

End of Desire

Fifty Poems

Hughlings Himwich

These poems are finished.
Others will come. There's to be
no more than a hundred, out of
a number I blush to remember.
A hundred is more than enough.

Some are waiting their turn,
but what's finally out or in
will be a near-death reckoning,
if I am still compos mentis.
A hundred is more than enough.

There are other poems, uncount-
able, written in joy and grief,
for students, family, strangers,
and friends. My boat's too small.
A thousand poems is not enough.

POEMS

Titles are click enabled.

[End of Desire](#)

[Marginalia](#)

[Still at Play](#)

[Lucubrations](#)

[Fifty Words](#)

[This side of silence](#)

[Into the Wild](#)

[Openings](#)

[White Water](#)

[High Ridge](#)

[Kate and Daisy](#)

[by Lamplight](#)

[A Song of Spring](#)

[The Evening Light](#)

[Time In the Garden](#)

[Mother and Son](#)

[Papa Crying](#)

[Father's Gift](#)

[Reading Lesson](#)

[Once my student](#)

[A Foolish Man](#)

[Dancing Lessons](#)

[Alone Together](#)

[Were you ever here?](#)

[Stay with me](#)

[A Perfect Thing](#)

[A Girl](#)

[Wanting Out](#)

[The Barren Sea](#)

[Jumping the Gap](#)

[Phaiakia](#)

[Polytropos](#)

[Tell my story](#)

[Loomings](#)

[All of It](#)

[Dry Grass](#)

[The Night Above the Dingle Starry](#)

[A Moon for Children](#)

[Caught in Our Chains Like the Sea](#)

[du Pré](#)

[The Westerlies](#)

[Lacrimosa](#)

[Old Blue](#)

[This My Ship](#)

[Immemorial](#)

[An Odyssey of Our own](#)

[What isn't There](#)

[Windswept Days](#)

[Pianissimo](#)

[Prayer](#)

End of Desire

On the shore the children
throw stones to test
their strength.

No one wins.

A mountain hovers
over the river, a ribbon
of light. There is only
the silent splash of stone.

Marginalia

I would write a poem
in the margins
and settle in
that open land.

Let others fill the page
with praise of life
found in the streets.

My words and letters
seek the garden path.

May the words I write
fill the blank, open hours
with what we lost.

Still at Play

I celebrate youth,
the youth in my students,
the unspent youth in myself.

As a boy, I ran free
leaping fences, dodging trains,
roughhoused with friends,
every bruise an honor earned,
running naked in the summer rain,
stripped down to what makes us all the same.
O those disapproving eyes!

I lost teeth, broke bones,
came crying home.
It still aches where I took stitches.
I never felt more alive.

Later came the greater danger
of what Thoreau called
quiet desperation.
I escaped through the raucous play
of words and their meanings,
ideas that put me at risk of ridicule.

Yet I am willing to believe
the equality of all that lives
is not merely the idea
of a boy at play,
but a risk still worth taking.

Lucubrations

It took all of thirty seconds
to get this right. If there's insight
into the human heart, it's yours, not mine.
So many times I've worked all night,
driving nails into my brain.
When morning came,
there was no verse worth the candle,
but just now when I had given up,
words with wings flew around my head
and so, glad at heart, I can claim to be
a poet again and fall dead asleep.

Fifty Words

We blindly feel our way
Along the wall, then think
To dig, but never deep enough.
On the other side, we homer on,
Some fifty words to hold against
The light. A tiger leaps through us
As if we were not there.
It mauls its prey. We break
For lunch.

This side of silence

Break the silence
and ten thousand things
ask for your attention,
a dress you saw in the window,
a map of the world
before Plato lived,
hands reaching out
to give and take,
words moving
down the page.

Into the Wild

In the wild
you hear the sighing
in the trees,
the thump of mountains,
the river's claw.

It begins to rain.
You fall
through the night,
the deepest sleep,
so near to death.

In the morning,
there comes the call of birds
to fly with them.
It matters not
you have no wings.

Openings

One crow
is a gathering
of many.
The woods are deep.

Night opens.
Stars come out of dark longing.
Ah, the fragrance.

Again, in spring,
the earth sings.
Birds catch the melody.
Leaves unbutton.

Snowdrops blossom
in my hand.
When will you come?

Allow me to return to where
I began dust and grass

White Water

Along the river
we stopped to rest

and found a pump,
a metal cup,
the water cold and good.

Ahead, the rocks.
No one thought
it was the end.

High Ridge

The mist on the mountains lifts
ghostly greens glimmer
a new day darkens the valley
far below, my fingers tracing
the high ridge
that runs above your eyes:
a sudden swoop of wind and wing

Kate and Daisy

The sister and daughter
I've never had
have taught me
what it's like
not to be
a brother or father
to Kate and Daisy.

