

FESTSCHRIFT FOR WILLIAM



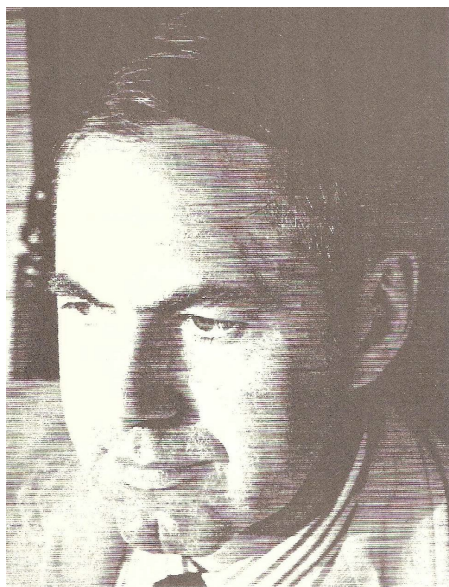
William Meredith at the Black Sea in Varna, Bulgaria

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**Kurt Vonnegut opens the Shain Library
(the Noodle Factory, as he dubbed it in his remarks)**

photo credit Vincent Scarano.



William as a young professor at Connecticut College in the 1950's

EDITOR'S NOTE

This publication comes as a private gift to participants of the Connecticut College Celebration of William Meredith on April 12, 2019 to thank the College for remembering William Meredith this way, and for old friends there who have not forgotten his contribution to the life of the college and the culture.



Poets' Choice wishes to thank *Poet Lore* for permission to use Michael Collier's upcoming-essay in this publication as well as my Tribute in an earlier edition. Michael's work will appear in Volume 114 1/2.

We also gratefully appreciate the contribution by Janet Gezari, J. Scott Price, Tom Kirlin and Krassin Himmirski for their insights into William Meredith and his work.

Richard Harteis

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JEANNE

Sketch of William by Jeanne Meinke

Memorial Minute: William Meredith

by Janet Gezari

William Morris Meredith was born in New York City on January 9, 1919 and died on May 30, 2007 at Lawrence & Memorial Hospital after an illness of some weeks. He received a Pulitzer Prize in 1988 for *Partial Accounts: New and Selected Poems*, a National Book Award in 1997 for *Effort at Speech: New and Selected Poems*, and many other awards, including fellowships and grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Guggenheim, Ford, and Rockefeller Foundations. He was a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets and served as Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress, a position re-titled Poet Laureate in 1985. He published nine volumes of poetry as well as *Shelley: Selected Poems*, *Poets of Bulgaria*, and *Alcools*, poems by Guillaume Apollinaire that he translated.

William earned his BA at Princeton University in 1940, where he followed his father and grandfather. He wrote his senior thesis on Robert Frost, who was a lasting influence on his poems and, later, a friend. Our library has a copy of the senior thesis, *An Analysis of the Poetic Method of Robert Frost*, inscribed by Frost, with gratitude, in 1940. The inscription suggests that Frost hadn't read the thesis and also says why: "I am assured on the best authority his results are very good. No man is supposed to look at himself in the glass except to shave." This was a view with which William would have concurred: "Study something deeper than yourselves" is how he puts it in one of his own poems.

After Princeton, William worked briefly for *The New York Times* (some of the obituaries said as a reporter, but I always understood he was a copy boy) before enlisting in the U. S. Army, and then the Navy, where he served as a pilot, making night landings on the decks of carriers. He re-enlisted for the Korean War, achieved the rank of Lieutenant Commander, and was awarded two Air Medals. His formally precocious first book of poems, *Love Letter from an Impossible Land* was selected by Archibald MacLeish for the Yale Series of Younger Poets and

published in 1944. Between active service in the Pacific and Korea, he did graduate work and taught English as a Woodrow Wilson fellow at Princeton and at the University of Hawaii. At Princeton, he met and became close friends with Charles Shain, who was also doing graduate work in English there. Much later, when Rosemary Park was due to retire here, William lured Charlie to Connecticut College, where he served as President from 1962 to 1974.

