

# SWAN

POEMS AND PROSE POEMS



MARY OLIVER

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*A Poetry Handbook*  
*Blue Pastures*  
*Rules for the Dance*  
*Winter Hours*  
*Long Life*  
*Our World (with photographs by Molly Malone Cook)*

AUDIO

*At Blackwater Pond*  
*Many Miles*

# SWAN

Poems and Prose Poems

Mary Oliver

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For Anne Taylor

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AFTERWORD

Percy

Everyone *once, once* only. Just *once* and no more.  
And we also *once*. Never again. But this having been  
*once*, although only *once*, to have been of the earth,  
seems irrevocable.

—Rilke, *Duino Elegies*

'Tis curious that we only believe as deep as we live.

—Emerson, *Beauty*

## What Can I Say

What can I say that I have not said before?

So I'll say it again.

The leaf has a song in it.

Stone is the face of patience.

Inside the river there is an unfinishable story

and you are somewhere in it

and it will never end until all ends.

Take your busy heart to the art museum and the  
chamber of commerce

but take it also to the forest.

The song you heard singing in the leaf when you  
were a child

is singing still.

I am of years lived, so far, seventy-four,

and the leaf is singing still.



## Of Time

Don't even ask how rapidly the hummingbird  
lives his life.

You can't imagine. A thousand flowers a day,  
a little sleep, then the same again, then  
he vanishes.

I adore him.

Yet I adore also the drowse of mountains.

And in the human world, what is time?

In my mind there is Rumi, dancing.

There is Li Po drinking from the winter stream.

There is Hafiz strolling through Shariz, his feet  
loving the dust.

## On the Beach

On the beach, at dawn:  
four small stones clearly  
hugging each other.

How many kinds of love  
might there be in the world,  
and how many formations might they make

and who am I ever  
to imagine I could know  
such a marvelous business?

When the sun broke  
it poured willingly its light  
over the stones

that did not move, not at all,  
just as, to its always generous term,  
it shed its light on me,

my own body that loves,  
equally, to hug another body.

## How Perfectly

How perfectly  
and neatly  
opens the pink rose

this bright morning,  
the sun warm  
on my shoulders,

its heat  
on the opening petals.  
Possibly

it is the smallest,  
the least important event  
at this moment

in the whole world.  
Yet I stand there,  
utterly happy.

## How I Go to the Woods

Ordinarily I go to the woods alone, with not a single friend, for they are all smilers and talkers and therefore unsuitable.

I don't really want to be witnessed talking to the catbirds or hugging the old black oak tree. I have my way of praying, as you no doubt have yours.

Besides, when I am alone I can become invisible. I can sit on the top of a dune as motionless as an uprise of weeds, until the foxes run by unconcerned. I can hear the almost unhearable sound of the roses singing.



If you have ever gone to the woods with me, I must love you very much.

## A Fox in the Dark

A fox goes by  
in the headlights  
like an electric shock.

Then he pauses  
at the edge of the road  
and the heart, if it is still alive,

feels something—  
a yearning  
for which we have no name

but which we may remember,  
years later,  
in the darkness,

upon some other empty road.

## Just Around the House, Early in the Morning

Though I have been scorned for it,  
let me never be afraid to use the word *beautiful*.  
For within is the shining leaf  
and the blossoms of the geranium at the window.  
And the eyes of the happy puppy as he wakes.  
The colors of the old and beloved afghan lying  
by itself, on the couch, in the morning sun.  
The hummingbird's nest perched now in a  
corner of the bookshelf, in front of so many  
books of so many colors.  
The two poached eggs. The buttered toast.  
The ream of brand-new paper just opened,  
white as a block of snow.  
The typewriter humming, ready to go.

## Tom Dancer's Gift of a Whitebark Pine Cone

You never know  
what opportunity  
is going to travel to you,  
or through you.

