

**Walking in Two Worlds at Once:
A playshop that leaps between details and dreams**

Something to think about:

Part of the magic of the poem is that it goes beneath the story. It is more than a retelling of what happened, though it is that, too. I think that the best poems will allow us to engage both our sense memory and our emotional memory. They ask us to walk in two worlds at once—a world of details and images—the world of pagers, cell phones, to do lists, robinsong, blizzard and mud. And also they ask us to inhabit a world dedicated to meaning making--the world we inhabit when we dream, imagine and feel.

How do we do that in our own poems?

- a) images that show
- b) a chink, and by chink, I mean a place where we see in past the details to the workings of the heart. You've heard you should show, not tell. Yes. And. This is the part where we spell it out, a little, anyway. A small telling. Or at least where we allow for the reader to see in.

Today:

- 1) Let's read a few poems that exemplify this leaping between the two worlds. Choose a line and write for 20 minutes. Use stream of consciousness and keep your pen moving. If you get stuck, repeat what you just wrote, go to a new prompt, start asking questions.

In a Time of Economic Downturn, I Gaze Up at the Sky

Michael Blumenthal

"Tonight when I get home ..."

August

Mary Oliver

What does your body have to accept?

To Hold

Li-Young Lee

"So we're dust. In the meantime ..."

Failing and Flying

Jack Gilbert (which blends myth and personal story)

"Everyone forgets that ..."

2) Collect images: any nearby location. stairwell, street, park, sidewalk. Use all the senses to jot down what you experience. Be specific. Gather as many images as possible in 15-20 minutes.

3) Putting it all together. Try to weave ideas and images from the two writings into one.

In a Time of Economic Downturn, I Gaze Up at the Sky

Michael Blumenthal

The sun came up this morning, just
as I knew it would. My morning coffee
tasted exactly like yesterday's: a tad bitter,
but nonetheless revivifying. The faces
of our dead Presidents on Mount Rushmore,
are still there, speaking of their trials
and tribulations from their scenic outlook
of granite. Tonight, when I get home from work,
my lover will make her way downstairs,
wearing my favorite underwear. We'll lie
in bed, pretending to watch a movie, both
knowing what we really want. The Dow,
no doubt, will continue its slide, just as the moon,
that lozenge of indifference, will continue
its path downward among the clouds. All of us—
sun, moon, coffee, clouds— might feel a twinge
of guilt: such indifference to profit and loss!
Yet, all over the world, tiny birds with broken wings
and injuries of all sorts are making their way
back to their nests, even the waterlogged anhinga
is drying its wings in the sun. It's good to know
so much keeps going on, despite everything.
Come closer, sweetheart, let's put the film on pause,
let's profit from whatever we've got—before
the closing bell, before the ruffraff of recovery
finds us and brings us down again.

more >>

August

Mary Oliver

When the blackberries hang
swollen in the woods, in the brambles
nobody owns, I spend

all day among the high
branches, reaching
my ripped arms, thinking

of nothing, cramming
the black honey of summer
into my mouth; all day my body

accepts what it is. In the dark
creeks that run by there is
this thick paw of my life darting among

the black bells, the leaves; there is
this happy tongue.

To Hold

Li-Young Lee

So we're dust. In the meantime, my wife and I
make the bed. Holding opposite edges of the sheet,
we raise it, billowing, then pull it tight,
measuring by eye as it falls into alignment
between us. We tug, fold, tuck. And if I'm lucky,
she'll remember a recent dream and tell me.

One day we'll lie down and not get up.
One day, all we guard will be surrendered.

Until then, we'll go on learning to recognize
what we love, and what it takes
to tend what isn't for our having.
So often, fear has led me
to abandon what I know I must relinquish
in time. But for the moment,
I'll listen to her dream,

and she to mine, our mutual hearing calling
more and more detail into the light
of a joint and fragile keeping.

Failing and Flying

Jack Gilbert

Everyone forgets that Icarus also flew.
It's the same when love comes to an end,
or the marriage fails and people say
they knew it was a mistake,
that everybody said it would never work.
That she was old enough to know better.
But anything worth doing is worth doing badly.
Like being there by that summer ocean
on the other side of the island while
love was fading out of her, the stars
burning so extravagantly those nights
that anyone could tell you they would never last.
Every morning she was asleep in my bed
like a visitation, the gentleness in her
like antelope standing in the dawn mist.
Each afternoon I watched her coming back
through the hot stony field after swimming,
the sea light behind her and the huge sky
on the other side of that.
Listened to her while we ate lunch.
How can they say the marriage failed?
Like the people who came back from Provence
(when it was Provence) and said
it was pretty but the food was greasy.
I believe Icarus was not failing as he fell,
but just coming to the end of his triumph.

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