William began teaching at Connecticut College in 1955. In the mid 1960s, when Upward Bound programs were a fresh idea, he founded and taught in the college's first enrichment program for low-income inner city high school students. He taught until his retirement in 1983, after a stroke that immobilized him for two years and left him with lasting expressive aphasia. It was difficult for those of us who knew him well to fix the boundaries between what he understood and what he could say, although it often appeared that his apprehension of the world remained full and satisfying, and that only his capacity to articulate it was affected. I can remember afternoons in Uncasville, in the early years after the stroke, when I and several of my colleagues took turns reading poetry to William and helping him with the exercises in the speech manuals provided for his rehabilitation. If I missed a word in a poem or put the stress in the wrong place, he would stop me; meanwhile, the manuals had him reciting simple commands using the smallest number of linguistic units. The irony of his situation did not escape his notice, but it never diminished his resolve. Those who knew him after the stroke will remember his courage in the face of obstacles and his optimism about his progress. During this time and until his death, William was loved and cared for by his partner, the poet and fiction writer Richard Harteis.

Only those who knew William before the stroke know the magnitude of his loss, and ours. William was consummately articulate, and his conversation was one of the highest pleasures of his company. His letters, typed on his old manual machine if he was at home or handwritten if he was traveling, spoke about cadged meals, boozy evenings with friends, and the *cornus alternifolia* (or alternate-leafed dogwood) he thought you ought to have in your garden. He told wonderful stories and liked elaborate jokes. He was effortlessly and often savagely witty. His judgment of language was impeccable and accounts in part for his centrality to what was then the world of American poetry. William knew all the poets, and several of his more celebrated contemporaries—Robert Penn Warren, John Berryman, and Robert Lowell—relied on his responses to their poems and drafts of poems.

While he was here, William saw to it that poetry was a part of life at Connecticut College. In addition to the writers I've just mentioned, Derek Walcott, Thom Gunn, Muriel Rukeyser, Eudora Welty, Maxine Kumin, Richard Wilbur, and Robert Frost all came to New London to give readings. Afterwards, there were long dinners in Uncasville where conversation flowed as generously as the drinks did. William was most his own strange self when he was hosting one of these dinners. He believed that food was meant to be served, and served with love. He wasn't particular about what we ate but he was very particular about how we did it. Stacking the dishes when you helped to clear the table was never permitted. During the thirteen years I was William's colleague, I don't remember his taking a sabbatical, but when he did take time away to teach at Carnegie Mellon or to perform his duties at the Library of Congress, he would produce his substitute. I remember all of these replacements well because they made extraordinary contributions to the life of the English department and the college. Blanche Boyd was one; the others were a former student and widely published writer of historical fiction, Cecilia Holland; the distinguished poet Robert Hayden, who had been the first black poet to serve as Poetry Consultant at the Library of Congress; the playwright Romulus Linney; and the Pulitzer Prize winning short story writer, James Alan MacPherson.

It was a mark of William's humility that his own poetry readings always combined a few of his poems with a larger number of poems written by other poets. He had no truck with grade inflation, and he used a teacher's shorthand when he described himself as a B+ poet who had written a few A plus poems. In the eulogy he gave at William's funeral, Michael Collier, William's former student and now a poet and teacher of poetry at the University of Maryland, reminded us that William used to say that he was proud of only three things: his knowledge of prosody, his knowledge of trees, and his immunity to poison ivy. His knowledge of prosody and trees was immense, as was his knowledge of many other things human and natural. He knew, for example, a lot about music, and had been opera critic for the Hudson Review, but he wore his knowledge lightly. He was always more interested in what you could tell him than in what he could tell you.