Once a friend gave me  
a small pine cone—  
one of a few  
he found in the scat

of a grizzly  
in Utah maybe,  
or Wyoming.  
I took it home

and did what I supposed  
he was sure I would do—  
I ate it,  
thinking

how it had traveled  
through that rough  
and holy body.  
It was crisp and sweet.

It was almost a prayer  
without words.  
My gratitude  
to you, Tom Dancer,

for this gift of the world  
I adore so much  
and want to belong to.  
And thank you too, great bear.



## Passing the Unworked Field

Queen Anne's lace  
is hardly  
prized but  
all the same it isn't  
idle look  
how it  
stands straight on its  
thin stems how it  
scrubs its white faces  
with the  
rags of the sun how it  
makes all the  
loveliness  
it can.

## For Example

Okay, the broken gull let me lift it  
from the sand.

Let me fumble it into a box, with the  
lid open.

Okay, I put the box into my car and started  
up the highway  
to the place where sometimes, sometimes not,  
such things can be mended.

The gull at first was quiet.

How everything turns out one way or another, I  
won't call it good or bad, just  
one way or another.

Then the gull lurched from the box and onto  
the back of the front seat and  
punched me.

Okay, a little blood slid down.

But we all know, don't we, how sometimes  
things have to feel anger, so as not  
to be defeated?

I love this world, even in its hard places.

A bird too must love this world,  
even in its hard places.

So, even if the effort may come to nothing,  
you have to do something.



It was, generally speaking, a perfectly beautiful  
summer morning.

The gull beat the air with its good wing.

I kept my eyes on the road.

## Percy Wakes Me (Fourteen)

Percy wakes me and I am not ready.  
He has slept all night under the covers.  
Now he's eager for action: a walk, then breakfast.  
So I hasten up. He is sitting on the kitchen counter  
where he is not supposed to be.  
How wonderful you are, I say. How clever, if you  
needed me,  
to wake me.  
He thought he would hear a lecture and deeply  
his eyes begin to shine.  
He tumbles onto the couch for more compliments.  
He squirms and squeals; he has done something  
that he needed  
and now he hears that it is okay.  
I scratch his ears, I turn him over  
and touch him everywhere. He is  
wild with the okayness of it. Then we walk, then  
he has breakfast, and he is happy.  
This is a poem about Percy.  
This is a poem about more than Percy.  
Think about it.

# Today

Today is a day of  
dark clouds and slow rain.  
The little blades of corn  
are so happy.

## Swan

Did you too see it, drifting, all night on the black  
river?

Did you see it in the morning, rising into the silvery  
air,

an armful of white blossoms,

a perfect commotion of silk and linen as it leaned  
into the bondage of its wings: a snowbank, a bank of  
lilies,

biting the air with its black beak?

Did you hear it, fluting and whistling

a shrill dark music, like the rain pelting the trees,  
like a waterfall

knifing down the black ledges?

And did you see it, finally, just under the clouds—

a white cross streaming across the sky, its feet  
like black leaves, its wings like the stretching light  
of the river?

And did you feel it, in your heart, how it pertained  
to everything?

And have you too finally figured out what beauty is  
for?

And have you changed your life?

## Beans Green and Yellow

In fall  
it is mushrooms  
gathered from dampness  
under the pines;  
in spring  
I have known  
the taste of the lamb  
full of milk  
and spring grass;  
today  
it is beans green and yellow  
and lettuce and basil  
from my friends' garden—  
how calmly,  
as though it were an ordinary thing,  
we eat the blessed earth.

## It Is Early

It is early, still the darkest of the dark.  
And already I have killed (in exasperation)  
two mosquitoes and (inadvertently)  
one spider.

All the same, the sun will rise  
in its sweeps of pink and red clouds.  
Not for me does it rise and not in haste does it rise  
but step by step, neither  
with exasperation nor inadvertently, and not with  
any intended attention to  
any one thing, but to all, like a god

that takes its instructions from another, even  
greater,  
whose name, even, we do not know. The one

that made the mosquito, and the spider; the one  
that made me as I am: easy to exasperation, then  
penitent.



