

The Trouble with Poetry

The trouble with poetry, I realized
as I walked along a beach one night --
cold Florida sand under my bare feet,
a show of stars in the sky --

the trouble with poetry is
that it encourages the writing of more poetry,
more guppies crowding the fish tank,
more baby rabbits
hopping out of their mothers into the dewy grass.

And how will it ever end?
unless the day finally arrives
when we have compared everything in the world
to everything else in the world,

and there is nothing left to do
but quietly close our notebooks
and sit with our hands folded on our desks.

Poetry fills me with joy
and I rise like a feather in the wind.
Poetry fills me with sorrow
and I sink like a chain flung from a bridge.

But mostly poetry fills me
with the urge to write poetry,
to sit in the dark and wait for a little flame
to appear at the tip of my pencil.

And along with that, the longing to steal,
to break into the poems of others
with a flashlight and a ski mask.

And what an unmerry band of thieves we are,
cut-purses, common shoplifters,
I thought to myself
as a cold wave swirled around my feet
and the lighthouse moved its megaphone over the sea,
which is an image I stole directly
from Lawrence Ferlinghetti --
to be perfectly honest for a moment --

the bicycling poet of San Francisco
whose little amusement park of a book
I carried in a side pocket of my uniform
up and down the treacherous halls of high school.

-- Billy Collins

Journal prompts:

- What is the "trouble" with poetry or journal writing for you? Start a write, "The trouble with poetry--" or "The trouble with journal writing--"
- Who was the first poet or writer you loved, whose words helped carry you through difficult times, or who taught you something important that you still remember and rely on?
- Look around you, right where you are. Pick up your notebook and pen and begin to write this current moment.

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