No one could have fought harder against death than William did, and this was entirely consistent with the life he had led and the poems he had written. He felt himself bound to continue, whether he was flying a mission for the Navy or composing a sestina. He feared cowardice more than other terrors, but he also felt grateful for the beauty of the universe and never stopped being conscious of its particular kindness to him. A poem titled "John and Anne" takes John Berryman's words about Anne Frank as its epigraph: "the hardest challenge, let's say, that a

person can face without defeat is the best for him." Just outside the door to William's house in Uncasville, there was a tamarack tree that had been savagely cropped by an oil truck. He liked to point out that the accident had made the tree thrive as it never could have otherwise.

William Meredith was the least suicidal poet of his generation. His last book of new poems, published a few years before his stroke, was titled *The Cheer*, an improbable title for any poet but William. The first poem in the book, a kind of envoi, goes like this:

Frankly, I'd like to make you smile
Words addressing evil won't turn evil
back but they can give us heart.
The cheer is hidden in right words.

By cheer William means morale or confidence or, better still, courage, with its etymological connections to heart. He wanted us to be heartened, even though—or perhaps because—we live in "a culture in late imperial decline." *The Cheer*,

written during the Vietnam war, includes a poem in which the poet presents himself as a "mild-spoken citizen" and respectfully accuses his country's president of "criminal folly." "A man's mistakes," the poem slyly notes, "his worst acts,/ aren't out of character, as he'd like to think." *The Cheer* includes several elegies, wry and celebratory poems written in memory of Lowell, Hemingway, Plath, and Berryman. All of them except Lowell, who tried to kill himself more than once, succeeded in ending their own lives. William dreamed and imagined death over and over. The elegy had been an important kind of poem for him since "The Wreck of the Thresher," which he wrote to commemorate "a squad of brave men" who died at sea in 1963. If his career as a wartime pilot, someone who faced death down daily, provides one important context for his struggle to survive after his stroke, the too short lives of the poets he loved, past and present, provide the other.

In "Talking Back (To W. H. Auden)," William rejects Auden's idea (in his elegy for W. B. Yeats) that "poetry makes nothing happen." "What it makes happen is small things," his poem says. William's highest aspiration as a poet was always spiritual, but he was never solemn. He agreed with Frost that "all the fun's in how you say a thing." His most memorable poems enable us to see the most forgettable things newly and to be changed by what we've seen. In one of Tom Stoppard's plays, there's a sentence honoring the effort at speech that defined William's life: "If you get the right [words] in the right

order, you can nudge the world a little or make a poem which children will speak for you when you're dead."

Just a Few of the Influences on William Meredith and His Poetry

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If one were to imagine tragedies of Greek proportions that could befall a poet, losing the ability to speak and write would come in at the top of most of our lists. The tragedy could be further compounded by imagining it happening to a nationally recognized poet at the peak of his career. Yet that is exactly what happened to William Meredith in 1983, at the age of 64, when he suffered a stroke that left him unable to speak or move. Meredith, and his long-time partner Richard Harteis, were, of course, initially devastated by this life-altering physical loss, but the *joie de vivre* spirit and aplomb which sustained Mr. Meredith his entire life would continue.

Friend to W.H Auden and Robert Frost, confidant of Robert Lowell and John Berryman, recognized as a blooming talent in poetry early in his life by Muriel Rukeyser and Allen Tate, held in high esteem (even to this day) in a country once snugly behind the Iron Curtain (Bulgaria), advocate for Robert Hayden, and a highly regarded professor for over 30 years who taught thousands of students over the course of his life, William Meredith was a poet of high intelligence and skill, with intimate knowledge of the poets who came before him and planted the seeds that would blossom to become Meredith's own style of articulate, intelligent verse.

He served as a Navy pilot in both WW2 and the Korean War, but rather than derail him for his poetic path, both of those wars were catalysts for his writing and

career. His first book, *Love Letter from an Impossible Land*, was published during WW2, and he stated that his experience in the latter war reignited his stagnating writing career. He published nine poetry collections in his lifetime, won three awards from *Poetry* magazine, earned prestigious fellowships and grants (from Princeton, the Rockefeller Foundation, the NEA, the Ford Foundation, and a Guggenheim Fellowship), became the Consultant for Poetry at the Library of Congress from 1978-1980 (the position was later renamed U.S. Poet Laureate in 1985), and taught at several distinguished universities. All of the above, with the exception of publishing his last two volumes, were done before he was felled by the stroke in 1983. But event that did not derail his love of life or poetry.