## How Many Days

How many days I lived and had never used  
the holy words.

Tenderly I began them when it came to me  
to want to, oh mystery irrefutable!

Then I went out of that place  
and into a field and lay down  
among the weeds and the grasses,  
whispering to them, fast, in order to keep  
that world also.

## More of the Unfinishable Fox Story

And what did the fox look like?

Like some prince in a fairy tale,  
in his secret costume.

What was he looking for?

For a rabbit to fall out of the stars  
and into the grass.

Was he combed and curly, did he  
wear a prince's crown?

No, he was rough and smelled of skunk.  
But he was beautiful,

and beauty is not to be taken lightly.

Did you stop the car?

No, I kept on going to wherever it was I was going,  
which I don't remember.

Well, what do you remember?

The fox! the fox!

## The Riders

When the Pony Express needed  
riders, it advertised  
a preference for orphans—  
that way, no one was likely  
to ask questions when the carriers failed  
to arrive, or the frightened ponies  
stumbled in with their dead  
from the flanks of the prairies.  
This detail from our country's past  
has no particular significance—it is only  
a footnote. There were plenty  
of orphans and the point of course  
was to get the mail through, so the theory  
was sound. And besides,  
think of those rough, lean boys—  
how light and hard they would ride  
fleeing the great loneliness.

# The Poet Dreams of the Classroom

I dreamed  
I stood up in class  
and I said aloud:

Teacher,  
why is algebra important?

Sit down, he said.

Then I dreamed  
I stood up  
and I said:

Teacher, I'm weary of the turkeys  
that we have to draw every fall.  
May I draw a fox instead?

Sit down, he said.

Then I dreamed  
I stood up once more and said:

Teacher,  
my heart is falling asleep  
and it wants to wake up.  
It needs to be outside.

Sit down, he said.

## Dancing in Mexico

Not myself,  
but Maria,  
who, when her work is done,  
tunes in the radio,  
goes out into the garden,  
picks up the front feet of the little dog Ricky,  
and dances. She dances.

## The Sweetness of Dogs (Fifteen)

What do you say, Percy? I am thinking  
of sitting out on the sand to watch  
the moon rise. Full tonight.

So we go

and the moon rises, so beautiful it  
makes me shudder, makes me think about  
time and space, makes me take  
measure of myself: one iota  
pondering heaven. Thus we sit,

I thinking how grateful I am for the moon's  
perfect beauty and also, oh! how rich  
it is to love the world. Percy, meanwhile,  
leans against me and gazes up into  
my face. As though I were  
his perfect moon.

## Bird in the Pepper Tree

Don't mind my inexplicable delight  
in knowing your name,  
little Wilson's Warbler  
yellow as a lemon, with a smooth, black cap.

Just do what you do and don't worry, dipping  
branch by branch down to the fountain  
to sip neatly, then flutter away.

A name  
is not a leash.



## In Provincetown, and Ohio, and Alabama

Death taps his black wand and something vanishes.  
Summer,  
winter; the thickest branch of an oak tree for which I  
have a  
special love; three just hatched geese. Many trees  
and thickets of  
catbrier as bulldozers widen the bicycle path. The  
violets down  
by the old creek, the flow itself now raveling  
forward through  
an underground tunnel.

Lambs that, only recently, were gamboling in the  
field. An old  
mule, in Alabama, that could take no more of  
anything. And  
then, what follows? Then spring again, summer, and  
the season  
of harvest. More catbrier, almost instantly rising.  
(No violets,  
ever, or song of the old creek.) More lambs and new  
green grass  
in the field, for their happiness *until*. And some kind  
of yellow  
flower whose name I don't know (but what does that  
matter?)  
rising around and out of the half-buried, half-  
vulture-eaten,  
harness-galled, open-mouthed (its teeth long and

blackened),  
breathless, holy mule.

