

The Why of Poetry

It has to mean something to me,
That's why I write
That's why I read

To explain or state or simply say
What has meaning to me.

Then why do poems have titles?
Why DO poems have titles?
(sadly) Why do poems have titles?
(philosophically) Why ... do .. poems have .. titles?

Hell, I don't know. And I don't care.

The problem with so much poetry,
Is it never says anything to me.
Oh, I wish it would, I know it could
But in the end ...

Why is it when someone feels a thing
Instead of just saying it, they speak-sing, in some unnatural rhythm
Christ, it's embarrassing. No one talks that way - No one listens that way.

They just tune in to some intellectual "bad neighborhood" in their brain
And pretend that what their ears are processing isn't inane.

Floating and fluttering, a bird on the wing ...
A feather, a raindrop, a kiss, AHH! Any damn thing.

So, I'll sit here and wait.
Sooner or later, someone's gonna say something
I can comprehend without turning it into some cerebral dead-end.

Yeah, I'll just sit here and wait. That's what I'll do. Just sit here and wait.

But first ...

Starting with the obvious - I'm old, overweight, gray-haired, and not a fashionable dresser.

Not so obvious is - I don't care.

Corcoran males tend not to live long. It's a tradition, of sorts - or, just a fact, really.

Whatever it is, it means I'm a ticking bomb.

And when you're on a short fuse, there isn't much to care about.

Thing is, I've been on a short fuse, of my own making, most of my life.

I decided in grammar school, maybe 10-years-old or so, that the world would end in 1960.

It didn't - obviously - but for a couple of years

I was blissfully unaware of all the important stuff

10-year-olds were supposed to care about.

My teen years were tougher. I ducked some of the insanity in a seminary,

A monastery, really, cloistered away from it all.

Then hid out in an all-boys high school until college.

A few hits to my self-esteem, mostly related to girls, but I learned -

Staying out of the pool lessens one's chances of drowning!

College darn near killed me.

The inane 'keeping up game': maroon, navy sweaters, weejuns, smelly aftershave.

The sexual and academic - pretty much a disaster

The financial - 7 bucks a week, and all the pocket change an unskilled, untrained,
socially-backward recluse could muster. No, no money either.

What saved me was the draft - July of '69, a BA in hand -

I kinda figured, I was likely never coming back. I mean, 55,000 dead,

half million physically or emotionally maimed, kids, mostly. What a waste ...!

But it saved me in this sense ...

I didn't have to worry about dating ... having a girlfriend or a job,
or dressing in anything other than olive - drab that is.

Oh, I hated it, sure, I didn't like being scared,

Or having to put up with so much stupidity. Yet the ludicrous,
mind-numbing anonymity of it all was, in its own way, a blessing.

And I never got over it.

To this day, I am incredibly aware of the possibility this moment may be my last.

Which is not a macabre thought. On the contrary,

It's liberating. A tonic for a worried mind. Absolution for a troubled soul.

And that's my conception of me -

Blissfully, blessedly, basically, a dead man walking.

And I'm kind-of loving it.

The upshot of it all is ...

I was tasked in a class, in 2010, to bring in three things which inspire me ... It was impossible - there aren't three things ... there's 300, 3000, 3 million – hell, it's infinite!

The fact I'm alive inspires me. Irish, the language, inspires me. Words, writing, reading, poetry, prose, plays, reciting, hybrid pieces ... the act of writing, itself, they all inspire me.

Dance ... song ... art – plastic and otherwise ... stone cutting, stained glass, painting, sculpture ... Colors ... trees ... flowers ... food ... feelings ... The list goes on and on ...

People inspire me. Even assholes ... you know, blagards and blow-hards – even they inspire me – to at least find something or someone else more pleasant as fast as is humanly possible.

Finding more pleasant things – that inspires me, always ... regardless of impetus.

Old things, new things, the sea, sky, wind, mountains, coastline, lakes, rivers, beaches ... It would be easier to bring in three things that don't inspire me ... they're all around: chairs, tables, wall sockets, paper-towel dispensers ... I don't care about them ... cars, careers, caterers – not the people, they inspire me, or can ... as long as they're not assholes ... but the act of catering doesn't do anything for me ...

Loneliness, love, hope, despair, joy - emotions - they inspire me ... as long as they're not banal. Sad about your mascara running? NOT inspirational. You didn't score more points in the basketball game? Yeah, right - and the starving are supposed to what? Care? But when the starving care about something, that inspires me.

You see, I spun so out of control so long ago that this is simply impossible - utterly impossible. The tattoos on Blue's back - lobstermen - Lena's long hair - Japanese joinery - Lauren's sideways glances - the Eiffel Tower, Mogdiliani, Mekong Thai - the straightforwardness in Alex's face - all of that and more adages ... you know, things to live by ... or try at least ... like:

Avoid assholes ... and try – try – TRY to never be one ...

Leave everything and everyone I touch better for having done so - or try, An Amish thing

Tell all the truth faster ... but nicely ... or try anyway ...

Never say something about someone that I haven't said to them first – unless it's good.

Ceramics ... weaving ... looms and spinning wheels ... stories ... sitting around fires, peat ... OMG peat fires ... and pints ... pastels ... earth tones ... etched glass ... hills, valleys, small towns, gingerbread houses ... lighting ... dancers ... oh, my God, dancers! ... forests and fields, streams ... screams ... Jaysus, somebody hit the “off” button ... PLEASE !!!

It's just bloody impossible.

That's the why of poetry – for me, at least.