Meredith and Harteis would not be deterred—heartbroken, frustrated, and occasionally sad, yes—but not deterred, and they both worked daily on intense physical and speech therapy regimens (even travelling to Great Britain for specialized care) to regain as much of his previous physical ability as possible over the subsequent years. This diligence and indomitable spirit saw Meredith earn some of the literary world's most prestigious awards in the years that followed—five years after his stroke (1988) he earned the *L.A Times* Book Prize and Pulitzer Prize for *Partial Accounts: New and Selected Poems*. Nearly a decade later, the

same year that Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain* won in Fiction and Frank Bidart's *Desire* was a finalist in poetry, William Meredith earned the National Book Award in Poetry for his *Effort at Speech*.¹

I had not heard of William Meredith prior to beginning this semester (which just goes to show how the world of poetry can be a vast and ever-replenishing ocean that always has more to offer each new seeker). Even though I had developed what I thought were separate interests in what influences poets, and in poets with military experience, he slipped past my radar until my faculty advisor suggested I look into him. As I conducted my initial research, I discovered his story was the perfect confluence of what had already piqued my interests—a person who served in uniform and went on to become a distinguished poet, and one whose overt and covert influences on his life and literary career could be discerned with further research.

In the introduction to Meredith's 1964 translation of French poet Guillaume Apollinaire's *Alcools: Poems 1898-1913*, Francis Steegmuller, American biographer of many French authors, states, "As in the case of all great poets, Apollinaire's life and poetry illuminate each other,"² and this paper takes the same approach: illustrating how the life of William Meredith and his poetry were fully

¹ <http://www.nationalbook.org/nba1997.html#.W0paFdJKjIU>, retrieved 20 August 2018.

² Apollinaire, Guillaume, and Francis Steegmuller. *Alcools: Poems, 1898-1913*. Translated by William Meredith, First ed., Doubleday & Company, 1964.p. v.

intertwined. His style, subject matter, and career-wide themes only unfolded as they did because of the life he lived.

It is difficult to capture and quantify the influences, direct and indirect, that determine the outcome of an individual life, and only slightly less difficult to try to do so for a famous poet. Each of us is unique, and each poet's voice similarly unique, but it is rare a poet's voice becomes entirely unique, because it is by default a product of not only that poet's unique life experiences, but also of all the literary influence that the poet consciously or unconsciously received as the poet strove to create better and better poems. However, we can begin to isolate some of the contributing factors that make a particular poet's voice unique enough to stand out from others.

The collection of Meredith's book reviews, essays, and presentations, *Poems Are Hard To Read*, is not widely circulated and was difficult to locate, and there have been very few essays or articles written about him and his works (compared to other major poets of his time and caliber). What few were written were done during his lifetime, with almost nothing written about him over the past 11 years since his death in 2007.

These factors may be indicators of his currently "lost" place in the world of poetry, but it has become clear in my research that he deserves a more prominent

place at today's ever-expanding poetry table. He was respected and well regarded during his life, and his passing shouldn't diminish his status. But I also realize that poets ebb and flow in and out of favor over time, and perhaps his life after death has yet to begin—and very well may not ever. The odds are not stacked in any one writer's favor in this regard.