## April

I wanted to speak at length about  
the happiness of my body and the  
delight of my mind for it was  
April, night, a  
full moon and—

but something in myself or maybe  
from somewhere other said: not too  
many words, please, in the  
muddy shallows the

frogs are singing.

## Torn

I tore the web  
of a black and yellow spider  
in the brash of weeds  
and down she came  
on her surplus of legs  
each of which  
touched me and really  
the touch wasn't much  
but then the way  
if a spider can  
she looked at me  
clearly somewhere between  
outraged and heartbroken  
made me say "I'm sorry  
to have wrecked your home  
your nest your larder"  
to which she said nothing  
only for an instant  
pouched on my wrist  
then swung herself off  
on the thinnest of strings

back into the world.

This pretty, this perilous world.

## Wind in the Pines

Is it true that the wind  
streaming especially in fall  
through the pines  
is saying nothing, nothing at all,  
  
or is it just that I don't yet know the language?

# The Living Together

The spirit says:

What gorgeous clouds.

The body says: Good,

the crops need rain.

The spirit says:

Look at the lambs frolicking.

The body says:

When's the feast?

The spirit says:

What is the lark singing about?

The body says:

Maybe it's angry.

The spirit says:

I think shadows are trying to say something.

The body says:

I know how to make light.

The spirit says:

My heart is pounding.

The body says:

Take off your clothes.

The spirit says: Body,

how can we live together?

The body says: Bricks and mortar  
and a back door.



## **We Cannot Know**

Now comes Schumann down the scale.

What a river  
of pleasure!

Where is his riven heart?

His ruined mind?  
Lying in wait.

Now comes Schumann up the scale  
and around the curly corners  
of just a few absolutely right notes

while the Rhine turges along,  
while the Rhine sparkles in the dark,  
lying in wait.

## The Poet Dreams of the Mountain

Sometimes I grow weary of the days, with all their fits and starts.

I want to climb some old gray mountain, slowly, taking the rest of my lifetime to do it, resting often, sleeping under the pines or, above them, on the unclothed rocks.

I want to see how many stars are still in the sky that we have smothered for years now, a century at least.

I want to look back at everything, forgiving it all, and peaceful, knowing the last thing there is to know.

All that urgency! Not what the earth is about! How silent the trees, their poetry being of themselves only.

I want to take slow steps, and think appropriate thoughts.

In ten thousand years, maybe, a piece of the mountain will fall.

# **Mist in the Morning, Nothing Around Me but Sand and Roses**

Was I lost? No question.

Did I know where I was? Not at all.

Had I ever been happier in my life? Never.

## The Last Word About Fox (Maybe)

Where is the fox now?

Somewhere, doing his life's work, which is  
living his life.

How many more foxes has he made for the earth?

Many, many.

How many rabbits has he caught so far?

Many, many, many.

This doesn't sound very important.

What's of importance? Scalping mountains  
or fishing for oil?

I would argue about that.

Ah, you have never heard of the meek and what is  
to become of them?

What's meek about eating rabbits?

It's better than what's happening to the  
mountains and the ocean.

You know, there's only one thing to say. I think  
you're a little crazy.

I thank the Lord.

## How Heron Comes

It is a negligence of the mind  
not to notice how at dusk  
heron comes to the pond and  
stands there in his death robes, perfect  
servant of the system, hungry, his eyes  
full of attention, his wings  
pure light.

# When

When it's over, it's over, and we don't know  
any of us, what happens then.

So I try not to miss anything.

I think, in my whole life, I have never missed  
the full moon

or the slipper of its coming back.

Or, a kiss.

Well, yes, especially a kiss.