They sing to me
in my old age
of tears and laughter,
a lullaby,
and of the children
I'll never know
and yet do love.

by Lamplight

There is before me in my room
a broken lamp that yet gives light
from years ago when father told me
of little mice who ruled the house
and left my room a fearful sight,
my toys and clothes scattered all about.
He smiled his smile, as I do mine,
beneath this lamp and distant light.

A Song of Spring

He sang a silly rhyme
to space out time:
Spring is here.
Watch out for bears,
while the rain
washed his children clean.
Then came the thunder.
They begged their father
to roar again.

The Evening Light

The old man took
the boy's hand in his
to say farewell
but the child
held him close,

and so he waited
until the light
was fading
and his mother
called him in.

The child ran
for the light
of an open door.
The old man turned
to the rising moon.

It was time, she said,
to come to her.

Time In the Garden

A child walks me
through the garden.
She knows the names
of all the flowers.
Rhododendrons
make her laugh.

We find the shade
of a tree where
robins build
their nest. She
sings a song
for the sparrows.
We do a little dance.

Then she tells me
I am dreaming.

Mother and Son

As a child, he played alone.
He only cried when it rained.

His mother kept his dreams alive,
died when he was twelve.

The rain a river fell.
He followed her in the boat she built for him.

Papa Crying

Papa cried last night.
When I awoke, he had gone.

I remember the moon
escaping through the window.

There had been a question.
No one answered, only the darkness.

Father's Gift

It rained hard that night.
Dad had read a poem I wrote
about angels falling,
littering the ground with anemone.

All it meant to him was that I was lost,
my brown eyes confirming the diagnosis.
He would know. He was among the first
to link the biochemistry of the brain
to Jupiter and Mars, serotonin to the speed of light.

O hoher Baum im Ohr. That's Rilke's tree in my ear.
To Dad, Rilke, too, was sick in the head.
So, there I was on the road, Rilke
singing, the trees leaning in.
I could live with that.

Reading Lesson

(for Peter)

Mom, who is dad talking to?
Friends who write.

Where did he meet them?
In books.

Is he talking to himself?
Yes.

Is he crazy?
Yes, a little.

Will I be crazy like dad one day?
Just keep reading.

Can I read dad's books some day?
Of course, he is talking to you.

Are you crazy too, Mom?
A little. I am talking to you, aren't I?

But Dad is so quiet when he writes.
Yes, he talks and talks.

Like me?
Yes, little one,
just like you.

Once my student

When I came to school today,
a bear came along with me.
No one noticed
except for a girl,
the light streaming
in her hair:
“You can’t fool me,”
and rose with wings
to a nearby tree.

On my way to class,
a bird flew past
and there she was
by my side:
“Who are you?”
She looked surprised
I didn’t know.

I growled and padded on
hand and foot
to teach my students.

A Foolish Man

As a child, he had always felt close to birds.
They revealed a world to which he belonged.

As a 6-year-old and then a teenager
and later as a father and teacher,

he never stopped hoping the birds
would not fly off when he approached.

He blamed himself: if he were
a better person, at peace with himself,

the birds would perch on his hat.
He scolded himself, such foolish thoughts!

Then one day, a bird did come to him
but only to drive him from her nest.

It made him sad. Returning home,
he slept the sleep of the dead,

but when he woke in the morning,
the birds were singing for his life.

Dancing Lessons

On the street
that is not a street,
women sing and ask
to dance with me.
They don't understand
my legs are sticks.
They circle round me
faster and faster
until it's me that's dizzy,
my feet moving like a poem.

Alone Together

From where I sit
I hear the rain
the desert blooms

It's only a room
on a street
like yours

Outside a girl
gathers flowers
she could be crying

Were you ever here?

Before turning out
the light, I woke
to find you gone,
the bed tightly drawn,
your comb as clean
as your getaway.

In the morning
you just smiled
at my dreams,
as you always do,
and said goodbye
a thousand times.

Stay with me

Time's gonna get
the best of me.

Stay with me,
sing the river

of you and me
and the Sea.

Where I'm bound,
you are the wind,

the waves from shore
to shore,

always home
with you alone.

A Perfect Thing

A perfect thing is known by its imperfection:
a journey that takes you where you've always been
a love endangered by wanting more
a padded paw without a thumb
a cut that bleeds so cleanly it doesn't hurt
a man who wants nothing more than to die as he has lived,
at peace with a broken heart

A Girl

There's one who's hurt
and needs your eyes
to see the night
comes with love.

She sleeps alone
in the woods
ashamed of what's
been done to her.

The truth the moon
guards in its light
and waits for you
to bring her home.