However, I propose to make a brief case for him, and to illustrate the how and why he became a poet, Naval aviator in two wars, a professor, and respected member the literary community, here and abroad. This is a short list, at the start of this paper, to attempt to capture the many competing and confluent influences on who Meredith was as a poet and a man. This paper is far too short to illustrate how each of these factors contributed to how his career developed as it did, but I will attempt to address a few of the more heavily weighted factors:

Environment	Poets & Allies
Upper class New England upbringing	Muriel Rukeyser
Classical education (preparatory school and Princeton)	Allen Tate
Aleutians Islands during WW2	Robert Frost
River Thames, Uncasville, CT (home)	Archibald MacLeish
Religious upbringing and renewed interest later in life	W.H. Auden
Military training and experience	Percy Blythe Shelley
Bulgaria	W.B. Yeats
High Intelligence	Emily Dickinson
	John Berryman
Passions	Robert Lowell

Trees	RichardHarteis
Birds	ThomasHardy
Opera	GuillaumeApollinaire

Meredith grew up in Darrien, Connecticut “on the edge of Long Island Sound [and] spent summers in small boats.”³ His father was a well-to-do banker, not massively successful but fairly well off, and when Meredith was coming of age during the Depression, his family fared far better than most.

He attended the elite Lenox School for Boys in Lenox, Massachusetts (loosely affiliated with the Episcopal Church) for his four high school years, and was an A & B student in English and Science, and a C & D student in Latin, History, and Math, but he pulled up his final Senior year final grades to all As and Bs.

As part of his Princeton application his headmaster rated him as “definitely better than average, perhaps low honor rating” with English studies being where he “probably” “exhibited special mental qualifications or unusual ability.” He was the editor in chief of his school newspaper, was on the Newspaper Board, and the football team, as well as being a member of the Religious Society and manager of

³ Gerald, Gregory Fitz, et al. “The Frost Tradition: A Conversation with William Meredith.” *Southwest Review*, vol. 57, no. 2, 1972, p. 109.

the baseball team.⁴ The headmaster went on to note, though, “Bill has never been interested in athletics, or done well at them. It is much to his credit that he played on the football squad, and showed good spirit, though his accomplishments, so far as football was concerned was not very great.” From an early age, Meredith’s preferred playing field, like many fledgling poets, was the internal landscape of the mind.

His Princeton application’s “General Estimate” essay, completed by his school’s headmaster, shows “His I.Q. rating has been steadily in the 130-135 range,” with steadily improving grades rising to meet that potential. “In the early years, he was a rather precocious youngster, given far too much to introspection and the desire to react in a grown up fashion to adults. His interests and inclinations were in no sense those typical of boyhood, nor are they now. He managed to cultivate a rather superior manner which generally gave considerable offence, and for teachers he had a most annoying placidity which it was almost impossible to ruffle.” This undoubtably helped him become a successful naval aviator and can help explain his undaunted spirit after his life-altering stroke.

“He is much less of a ‘lone wolf’ than he was, though he is still not entirely comprehended by his form mates.” This final assessment from his principal would

⁴ Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton, Box 44, Folder (William Meredith), Finding Aid AC198.03_c128

always be true to some extent, but ever-lessening as he grew as a poet and a man, because Meredith recognized these—his introversion, high intelligence and education, and his “separateness” from peers—were issues for him to address early on, and he took measures to become more accessible and intimate with others throughout his life. Joining the military was his first step after Princeton, and becoming a trusted confidant and sounding board to fellow poets and students the rest of his life was part of his self-improvement “path that never ends.”

By the end of his life, he had developed what was described as a “gift for friendship. And he radiated what I can describe only as an aura of humanity.”⁵ Michael Collier, a once-student of and long-time friend of Meredith, said during his eulogy that what made Meredith so impactful was “a deep interest in people and a belief that each of us wrestled with one or two or several demons; that we all possess flaws but were redeemed and ennobled by our efforts to face them.” My outsider’s brief incursion into Meredith’s life confirms these assessments.