# Trees

Heaven knows how many  
trees I climbed when my body  
was still in the climbing way, how

many afternoons, especially  
windy ones, I sat  
perched on a limb that

rose and fell with every invisible  
blow. Each tree was  
a green ship in the wind-waves, every

branch a mast, every leafy height  
a happiness that came without  
even trying. I was that alive

and limber. Now I walk under them—  
cool, beloved: the household  
of such tall, kind sisters.



## In Your Hands

The dog, the donkey, surely they know  
they are alive.

Who would argue otherwise?

But now, after years of consideration,  
I am getting beyond that.

What about the sunflowers? What about  
the tulips, and the pines?

Listen, all you have to do is start and  
there'll be no stopping.

What about mountains? What about water  
slipping over the rocks?

And, speaking of stones, what about  
the little ones you can  
hold in your hands, their heartbeats  
so secret, so hidden it may take years

before, finally, you hear them?

## I Own a House

I own a house, small but comfortable. In it is a bed,  
a desk,  
a kitchen, a closet, a telephone. And so forth—you  
know  
how it is: things collect.

Outside the summer clouds are drifting by, all of  
them  
with vague and beautiful faces. And there are the  
pines  
that bush out spicy and ambitious, although they do  
not  
even know their names. And there is the  
mockingbird;  
over and over he rises from his thorn-tree and  
dances—he  
actually dances, in the air. And there are days I wish  
I  
owned nothing, like the grass.

## I Worried

I worried a lot. Will the garden grow, will the rivers  
flow in the right direction, will the earth turn  
as it was taught, and if not, how shall  
I correct it?

Was I right, was I wrong, will I be forgiven,  
can I do better?

Will I ever be able to sing, even the sparrows  
can do it and I am, well,  
hopeless.

Is my eyesight fading or am I just imagining it,  
am I going to get rheumatism,  
lockjaw, dementia?

Finally I saw that worrying had come to nothing.  
And gave it up. And took my old body  
and went out into the morning,  
and sang.

## Lark Ascending

galloped up into the morning air  
then floated

a long way

whispering, I imagine,  
to the same mystery

I try to speak to  
down here.

And look, he is carrying something—

a little letter just light enough  
for him to hold

in his yellow beak!

Look now, he is placing it

inside a cloud

and singing at the same time  
joyfully, and yet

as if his heart would break.



Later, I take my weightier  
but not unhappy body  
into the house

I busy myself  
(bury myself)

in books. But  
all the while I am thinking

of the gift  
of my seventy-some years

and how I would also if I could  
carry a message of thanks

to the doors of the clouds.

I don't know whether it would be  
of the heart or the mind. I know  
it's the poem I have yet to make.

## **Don't Hesitate**

If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy, don't hesitate. Give in to it. There are plenty of lives and whole towns destroyed or about to be. We are not wise, and not very often kind. And much can never be redeemed. Still, life has some possibility left. Perhaps this is its way of fighting back, that sometimes something happens better than all the riches or power in the world. It could be anything, but very likely you notice it in the instant when love begins. Anyway, that's often the case. Anyway, whatever it is, don't be afraid of its plenty. Joy is not made to be a crumb.

## In the Darkness

At night the stars  
throw down  
their postcards of light.

Who are they  
that love me  
so much?

Strangers  
in the darkness—  
imagine!

they have seen me  
and they burn  
as I too

have burned, but in  
the mortal way, to which  
I am totally loyal.

Still, I am grateful  
and faithful  
to this other romance

though we will not ever know  
each others' names,  
we will not ever

touch.

## Four Sonnets

### 1.

There appeared a darkly sparkling thing  
hardly  
bigger than a pin, that all afternoon  
seemed  
to want my company. It did me no hurt but  
wandered  
my shirt, my sleeve-cuff, my wrist.  
Finally it opened its sheets of chitin and  
flew away.  
Linnaeus probably had given it a name, which I  
didn't know. All I could say was: Look  
what's come from its home of dirt and dust  
and duff, its  
cinch of instinct. What does music, I wondered,  
mean to it?  
What the distant horizons? Still, no doubt have I  
that it has some purpose, as we all have  
some purpose which, though none of us  
knows what it is, we each go on claiming.  
Oh, distant relative, we will never speak to  
each other  
a single kind word. And yet, in this world, it is  
no small thing to sparkle.



