

Love is my Project

I am afraid to write.

I am afraid.

I fear that collecting, organizing,
And presenting my thoughts is too daunting.
I fear exposing myself to unwanted criticism.
I fear my own criticism.
I fear that my voice will not be compelling.

I worry about cadence.
I worry about flow.
I worry about word placement and tonality.
I worry about the subjective reader.

I fear being wrong.
I fear being right!
I fear making hard stances
Which fail under broader systems of thought.
I fear I have no business writing at all.
Who granted me the authority?
What school, institution, agency?

Might I tell myself that my opinion matters
And believe it?
Aren't we all competing in the economy of attention?

I fear that my prose will not compare to Proust's (it won't)
or my philosophy to Kant's (it won't)

I fear that I will never play a significant part in dismantling any system
or in reconstructing one
I fear that nothing I say will hold relevance
Like passages from Thoreau, or Baldwin, or Kafka have for me.
I fear that I will never make anything of writing.

I worry about conveying ideas simply.
I worry about omitting alternate points of view.
I worry about organizational and structural points.
I worry about stating something that has previously been
stated succinctly by someone else.

I fear conflict.
I fear resolution.
I fear my experience and my inexperience.
I desperately fear being drab.

I am afraid to tell stories.
I am afraid not to tell them.
I am afraid for every reason imaginable.
I am afraid for no good reason at all.

It was June of 2021 and I was sitting alone at a picnic bench in New Orleans' Audubon Park. The shade from the nearby oak tree, possessing aesthetic completion with its complementary Spanish moss, had shifted to my right, and the sun had become unforgiving. I placed myself at this bench in the hopes of absorbing some of the serene offerings of the park, that they might lead me beyond my writer's block. Instead, I found myself squinting into my laptop screen at its maximum brightness, hands placed on my furrowed brow line for shade, with beads of sweat accumulating on my scalp. At the time I was feeling the rumblings of a story needing to be told—my story—and I was determined not to let these physical elements deter me from conjuring the words. The desire for the words to commit themselves to the page had become overbearing, for I was weighted with an awareness of the totality of their emotion which I was unable to give voice to. The problem with my 'story' was that I found myself unable to fashion the strong causal nexus required to create narrative out of my recollections. My recollections were suspended in an inordinate nebula of emotion. I had come to retreat in New Orleans because this puzzle—this *Who am I?*—required a renewed, aggravated focus of my mental efforts. I had quit my job in order to take the words to task. I decided I would become a writer, for by mastering the words I would become a master of myself. When I could read my story back to myself, I would know who I had become, and by familiarizing myself with the character I was I would know how to advance my life forward.