

Sorrow Bread

Poems 1984–2015

Selected and New

Mark Cox

Serving House Books



All That Shimmers and Settles Along the Roads of Our Passage

After seventeen years, I return home to my ex-wife,
without the cigarettes and bread,
without the woman and children I left her for,
older, empty-handed, and yet
to the same clothes
still in the same drawers,
as if nothing has changed.

My torn t-shirt is still splotted with paint
across her left breast,
her hair has not gone gray at the temples,
and she does not ask a single question:
not *where have you been*,
not *how could you*,
not *where were you when I needed you*,

just, *hey baby* and a smile,
the Vermont air cold,
the old mattress flat on the floor,

because the frame and box springs are still in the Ryder truck,
because my first students have not entered the classroom,
I have yet to fall in love with my own bourbon-soaked voice,
our dog has not died arthritic and stroke-plagued,

there is, instead, the kitchen faucet still running,
the beans rinsed and splayed in the colander,
and there isn't the slightest anger in her voice,
that I have missed a good dinner,
that I will have to warm it up if I want any,
it's ok, in fact, if I let the dog out
one last time and *just come on to bed*.

And so I could re-enter
the dream's cold, pine-paneled walls,
knots bleeding through their sealer,
I could, after seventeen years, step back
into that unblemished body,
shrug back on the aspirations and worries,
and begin again, sorrow by sorrow,
to destroy her love for me,
my own confidence and faith.
Because this is the nature of time,
or at least the relation of our nature to time,
to idealize that kitchen,
the string beans on the counter,
the dog bed by the door—
if we can still see it, it must be real,
it must still exist there,
not frozen in stasis,
but still playing itself out,
forever, without repeating,
as the moment it is.

It is my dream, then, that is the repetition,
my return, the problem,
but if I don't extend my hand into it,
do not turn loose the knob,
if I can step back outside, quickly, before we touch,
press my face to the storm door,
it is clear the young man I was
and the young woman she was
can still love each other
and have not turned away.

Red Lead, 1978

The way a boy might kick a can,
or a field goal, or a stone to skip
down one long empty street
toward a home that held no warmth for him;
as if putting on a sock or unbuckling a belt,
some small gesture shared by all of us,
he kicked him in the face. Then,
standing like a hunter over his trophy,
one foot on the tailgate,
he dabbed blood from his boot
with a napkin.

Behind us, clouds muddied the horizon,
pigeons peered from their nests in the girders,
and the latticed shadows of the bridge
lay like a puzzle on the ground.
To the east, the broken-toothed St. Louis skyline
yawned up into haze. *It is a trial*, the stanchions
murmured, *bound here as we are, our sorrows given
so we won't float toward heaven too soon.*

Spot primer, finish coat, blood, dust and asphalt.
Squabs laid gingerly down to die
by bottle caps full of water. For miles,
that paper napkin rode the Missouri,
getting darker and darker, going under,
being pulled apart and into
the fierce, filthy river of everyone.

Like a Simile

Fell into bed like a tree
slept like boiling water
got up from bed like a camel
and showered like a tin roof.
Went down stairs like a slinky
drove to work like a water skier
entered the trailer like a bad smell
where I changed clothes like a burn victim
drank my coffee like a mosquito
and waited like a bus stop.
A whistle blew.
Then I painted like I was in a knife fight for eight hours
drank like a burning building
drove home like a bank shot
unlocked the door like a jeweler
and entered the house like an argument next door.
The dog smiled like a chain saw.
The wife pretended to be asleep
I pretended to eat.
She lay on the bed like a mattress
I sat at the table like a chair.
Until I inched along the stair rail like a sprinkler
entered like smoke from a fire in the next room
and apologized like a toaster.
The covers did *not* open like I was an envelope
and she was a 24-hour teller
so I undressed like an apprentice matador
discovering bullshit on his shoes.

The Pole

Some mornings it takes an expedition to get to the paper, some days it has to be enough just to sit down and stare at it. The Antarctic, I call it, the blank white Word screen of death and I am Scott, slaughtering my sled dogs and eating their livers to stay alive. While all the Amundsens of the world skip ahead to the award ceremony, I am trudging in a hallucinatory haze 96 km in the wrong direction hoping to find a polar bear I can kill and crawl inside of and whose blood-sopped turds, yum, can sustain me. Oh, I don't think so, Galway, but then maybe that is why I am not so serious a poet, maybe I don't go that extra 11 miles and eat my own doo-doo—hell, I can't bear to read it, let alone choke it down. But where was I? Oh, back to the tundra, where I am peering out over my frosted goggles looking for a subject when it occurs to me my subject is always poetry, and writing about poetry *is* similar to scarfing your own shit, so maybe this bear thing has something to it after all. You are out there, alone on the ice floes, subzero temperatures, chill factor off the charts, not a single speck of ink in sight. It is lonely here, the world has nothing to say to you, it has its back to you, conversing with someone famous and more talented, they are clinking glasses and sharing an anecdote over walrus pâté, but that's ok, it is worth it just to be here in the vicinity of the pole, even if it has cost you nineteen ponies, your sled dogs and three toes, you will feel a lot better once you get those wet things off and huddle around the Sterno. “Why I never,” as my grandmother used to say, which translates loosely in current parlance to, “Hell no, I am not eating that thing.” But you