## 2.

The kingfisher hurrahs from a branch  
above the river.

Under its feet is a fish that will swim  
no more,

that also has its story, for another time  
perhaps.

Now it's the bird's, pounding the fish then  
hulking it down its open beak,

glad in its winning and not at all trammeled  
by thought.

I keep trying to put this poem together.  
Meanwhile

the bird is again gazing into the glaze  
of this running food-bin. Thought does not  
create the soul, not entirely, but it  
plays its part.

Meanwhile the bird is flashy body and the fish  
was flashy body and each  
fulfills what it is, remembers little  
and imagines less.

And thus the day passes into darkness  
undamaged.

The fish, slippery and delicious.

The kingfisher, so quick, so blue.

## 3.

The authors of history are among us still.

And believe me they believe what they believe  
as sincerely as the millions who are simply  
looking for a life, a purpose.

Who are the good people? We are all good people  
except when we are not. Meanwhile the forests  
are felled, the oceans rise, storms  
give off the appearance of anger. Who  
despises us and for what reasons? Whom do we  
despise and for what reasons? Once there was a  
garden  
and we were sent forth from it, possibly forever.  
Possibly not, possibly there is no forever.  
“What’s on your mind?” we say to each other.  
As though it’s some kind of weight.

#### 4.

This morning what I am thinking of is circles:  
the sun, the earth, the moon;  
the life of each of us that begins then returns  
to our home, the circular world,  
even as in our cleverness we have invented  
invention—the straight line  
nothing like a leaf, or a lake or the moon  
but simply, perilously  
getting by on our wits from here to there.  
Einstein chalks slowly across the blackboard,

erases, writes again. Mozart flings  
his fluttering notes onto the rigid staff.  
The drones fly straight to any target. This morning  
what I am thinking about is circles  
and the straight lines that rule us  
while earth abides in all sorts of splendors,  
knowing its limitations. The light  
of every morning curls forth,  
oh beautifully, then circles toward the dark.  
Obama works, prays, then grabs his scrim of sleep.

## Trying to Be Thoughtful in the First Brights of Dawn

I am thinking, or trying to think, about all the  
imponderables for which we have  
no answers, yet endless interest all the  
range of our lives, and it's

good for the head no doubt to undertake such  
meditation; Mystery, after all,  
is God's other name, and deserves our

considerations surely. But, but—  
excuse me now, please; it's morning, heavenly  
bright,  
and my irrepressible heart begs me to hurry on  
into the next exquisite moment.

# More Evidence

## 1.

The grosbeak sings with a completely cherishable roughness.

The yellow and orange and scarlet trees—what do they denote but willingness, and the flamboyance of change?

With what words can I convince you of the casualness with which the white swans fly?

It doesn't matter to me if the woodchuck and the turtle are not always, and thoughtfully, considering their lives and making decisions, the certainty that they are doing this at all—that alters everything.

Do you give a thought now and again to the essential sparrow, the necessary toad?

Just as truly as the earth is ours, we belong to it. The tissue of our minds is made of it, and the soles of our feet, as fully as the tiger's claw, the branch of the whitebark pine,

the voices of the birds, the dog-tooth violet  
and the tooth of the dog.

Have you ever seen a squirrel swim? I have.

Is it not incredible, that in the acorn something  
has hidden an entire tree?

“For there is nothing that grows or lives that  
can approach the feathery grace, the symmetry  
of form, or the lacy elegance of pattern of the  
Ferns: and to be blind to all this beauty is  
nothing less than calamitous.”

In Australia there is a cloud called The  
Morning Glory.