Wanting Out

Though it's
always spring
in this valley

and though
we see
all the colors,

the only flowers
are those
you bring to us.

It's only then
do we remember
we are shades.

The Barren Sea

The Sirens weave your love
of self into song. Thunder,
birdcall, wind and wave
draw you close. No thought
of home holds you back,
the song now a bird of prey.
Too late you see the rocks,
the shore white with bones.

Jumping the Gap

I jump the gap
and fire flowers,
today tomorrow
never comes,
a tree a tuning fork,
a raucous heart.

There's yet a girl
beating a drum,
a tiger leaping
through the dark,
a babe abandoned
in an eagle's nest.

My song goes on,
a dying ember.
A raven's wing
covers all.

A whirl of wind
sweeps us all along.

Phaiakia

Digging in the garden
I find but earthly treasure:
worms, beetles, and ocean shells
and a blackened shard to cast away
where now stands a graceful palm
and a girl, spellbound by a stranger's words.
She lingers there by a stream
and hears the wind in his song
and knows she's free,
her mind as wild as the sea.
His too, far from home.

Polytropos

I am lost
in a labyrinth
of my own turning.

Before me stands
a beast born of stars.
It's his words

I'm writing
to come home
and die in bed.

Tell my story

For Scrooby, in admiration

ὦ πόποι

Am I awake,
or did I dream you up?
Now so late in my journey
it doesn't matter
if like Ariel you do my bidding
and sing of that ancient sailor
who fell off Circe's roof.
I too would have my oar
mark a waking grave.

Loomings

“I account it high time to get to sea
as soon as I can.” – Ishmael

You’re always saying
the wind is weeping
when it’s not the wind
or rain but you and I
who can’t explain
why we’re crying,
except for the bombs
and roadside explosives
the hate that sounds
like a band on Friday night,
or the truth writ on the wall,
Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?
like not having one idea
you can call your own.

Yes, the wind is weeping,
flooding the world
a second time.

All of It

for Pauline Eaton

In the beginning Love was so alone in the darkness
only by chance did he know he was there.

In that Time before time,
he discovered that if he whirled like a dervish
feathery bits and pieces of his colossal body
became flames and feathers.
Some had the shape of white linen, others bats.
Farther off, bits of silver and gold
arranged themselves as constellations,
though their great stories had not yet been told.
Theseus had not yet sailed for Crete.

Having never seen himself,
he looked upon this luminous jumble
as simply Other
and called it Friend.

Then, seized by what we would call inspiration,
he let out whoops of joy:

SAL-WAY-TE

WA-LAY-TE

Sound and sense began to attract and repel each other.
In what would seem to us an endless instant
strange figures, stiff as dolls, began to appear.

Love was surprised to discover
his breath could bring them to life.
He was even able to forget
all their laughter and quarreling
were no more than himself.

Soon they vied for his favor,
throwing their own limbs into the fire.
Others burned themselves as torches.
Only then did he stop his spinning
and take up knitting.
He worked seven days, weaving together
scraps of bone and soul, dreaming while still awake,
and then at last fell asleep.
When he woke,
there stood before him a winged Other.

Love called her Anima.
She felt as close to him
as breath to wind.

ANIMA ANIMUS

ANIMUS ANIMA

After each cycle of seven days of waking dreams
he would fall asleep,
and upon waking discover other winged forms.

He named them
Twilight and Shadow,
Dawn and Cobweb,
Shifting Sand,
Trumpet,
Midnight Blue.

They brought him
earth, air, fire, and water
as gifts.

In return,
Love dreamed a world for them.

Dry Grass

It was not you I was looking for or needed, nor was I the Ramon or Ramona you had in mind. We made do, as they say, and built a house and a life several miles from the Itacah River to be safe when the spring rains came. There were no children, of course, but there was a garden of stone, sand, and stalks of jibati that kept the land and constellations in place. When you died, we went right on living together in the house built when you were as young and old as you would ever be. The folks on the other side of the Itacah never come this far west. They say these are the badlands, but we call it home. There's no need for talking. There's nothing to say. Don't mistake these words for speech. It's just wind sweeping through tall dry grass.

The Night Above the Dingle Starry

I am not far
from No Man's
Last Gas & Grill.

When you've gone
as far as you can,
there you find
all the poets
you have loved:
Yeats, who yodels
no tomorrows,
and Dylan Thomas,
who's still drinking
for all the others
who sing in turn
verba sua supersubstantalia
that, like our daily bread,
keep them alive.

Then, as if you know
where you're going,
you wave goodbye
and leave the poets
in the dust.

The only sign
along the road
is a Great Horse
of the Sea,
baring its teeth
at the dawn,
ever and never
coming on.

You run out of gas
but travel fast
and see the night
with Dylan's eyes.

