

Jim Thompson's Spiritual Poetry Class #69

Wednesday, September 22, 2021

5 pm PT

Dear Friends:

Call this **James Wright Week!** Any poet that Mary Oliver writes 3 poems about deserves our attention.

Here are the poems for this week.

- **Three Poems for James Wright** by Mary Oliver. I wonder how well Mary Oliver knew James Wright. There certainly was a deep connection.
- **Hook** by James Wright. Turns out James Wright taught at Macalester College, one of my alma maters. Not sure I was there when he was, and I didn't pay much attention to poetry then even if so. But I'm glad there is that connection between us. Does reading this poem make you feel cold?
- **A Blessing** by James Wright. Isn't it wonderful to be welcomed by others who are so happy we have come, even if they are horses? And what do the last 3 lines mean, anyway?
- **Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio** by James Wright. Interesting juxtaposition of "Proud" and "ashamed" in the same line about the same people. Are you ready for some **FOOTBALL?**

Here's the link for this week:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81374816274?pwd=eG1PRUxoWC9iTjFaTHFBNTBrNklvQT09>

Passcode: 704824

Note: This link and passcode is good for classes through October 27, 2021

+ + Jim

Three Poems for James Wright

—Mary Oliver

1. Hearing of Your Illness

I went out
from the news of your illness
like a broken bone...
...Then I lay down in a rank and spring-sweet field...
...small creatures rustling about, living their lives
as they do, moment by moment.
I felt better, telling them about you.
They know what pain is, and they knew you,...
..They...
merely loved you and waited
to take you back...
...meanwhile not missing one shred of their own
assignments of song
and muscle-
what I learned there, so I
got up finally, with a grief
worthy of you, and went home.

2. Early Morning in Ohio

...I remember
what you said.
And think how somewhere in Tuscany
a small spider might eve now
be stepping forth, testing
the silks of her web, the morning air,
the possibilities; maybe even, who knows,
singing a tiny song.

3. The Rose

...the news came
that nothing
could come to you
in time
anymore
ever.

I put down the phone
and I thought I saw, on the floor of the room, suddenly,
a large box,...

...but what it was-the voice
of a small bird singing inside, Lord,
how it sang, and kept singing!
how it keeps singing!
in its deep
and miraculous
composure

Hook

—James Wright

I was only a young man
In those days. On that evening
The cold was so God damned
Bitter there was nothing.
Nothing. I was in trouble
With a woman, and there was nothing
There but me and dead snow.

I stood on the street corner
In Minneapolis, lashed
This way and that.
Wind rose from some pit,
Hunting me.
Another bus to Saint Paul
Would arrive in three hours,
If I was lucky.

Then the young Sioux
Loomed beside me, his scars
Were just my age.

Ain't got no bus here
A long time, he said.
You got enough money
To get home on?

What did they do
To your hand? I answered.
He raised up his hook into the terrible starlight
And slashed the wind.

Oh, that? he said.
I had a bad time with a woman. Here,
You take this.

Did you ever feel a man hold
Sixty-five cents
In a hook,
And place it
Gently
In your freezing hand?

I took it.
It wasn't the money I needed.
But I took it.

A Blessing

—James Wright

Just off the highway to Rochester, Minnesota,
Twilight bounds softly forth on the grass.
And the eyes of those two Indian ponies
Darken with kindness.
They have come gladly out of the willows
To welcome my friend and me.
We step over the barbed wire into the pasture
Where they have been grazing all day, alone.
They ripple tensely, they can hardly contain their happiness
That we have come.
They bow shyly as wet swans. They love each other.
There is no loneliness like theirs.
At home once more,
They begin munching the young tufts of spring in the darkness.
I would like to hold the slenderer one in my arms,
For she has walked over to me
And nuzzled my left hand.
She is black and white,
Her mane falls wild on her forehead,
And the light breeze moves me to caress her long ear
That is delicate as the skin over a girl's wrist.
Suddenly I realize
That if I stepped out of my body I would break
Into blossom.

Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio

—James Wright

In the Shreve High football stadium,
I think of Polacks nursing long beers in Tiltonsville,
And gray faces of Negroes in the blast furnace at Benwood,
And the ruptured night watchman of Wheeling Steel,
Dreaming of heroes.

All the proud fathers are ashamed to go home,
Their women cluck like starved pullets,
Dying for love.

Therefore,
Their sons grow suicidally beautiful
At the beginning of October,
And gallop terribly against each other's bodies.