever confronted with the problem of expressing its heterogeneity without hyperbole, without letting its poetic, egoistic, or even hyperbolic element (so far as the latter is present and unavoidable) play about like a false friend. The poems I have written are good enough that I can't pillory them and perhaps for that reason pillage them in the name of radically telling the truth about myself. At the same time I'm tempted to use them to make good for past failures seeming or otherwise. But then of course I run the risk of acting in bad faith by letting something slip in under false pretences.

Why does one resort to writing poems if not to get at something that eludes strict truth-telling and yet seems strict for all that with respect to something that should be called the truth? Something like a rare personal experience that must attend upon the rare testimonial to make it rare? Is the latter any less of an event because of its rarity on these two fronts? Is its resistance to strict truth-telling to be used as a slur against it, as a scholarly reason to call it second-order truth or simply none at all? That I know that philosophy is and has always been this slur is to know that it has never had as its object truth-telling or the truth-teller himself except as a partial or hidden subject, as one caught up in his pride, prejudice, and aloofness. Envious of the poet, the philosopher has always found in his logic and his lack of equivocation the force of entry to all things. Gifts of God these presumably are and presumably granted to everyone. But also presumably requiring a continual throwing up of experts to put them to work and to work towards a universal consensus and enlightenment.

You can see where I am, you other pair of eyes. Dissatisfied with poetry even while with it and critical and contemptuous of philosophy even before I have properly arrived at it. Yet with each having a strong claim on me and each counterbalanced by the other. Thus I was friend to nothing more than learning as much as I could from them whenever and however it came about. But in the case of poetry, to say that I learned from it is not much more than to say that some poems reached me and others didn't. That some passed on a sensibility or heightened and articulated an already abiding one. Like the feeling of time, its passage, its both all too human and inhuman quality, its stretching too far back and too far ahead to give meaning to itself. Its nonetheless attempting to encompass all meaning in those moments of greatest intensity. In what rang true to me as the truth of all time. What came to me indistinctly yet wrote itself like my last will and testament. What told me in a rather pedantic way that we take ourselves to be too much. Too much the centre of things. Too little the wandering part of the universe.

Well, the best that can be said is that between this hyper-deflation of the ego in metaphysical terms and the hyper-inflation of it in mythical ones is an area I didn't close off to contemplation. Where I didn't refrain from going back and forth and to and fro like the devil in Job. The poetry I read and the poetic sense of myself roughly corresponded to these two extremes. Which amounts to saying that few twentieth century poets steal their light from the traditionally heroic and adventurous. Yet I wouldn't go so far as to say these elements don't exist in their work. Only that they have been effaced, narrowed down, or brought to a fine point. How much vigour and commitment one can put into shaking off life's illusions might be one way of expressing the matter. Or how much one can bear the raw truth that our historical times have thrown up to us. But so expressing this distillment of the tragic vision brings to mind another thought, namely, that there is an ethics at work drawn to negativity, pessimism, and even defeatism. An ethics essentially hostile to the ethics of everyday, to the ethics of doing, to the ethics of most truth-telling. A good many people I'm sure are conscious of this division and are even subject to being torn and oscillating between the one and the other. On the other hand, the fact that most people don't proclaim this division to be a major contradiction in their lives says something about the nature of contradiction per se. That is, that its force as obstacle, as target, as something to be overcome only has sense and significance as an ethics of optimism. An ethics then of non-seeing, of breaking away from poetic insight.

*Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.*

I do not think they will sing to me.

*I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.*

*We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.*

Living our own death even while we are living and so living as to shun death. The eyes focussed and then not focussed upon it as the proper end of life. This oscillation a living rhythm that poetry can pick up on but not philosophy. That inhabits us and is an intimate part of us but must be held down as if it didn't exist. As if it should be discounted in the name of the public good.

What if poetry is that private good – that most intimate coming into contact with oneself – that is antagonistic to the public? And what if that private good is only good as a partial or half-hidden thing, a true-seeing if not true-saying so strict and relentless as to be almost intolerable?

What if the truth of poetry is the most universal truth to be found and yet too hard to bear except as a terrible truth, a terrible beauty? Would not someone concerned with the subject of truth-telling have to take it into account? And would not all concerned with telling the truth as objective truth have to ignore it?