A Moon for Children

If only age made you wise,
I'd wear my rags like a child
And hold the moon in my hands.
If only age made you strong,
I'd speak the truth of the dark,
A lie as lovely as these stars,
And write a poem full of tears.

Caught in Our Chains Like the Sea

It will come with a rush of wind
or as a wolf
that chases shadows.

It will come from the sea
as Poseidon's snakes
did for Laocoon.

It will come as a lion's roar
after it has made its kill,
its mouth bloody.

It will come when your song
breaks like waves
on the shore.

It will come when every breath,
to your surprise,
is your last.

It will come as an eagle
we cannot see,
but only be.

du Pré

The song falls below sound
and begins again beyond our hearing,
erupting now as light
bird and wind,
your fingers driving the bow across the strings,
a hammer against the silence,
calling us to hear the music.
You stand before us as ourselves.

The Westerlies

The man's so old
his face is gone.
All that's left
is his soul.

The sea rolls
in its waves
what the birds
leave behind.

The soul sails
east on borrowed
breath, becomes
the wind.

Then the dawn.

Lacrimosa

The music echoed
east and west.

How far above,
how far below

it was heard,
no one knows

except the choir
of the dead.

Here there were
only tears.

Old Blue

Past eighty on the horizon line,
I still wear that old blue shirt
I wore when I was twenty,
chasing girls who lived closeby,
getting lucky, live or die,
but now I've been too much in the sun.
The gals just laugh when I stare.
I no longer smoke and barely sleep,
and yet I dream as I always have.
Back then I learned to dig the blues
and wash my hands in heaven's dirt.
I'll wear that blue shirt to the grave.
Look for me in the sky or when it rains.
The sky's still blue above the clouds.
At night, Old Blue sleeps by my side.

This My Ship

Let my words
fall with the rain
and make the sea
rich with meaning,

words that strike
from the sky,
the thunder booming.

Let there be streams,
rivers, and oceans
of thought and desire
into which we disappear,

waves making the earth
roll and pitch, a ship
on which to raise a flag
to bid farewell to those
whose tears make it rain.

Immemorial

A tree grows in these words
in remembrance of the dead
lost to all memory, its root
the earth upon which I stand
searching through the night,
its leaves leaping into fire
giving to each lost soul
a home in the deathless dark.

An Odyssey of Our own

You will come to the end
of your high story,
your body broken,
your spirit weak and alone,
the goal still distant,
yet on your lips, a song
of no regret as you
set out a final time
on a ship unriggered,
your self the wind
and sky and sea.

What isn't There

Though I am known to God
as Hughlings, my friends call me
Hugh and leave it at that,
leaving me half a man.

Though I do not believe
in any god or have any Jesus,
I yet retain the genius
of a soul-at-large.

It is as if during the day
I can still see the stars
ablaze, circling round,
and truly see what isn't

there. My friends say
it is a harmless madness
but look long into my eyes.
They suspect I am blind.

Windswept Days

*Westron wynde, when wyll thow blow,
The smalle rayne downe can rayne.
Cryst, yf my love were in my armys,
And I yn my bed agayne.*

See the child at play
in wind and rain
and then the man,
sewing together
his windswept days
before the dying.

O westron wynde,
when wyll thow blow
and take me riding
once again.

* “Westron Wynde” is among the earliest and most beautiful songs in English. The poet and original music are unknown, and perhaps better so.

Pianissimo

I am the river you drift upon
and do not know it's who you are.
I carry you through a sea of changes:
a father falls, a child is born,
a mother dies, but not her love.
I am the song you sing but never hear.

Prayer

Let there be a river
that runs through my words
to a sea to which I will come
when my breath runs at last
with the wind through the trees
and sweeps down the mountain
to where we all begin. I am
already as old as the rain
that falls in the fields.
All the flowers sing for joy.

Index of Titles (click enabled)

A Foolish Man

A Girl

A Moon for Children

A Perfect Thing

A Song of Spring

All of It

Alone Together

An Odyssey of Our own

by Lamplight

Caught in Our Chains Like the Sea

Dancing Lessons

Dry Grass

du Pré

End of Desire

Father's Gift

Fifty Words

High Ridge

Immemorial

Into the Wild

Jumping the Gap

Kate and Daisy

Lacrimosa

Loomings

Lucubrations

Marginalia

Mother and Son

Old Blue

Once my student

Openings

Papa Crying

Phaiakia

Pianissimo

Polytropos

Prayer

Reading Lesson

Stay with me

Still at Play

Tell my story

The Barren Sea

The Evening Light

The Night Above the Dingle Starry

The Westerlies

This My Ship

This side of silence

Time In the Garden

Wanting Out

Were you ever here?

What isn't There

White Water

Windswept Days