Okay, I confess to wanting to make a literature  
of praise.

## 2.

Where are you when you're not thinking?

Frightening, isn't it?

Where are you when you're not feeling anything?

Oh, worse!

Except for faith and imagination, nature is that hard fortress you can't get out of.

Some persons are captive to love, others would make the beloved a captive. Which one are you?

I think I have not lived a single hour of my life by calculation.

There are in this world a lot of devils with wondrous smiles. Also, many unruly angels.

The life of the body is, I suppose, along with everything else, a lesson. I mean, if lessons are what you look for.

Faith: this is the engine of my head, my breast bone, my toes.

### 3.

It is salvation if one can step forth from the clutter of one's mind into that open space—that almost holy space—called work.

Emerson: how the elegance of his language can make me weep over my own inadequacy.

Music: what so many sentences aspire to be.

Or, how sweet just to say of a great, burly man: he's a honey.

Or of the fox: his neat trot. The donkey, his sorrowful plodding. The cheetah: his clean leap. The alligator: his lunge.

Do you hear the rustle and outcry on the page?  
Do you hear its longing?

Words are too wonderful for words. The vibrant translation of things to ideas. Hello there.  
My best greetings to you.

Lord, there are so many fires, so many words, in my heart. It's going to take something I can't even imagine, to put them all out.

#### 4.

Let laughter come to you now and again, that sturdy friend.

The impulse to leap off the cliff, when the body falsely imagines it might fly, may be restrained by reason, also by modesty. Of the two possibilities, take your choice, and live.



Refuse all cooperation with the heart's death.

**5.**

Sing, if you can sing, and if not still be musical inside yourself.

## **Whispered Poem**

I have been risky in my endeavors,  
I have been steadfast in my loves;

Oh Lord, consider these when you judge me.

## The Poet Is Told to Fill Up More Pages

But, where are the words?

Not in my pocket.

Not in the refrigerator.

Not in my savings account.

So I sit, harassed, with my notebook.

It's a joke, really, and not a good one.

For fun I try a few commands myself.

I say to the rain, stop raining.

I say to the sun, that isn't anywhere nearby,

Come back, and come fast.

Nothing happens.

So this is all I can give you,

not being the maker of what I do,

but only the one that holds the pencil.

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz.

Make of it what you will.

# AFTERWORD

## Percy

(2002–2009)

This—I said to Percy when I had left  
our bed and gone  
out onto the living room couch where  
he found me apparently doing nothing—this  
is called *thinking*.

It's something people do,  
not being entirely children of the earth,  
like a dog or a tree or a flower.

His eyes questioned such an activity.  
Well, okay, he said. If you say so. Whatever  
it is. Actually  
I like kissing better.

And next to me,  
tucked down his curly head  
and, sweet as a flower, slept.

## NOTES

The Rilke epigraph is from the Ninth Elegy, translation by C. F. MacIntyre.

The last line of the poem titled “Swan” remembers the final sentence of Rilke’s poem “Archaic Torso of Apollo” as translated by Robert Bly: “You must change your life.”

The quotation in “More Evidence (1)” is by Herbert Durand, from *The Field Book of Common Ferns* (G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1928).

Page 45, the author acknowledges Gerard Manley Hopkins’ poem “Hurrahing in Harvest.”

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*Bark*: “Percy Wakes Me,” “The Sweetness of Dogs,” “Percy”

*Michigan Quarterly*: “Swan”

*Onearth*: “Beans Green and Yellow”

*Orion*: “How Heron Comes”

*Parabola*: “Passing the Unworked Field,” “April,” “Mist in the Morning, Nothing Around Me but Sand and Roses,” “When,” “In Your Hands”

*Shenandoah*: “Just Around the House, Early in the Morning,” “Tom Dancer’s Gift of a Whitebark Pine Cone,” “The Poet Dreams of the Mountain,” “Trying to Be Thoughtful in the First Brights of Dawn”

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