

The Page as Artifact

If you're spending too much time on the page and not enough time outside the page, then you'll need to find more time to find poetry. The page isn't poetry: rather, the page is poetry's artifact, poetry's afterthought. The page is what happens after the fact.

Poetry happens outside the page. Poetry is an instant. It strikes us oh-so-quickly; it makes us mourn. It happens when life too painfully or too blissfully filters through us. By the time we've acknowledged it, poetry has passed.

That's why we turn then to the page. We want to filter that poetry through the page to give that poetry a place to live again, because it's since stopped living.

The page is artifact to poetry, that is, to what has been.

Can you give to someone else *what has been*? That's the task of the poet. Over six thousand light-years away, almost one thousand years ago, a supernova explosion occurred in the constellation Taurus. When it happened, that was poetry. The Crab Nebula is artifact. We can wonder at its explosion because of that artifact.

Poetry should allow others to wonder at explosions.

Did something explode inside of you? Did something recently die? Is there, today, enough poetry to confront the page?

The line will break; the line will break, and you will need to answer why. Can you answer why? I came upon an answer once, and it was too true; so I stopped with all the line breaking because it frightened me too much. You should know why the line breaks; you should be able to say why. If you don't know why, then you should face each day, not the page, but the break.

Because things will break, and their breaking will make you a poet.

Are you generous enough? Have you enough to give? Or have you lost trust and, as a result, cannot give enough? Sometimes, a poet loses trust. A poet often does not give enough. Giving takes a long time to learn. Giving may not be something that's taught.

When life filters through you, and it has given you a gift (and you've already been gifted as a poet, that is, with the swift ability to conjure language), will you be poet

enough to return this gift on the page? Life will filter through you and deposit gifts your way. You must be astute enough to see what each thing has to say.

Poetry is an instant. It is an instant in which transcendence is achieved, where a miracle occurs, and knowledge, experience, and memory are obliterated and transformed into awe. The instant passes quickly, so quickly, and then you are just your regular self again. This instant is what has been; the page is artifact to that.

Is it love that you're after? Immortality? Friendship? Acceptance? Fame? I want to know what your motives are. You should have no motives. Your communion should be wholly sincere.

Sincerity takes time. Sincerity doesn't come easily. The addressee still evades, eludes, escapes you. Is your addressee somewhere enjoying life without you? Or does your addressee flitter somewhere between two clouds? Your prettily packaged artifact: I want to know for whom it is intended.

These things can be learned: rhythm, rhyme, imagery, metaphor, form, synecdoche, line. The tools of the poetry trade are there; they are given easily over to you. But do you know what use there is for metaphor or what form is for? What equivalents exist of these tools in the stars?

So nice of the ancient Greeks to have left us Draco and Scorpius, Cassiopeia and the Pleiades, arrows aimed finitely toward infinity.

They knew that artifice is what we use when dressing the artifact.

The page is where we turn to resuscitate that.