But as someone concerned with telling the truth and in his own way objectifying it, I can't pretend that I haven't ignored it. That I haven't worked secretly with the soul of a philosopher for many years and so as one who was continually looking past or away from what he also felt compelled to take in. The poetic sense of myself was my childhood naivety, innocence, and sense of immortality allowed to pass over into adulthood. A neither logical nor rational move except from the point of view that I couldn't live without it. That it was implicated in and inseparable from my desire to tell the truth about all these contradictory and confusing matters.

Visiting

*I see the proud Jaguar crouched on the front drive
and the spacious lawn with big blue spruces
pinnacling skyward.*

*The Tudor beams excite my eye
and the vast expanse of masonry
has an impact of which I am not certain.*

*Could it be (I ask myself)
that I look pleurably upon this place
or enviously take account of the luck that has it?*

*The blue sky excites my eye too
and reaches right around the property.*

*I round the house to view it from all angles
and when I'm done and leave the house behind
I look up once again to find
that sky and senses are perfectly transportable.*

I don't want to deny the element of optimism in my outlook that kept me from feeling universal mortality like others. I don't want to pretend that I didn't fill the future with fantasies that blunted any pain that might have come from it. I don't want to make out that I was already old in my youth like some with poetic insight. I merely want to make out that the study of twentieth century poetry and poetics signalled my readiness to explore some secondary roads of my psyche and leave at least temporarily the main one of erotic and romantic daydreams.

*How sad it is to see
That she feels about me
In a way which makes hers
The more bitter sorrow.*

Now the notion that poetry is bound up with coming into most intimate contact with oneself invites the sort of investigation I never did and perhaps can only do now because, as it seems to me, the subject matter is too elusive and intractable to be taken up without a special reason. Relying on my memory which of course isn't foolproof but remarkable enough, I think of myself at twenty-five or twenty-six reading Yeats' *The Wild Swans at Coole*. In an instant I was catapulted some twenty years ahead in time, becoming a wistful middle-aged Irishman.

*The nineteenth autumn has come upon me
Since I first made my count.*

A wistful middle-aged Irishman at twenty-five? I who was still seeking the future with appetite and relish and wild expectation?

*Their hearts have not grown old;
Passion or conquest, wander where they will,
Attend upon them still.*

The swift identification with a self removed from me by a generation was a shock, an unsettling, a dislocation, a rude awakening. How could this have been if, imaginatively and emotionally speaking, I had already accepted aging as a personal possibility?

Even if I'm exaggerating this matter, it still indicates a lag in me that I abruptly became aware of at the time. Intellectually speaking, I knew I was at the apex of my youth and for this very reason couldn't look ahead without expecting some signs of decline. But how paralyzing and self-destructive it would have been to focus on this! Thus there were these two movements of thought suddenly brought together and held in suspense. One acknowledging that until that time I hadn't looked towards the future in the most feeling and penetrating way. The other recognizing that there was a mighty and even healthy resistance to doing so.

To be sufficiently struck by these conflicting impulses not to let them slip out of sight is the drive to self-knowledge in the most intimate and personal sense. On the other hand, it is to be blocked from putting order into one's thoughts by direct and explicit theorizing. It seems to me then that I have no choice but to continue along and table more poems I have written or read. The first because they represent some of my most intimate thoughts. The second because they set in motion same or similar ones. Together they helped to keep me on track of the two subjects, myself and truth-telling, that for a long time I only dimly recognized as being conjoined.

In that first university class there was another poem that spoke to me as I was then. Just as in the case of the Yeats' poem, it evoked a repressed part of me that had escaped emotional and imaginative development. Only instead of its being about a middle-aged man linked to his past and present, it was about a young man linked to his dream.

*What calls me is that lifted, rough-tongued bell
(Art, if you like) whose individual sound
Insists I too am individual.
It speaks; I hear, others may hear as well.*

There are some poems that match one sentiments so perfectly that one feels as if one had written them in another life.