are old school, you know you have gotten exactly what you wished for. Amundsen would never have used Skidoos or Snow Cats, either, it just takes all the challenge out of freezing to death; there is nothing heroic about coptering in your doublewide and setting up a generator. You have to keep your tent to a minimum for the poetry to count for something, you have to sacrifice, for Christ sake, lose at least one digit, drink your own urine once in a while. So I guess I owe Galway an apology, I guess there really is nothing else to sustain you, just the hoary hide of poetry, you just have to keep going on what you produce and what we produce truly is mostly crap most of the time. But I don't want you to get the wrong impression of me, I am a happy guy, really, I zip up my parka and go to work every day. I explore the blank page with some degree of noble aplomb. I know what it is to have tusks of snot frozen to my face. Eventually you have to just stick a flag in it and call it a day, this is what is yours, this little plot of ice, beneath your frostbitten mukluks, and it is wasteland, granted, but it is yours and at some point you have to accept you're *there*. It can't matter that you are off by 200 feet, or if you are writing in circles in a whiteout, repeating yourself repeating yourself, you are doing the best you can with the gear you lugged with you—here, have a herring.

Sill

On the kitchen sill,
in the square brick house
my aunt aged and died in,
the flawless hand-blown pear
will neither rot nor last.

My daughter, too young
to ever think of this again,
once took it down
and placed it in a bowl,
with the breakfast oranges.
She'd thought it lonely, I guess,
with just the sunlight against it,
that single breath,
exhaled, perhaps, just after lunch,
smelling of cheese and peach schnapps.

Dust is the pollen of our dying,
even children sense this,
and after she'd wiped it clean
with her flowered dress,
she held it suspended
by its delicate, disproportionate stem
and lowered it into the wooden bowl.

Her great-aunt, though,
had little patience with disorder,
couldn't bear the clean, unblemished outline
where it had originally been,
and that was that.

Moments ago, after assurance that her family
would all recognize each other in heaven,

my daughter asked who would take care of her things.
And when I said her babies could, she cautioned
that babies can't even take care of themselves.

Neither can we, of course, never quite tall enough
to reach the light switch, never quite able to drink
from the wall-mounted fountain of contentment,
we stuff our pockets with beads and bottle-caps,
we organize our knick-knacks as best we can.

My aunt's squat, miniature tract house was razed.
Her window sill exists only in the heaven of children.
The pear, it could be anywhere,
like the last breath of the old German who made it.
Likewise, her porcelain salters
and the hummingbird still hovering
at its glass flower.

Want

Kiefer, sweet boy, too far from me now,
the bobber dips so rarely in this life,
it's our job to be watching when it does.

Remember how brilliant and terrified
the little trout seemed, held up on your hook?
The gasp of joy it gave you?

Stop hiding, for a moment, whatever you've collected
in my shoe or your pillow case,
stop and listen this once.

That stone, greened with moss,
too big to be carried home,
is called a mountain.

You can sleep with the world for a while,
but then you have to put it back.

Morning Blend

She glides the cramped apartment kitchen, barely clothed, spirited and graceful as a kind of animal, with none of the night before's awkwardness, the tentativeness, the brushings and nudges,

the shy gestures of a blossoming willingness, until finally there was the naked union of two imperfect truths and her perfect twenty-something body poised above yours.

Now, this morning, there is the spatter of eggs in the skillet, the scent of browning toast in the air, and through one narrow, open window waft sounds of the waking city, vibrant,

alive with small tensions, distant car horns and street voices, an agitated dog from the park across the way.

The two of you are comfortable for the moment,

being a man and being a woman, being alive together, occupying the same century, neither wanting more nor less than the other, neither asking questions the other is unable to answer. It is so simple. It is all

as simple as this cup of coffee, isn't it? Of course, coffee is not simple. Someone must grow it, and harvest it and ship it. Someone must roast and process and package and price it,

bearing, all along the way, daily traumas and trials as they shuttle those beans to us. So, no, nothing is simple. But lucid, yes, clear and unadorned, as the carrier,

the container for all this memory would convey to you.

What such a memory might mean to her, you cannot say.
Maybe it is as strong a force, maybe it is stronger.
Perhaps she has forgotten completely
that Brooklyn morning so long ago,

she who never seemed to notice her own beauty,
her own especial nature. Perhaps you were memorable
as a man, shirtless and in jeans, hair tousled,
slicing the fruit, tending the two cigarettes

in the ashtray on the table.

You cannot even remember now what caused
the disenfranchisement, the eventual detachment,
some difference, undoubtedly, in expectations,

some degree of disillusionment. Familiar bodies
came to seem foreign, trust wavered, interest waned.
But it could have as easily succeeded. One moment,
one defining moment of either sorrow or happiness,

one indelible shared experience could have been enough
to bond you two for life. We are always, it seems,
just a breath away from ecstasy or misery, take
your pick. It is, to some degree, chance that will decide

our fate, but then, you can finally accept that, now —
now that each of you is somewhere else,
now that the past is no longer to be reckoned with.
Your faults known and accepted fully.