*The trumpet's voice, loud and authoritative,
Draws me a moment to the lighted glass
To watch the dancers – all under twenty-five –
Shifting intently, face to flushed face,
Solemnly on the beat of happiness.*

*Or so I fancy, sensing the smoke and sweat,
The wonderful feel of girls. Why be out here?
But then, why be in there? Sex, yes, but what
Is sex? Surely, to think the lion's share
Of happiness is found by couples – sheer
Inaccuracy, as far as I'm concerned.*

Of course the sense of a two-way interference was nothing new to me. That my highest aims and aspirations and search for sexual pleasure inhibited each other. At the same time I always secretly hoped that the second would be swept up into the first without loss or remainder. It was as if I wanted to be on the dance floor – *really* on the dance floor – and outside the window at the same time. Consequently the thought of having to sacrifice, of having to be a bit of a martyr for the sake of my dream was one I couldn't entertain for long. And although it seemed to me that Larkin had some residual difficulty in deciding where he belonged, it also seemed to me that he was more unflinching in the matter of admitting what the stakes were.

*But not for me, nor I for them; and so
With happiness. Therefore I stay outside,
Believing this; and they maul to and fro,
Believing that; and both are satisfied,
If no one has misjudged himself. Or lied.*

To be put into most intimate contact with oneself is to be reminded that one is never fully there. That there is always a gap to be made up. It is to be involved in a largely hit-and-miss affair except insofar as one knows that poetry is the way to go and not philosophy. But what does this mean if not that there are many well-functioning individuals who live without it and who are nonetheless to be envied and admired for many good reasons? So many in fact that one can easily forget there is a hidden deficit, a perceptible loss, a boarded-up space in their psyche that inevitably results from this practical outlook. Admittedly the greater freedom of the poet is habitually taken to be

a surplus of freedom, a thing not bad in itself but certainly dispensable in the ordinary run of things. Infectious as this point of view is, it is likely that I sometimes didn't realize how much I stood in need of being inoculated against it.

*He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be
One whom there was no official complaint,
And all the reports on his conduct agree
That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a
saint,
For in everything he did he served the Greater Community.
.....
Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:
Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.*

That I largely restricted my reading of twentieth-century poems to one particular anthology called *Twentieth Century Poetry and Poetics* is one of those niggling facts that, simply by being niggling, summons me to confession. Of course this fact is not a problem from a scholarly or artistic viewpoint except if I were to overlook it. If I were to refrain from hauling it into this account of my poetic self and its development. For what matters from the point of view of truth-telling is not how this self stints or falls short but how it fits in to an overall development that ends in what I'm presently doing.

It is a niggling fact that I haven't read the collected works of Yeats or Auden or others only for the reason that I'm constituted to think and imagine a grand taking in of everything. Or at least everything I chance to come across that pertains to my subject and so virtually everything I come across. But it is clear as day this can't be done and so selective sampling – as one finds it in a good anthology – is what I have always had to settle for.

What other ways was I awakened to myself when I consulted this anthology of twentieth century poems in years to come? Was there not at age twenty-seven (but at other times as well) the sense of not being able to think clearly about what I was doing? Moments of wondering why I couldn't be like those who seemed to have a good grip on life and confidence in what they were doing and where they were going? Certainly establishing myself as a playwright had become a primary objective but, as I have already said, I lacked confidence in this area. Such confusion discomforted me to the point that a delicate adjustment was often required in my thinking. A sort of cognitive tacking to keep my sails full despite contrary winds. And although

a poem may not be the only way to do this, I doubt whether there is anything that works so wondrously quick.

*He is quick, thinking in clear images;
I am slow, thinking in broken images.*

*He becomes dull, trusting to his clear images;
I become sharp, mistrusting my broken images.*

*Trusting his images, he assumes their relevance;
Mistrusting my images, I question their relevance.*

*Assuming their relevance, he assumes the fact;
Questioning their relevance, I question the fact.*

*When the fact fails him, he questions his senses;
When the fact fails me, I approve my senses.*

*He continues quick and dull in his clear images;
I continue slow and sharp in my broken images.*

*He in a new confusion of his understanding;
I in a new understanding of my confusion.*

That I continued slow and sharp in a new understanding of my confusion is what I take to have been spelt out to me even while this new understanding was still on its way.

Robert Graves' poem put me in touch with a certain certainty overriding all uncertainty. A certainty I was as certain of as Descartes of his. As certain of then as to be *very* certain. To be that Cartesian that everyone is when one's personal self is at stake. As certain of then as to think that I couldn't live without a certain ethical, aesthetic, and even epistemological orientation. Couldn't live without it not in any rhetorical sense but precisely as the inability to live without *my* particular consciousness, *my* particular source of pride, and *my* particular sense of well-being.