Your aspirations revised by the acceptance of your losses.
Left to breakfast on what memory serves you, this
encapsulated joy of having been a young man: a lithe
woman in your white dress shirt, unbuttoned to the waist,

sunlight sprawled across an open window casing,
distant taxis, impatient running late for church,
and a nondescript bird somewhere nearby, calling,
fully expecting an answer.

Things My Grandfather Must Have Said

I want to die in the wintertime,
make the ground regret it,
make the backhoe sweat.

January. Blue Monday
after the holiday weekend.
I want it to be hard on everybody.

I want everyone to have a headache
and the traffic to be impossible.
Back it up for miles, Jesus.

I want steam under the hood, bad directions,
cousins lost, babies crying, and sleet.
I want a wind so heavy their umbrellas howl.

And give me some birds, pigeons even,
anything circling for at least half an hour,
and plastic tulips and a preacher who stutters

“Uh” before every word of Psalm 22.
I want to remind them just how bad things are.
Spell my name wrong on the stone, give me

earthworms fat as Aunt Edith’s arms
surfacing under the folding chairs.
And I want a glass coffin,

I want to be wearing the State of Missouri
string tie that no one else liked....God,
I hope the straps break

and I fall in with a thud. I hope

the shovel slips out of my son's hands.
I want them to remember I don't feel anything.

I want the food served straight from my garden.
I want the head of the table set. I want
everyone to get a pennant that says,

“Gramps was the greatest,”
and a complete record of my mortgage payments
in every thank-you note.

And I want to keep receiving mail for thirteen years,
all the bills addressed to me,
old friends calling every other month

to wonder how I am.
Then I want an earthquake or rising water-table,
the painful exhumation of my remains.

I want to do it all again.

I want to die the day before something truly
important happens and have my grandson ask:
What would he have thought of that?

I want you all to know how much I loved you.

Eastern Wyoming

Why hide where we can see you?
Because you could not find me

Why turn from fires to the outer dark?
Because the moth among sparks becomes a spark

How long can a flower be held and still be a flower?
There is no end to the ground of your hand

If the hand opens, where will the fist fall?
The fist is always a fist and grows again on your arm

How can the tree in granite flourish?
*Because its root is memory. And because one
brakeman stopped to give it water*

How can we go on this way?
There is not enough room in the world to turn your life around

Ashes, Ashes

Snow. A nit's weight
on the hair of one's neck,
the blessed host of the past,
right there, just so.
Turn into it, this once.
It's time to become the lake surface,
time to claim your face.

Soon the present
will cool enough to touch,
you can lay you down
in the outline you once were,

smoke still adrift
from the original fire.
Cup the moth's spark
in your hands.
Open your mouth and take
the dissolution
on your tongue.

No one else remembers
exactly what you remember.
If you don't carry it,
who will?

Bread of the world, in mercy broken,. Look on the heart by sorrow broken,. Look on the tears by sinners shed; /.../holy communion the communion 336.htm.Â Bread and Gravel past delights often becomes a present sorrow and shame sense Christ Himself is the 'true bread that cometh bitter at first, being eaten with tears of penitence /.../maclaren/expositions of holy scripture g/bread and gravel.htm. Reading the Law with Tears and Joy Sorrow Bread book. Read reviews from worldâ€™s largest community for readers. In this collection, poems selected from a distinguished thirty-year career co...Â Weâ€™d love your help. Let us know whatâ€™s wrong with this preview of Sorrow Bread by Mark Cox. Problem: Itâ€™s the wrong book Itâ€™s the wrong edition Other. Bread - Our Lady Of Sorrow. Listen. Download MP3. Bread. Lost Without Your Love. 04:07 9.43 ÐœÐ± 320 ÐšÐ±/Ñ.Â Watch music video "Bread - Our Lady Of Sorrow" online. Update music video. Send lyrics Send translation. Similar songs. Michele Da Pila - Our Lady Of Sorrow. The Acacia Strain - Our Lady Of Perpetual Sorrow. Thorns - Our Lady Of Sorrows. My Chemical Romance - Our Lady Of Sorrows. Bread - Dream Lady. Philistine Dream - Our Lady Of Sorrows. White Mountains - Our Lady Of Sorrows. Bread of Sorrow. Nathaniel Peters March 12, 2014. Thomas Nevinâ€™s The Last Years of Saint ThÃ©rÃ¨se, the sequel to his ThÃ©rÃ¨se of Lisieux: Godâ€™s Gentle Warrior, is at once beautiful and maddening.Â She is seated at their table, serves them their bread of sorrow and eats it with them. As Nevin notes, this image is the goal of her adolescent desires to be a warrior, missionary and martyr. She longed to spend herself lavishly out of love for Christ, but ended up doing so along an unexpected way of spiritual pain.