For to live any other way would have been to live where I had never lived, never believed, never thought of myself as myself, and never thought about a life for myself. Where order took precedence over openness, where errancy was simply error, where things were left out of the picture simply because they didn't fit in. Where there were plenty of fields to work in and hospitable

homes to live in but at the price of giving up one's citizenship to a larger world.

Of course there were many other poems from *Twentieth Century Poetry and Poetics* that had this or that effect on me. That produced some subtle modification of thought or feeling hard to pin down because it was but one extraordinary moment in a flight of others. These last being so much more numerous, they tended to bear down on me with their weight and authority. I know this is the common lot of mortals just as I know that revolting against it is also common. In my own case, it amounted to trying to redeem the tawdriness of the past by making it work in the present.

*We made the break
almost bloodless
you and I
Out of our brief union
came still-born pain
that shed no tear
and gave no cry
for we had wed in our
self-respect*

*Too many polite words
lead to emotional sterility
but...*

*dam up the outlets
with decorum
that she may know
and remember you
as you want her to*

*I visualized myself
with your eyes
and tried to act accordingly
Inwardly I retreat from
the heart of my pain
and take refuge in
contemplation*

So silently do I

scream away my pain

As I moved from my mid to late twenties, the ordinary moments of life, however full and well-seasoned, however smooth and untroubled, took on an oppressive aspect new to me. No longer were they what they had been when, after dropping out of high school, I worked itinerantly or when, some years later, I travelled about Europe. Time in its generality took on a different weight and measure. It was no longer experienced by me as something light and free-floating, as a series of rising currents or updrafts that, however turbulent, carried me forever on to the place where all my dreams would be fulfilled. On the contrary, I began to identify it with a narrowing of possibilities, with a closing down of whole realms of experience, and with a series of choices already made that fitted me for certain walks of life and barred me from others.

For a long time I had lived with the conflicting fantasies of wanting to be all things – that is, all things well recognized and well received – and wanting to shine like some new star in the firmament. No doubt the first as much as the second arose in my childhood when it was easy and natural to place no restrictions on all the attractive pursuits and occupations that promised themselves as future possibilities. Of course this outlook dissipated as I got older and grew more attentive to what could and could not be done in a lifetime. Nonetheless I suspect that, just as in the case of my attitude towards aging and having to make sacrifices, there was a lag between my intellectual acceptance of limited possibilities and what registered with me on the imaginative and emotional plane. In fact I would say that my vagabonding years made this lag persist in me and become so ingrained that, while it definitely closed over time, it never went away completely. Therefore it was always the case that I was less anxious than most people to plan and prepare for the future if I construed such practicalness as a drastic limiting of my horizons.

Still the time came when my longstanding habit of fantasizing my life as an upward spiral without retrograde motion couldn't be borne so naively and, as in the case of other aspects of my cognitive life, needed to be readjusted.

*Time withers, time mocks
The early vanities of youth.
They who suffer age know it!
Time takes away, seldom restores;
Nay, not in this life.*

But to say that I was stricken by some new sensibility regarding time is not to say that it came all at once or that it could rival in intensity certain other sensibilities or that it wasn't put in the shade by my longstanding hangups about sex. No, it was more like a new awareness that slowly crept into my consciousness during those mild and mellow moments relatively free from egoism and devoted to pure observation and speculation. At least this way of reporting the matter allows me to bear witness to what is difficult to recount on the basis of memory alone, namely, that a key thought came to me rather late and required a poem to get it out.

Before I had read Dylan Thomas's "Fern Hill," did I ever think that time had already brought death and destruction to me? Did I ever think that the end of my childhood was the end of a life qualitatively better than what would follow? Perhaps I did but not so much as to be troubled by this thought that even now troubles me and whose truth I don't doubt any more than I doubt its limitations. But, having said this, I certainly don't want to get bogged down in proverbial questions about happiness and what constitutes a good life. I only want to say that, before having read this poem and perhaps for some time after, I gave little or no thought to incremental loss, to unconscious loss, to all the various deaths in a life, to all things of this nature that may or may not be missed and lamented.

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