Meredith wrote in his Princeton application, “The English course at Princeton, I feel, will be the most interesting, and useful one to me if my present interests are to be taken as a criterion, but the width of scope of the courses in the freshman and sophomore years may well change or supplement this present

⁵ Harte, Jack. *An Irishman’s Diary: Jack Harte on William Meredith’s pilgrimage to Yeats’s Sligo*. Jan 6, 2015. <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/an-irishman-s-diary-jack-harte-on-william-meredith-s-pilgrimage-to-yeats-s-sligo-1.2055604>, retrieved 28 July 2018

standard.” He also notes, “I expect to meet people at Princeton whom I shall see later on in life if I live, as I expect to, in or around New York.” He also references “a certain amount of tradition”, as he was a Princeton legacy student, his grandfather graduating in 1877 and father graduating in 1911.⁶

Meredith was right. At Princeton he met and befriended the Dean, Christian Gauss, a friend of Meredith’s father, who would play an ongoing mentor role in his life after Princeton; Charlie Shain ‘36, who he helped bring to Connecticut College where Meredith taught most of his career as its new President in 1962, and poet Allen Tate who would play a prominent role in his initial foray into the wider literary world.

It seems Meredith was interested in studying Military Science (what we now call the Reserve Officer Training Corp, ROTC) while at Princeton, but his father and preparatory school head master dissuaded him from this course of study before arriving at Princeton. However, just to be sure, Meredith’s father wrote a familiar letter to the Princeton Director of Admissions, Radcliffe Heermance, in the fall of his freshman year. Meredith’s father did not feel that this sort of training “has a place in a broad cultural training such as I want Bill to have at Princeton.”⁷ His

⁶ Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton, Box 44, Folder (William Meredith), Finding Aid AC198.03_c128

⁷ Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton, Box 44, Folder (William Meredith), Finding Aid AC198.03_c128

father served in the American Expeditionary Force during the First World War⁸, and it's entirely probable Meredith's father wanted to spare him from similar experiences, so there were to be no military studies at Princeton for William, and his suppressed military aspirations had to wait until after graduation in 1940—when the country was once again fully on a trajectory for war.

Later in life Meredith admitted he began writing poetry as early as eight years old, but student records indicate he went to Princeton for undergraduate work unclear what he wanted to do after earning his degree (or perhaps unwilling to admit to it). Even upon graduating with honors with an English degree in 1940 he was still unsure, and stated in his yearbook that he would “probably engage in the publishing business.” He had already been contributing to and helping edit the school's literary journal, *Nassau Lit*, as well as contributing to *the Daily Princetonian* as a columnist. He ran cross country and tutored History 101-2 for two years. He was writing poetry consistently at this time, and was honored with being asked to write his graduating class poem, which he subsequently published in his first book.

The Creative Arts Program at Princeton was founded during Meredith's final year at Princeton under the direction of his friend and mentor Dean Christian

⁸ Charles Shain Library archives, Connecticut College, Box 15, 29 Oct 18

Gauss, who took the young Meredith under his wing to a certain extent while at Princeton, taught at least one class to Meredith, and who remained a correspondent and supporter of Meredith until Gauss's death in 1951. The Creative Arts Program was originally funded by a five-year grant from the Carnegie Corporation before transitioning into a permanent Princeton department. It was this program that brought in the famous poet and critic Allen Tate that same year to work with talented writing students,⁹ and it was Tate who saw great promise in Meredith and who provided the conduit (and most likely significant encouragement) for Meredith's first manuscript to find its way to Archibald MacLeish, who ultimately chose *Love Letters from an Impossible Land* as the winner of the Yale Series of Younger Poets Prize for 1944.

Princeton is highly selective today, and was just as selective, if not more so, during Meredith's undergraduate time there (1936-1940). Following the First World War there was a boom in college applications across institutions in America, and in 1922 Princeton adopted "a policy of limited enrollment and selective admission in order to preserve the essential features of Princeton's residential life and to maintain its standards of individual instruction."¹⁰ While there were a few outliers prior, Princeton did to begin recruiting racial minorities

⁹ http://etcweb.princeton.edu/CampusWWW/Companion/creative_arts_program.html, retrieved 7-28-18

¹⁰ <http://etcweb.princeton.edu/CampusWWW/Companion/admissions.html>, retrieved 7-28-18

and women until the mid-to-late 1960s, so most of Meredith's peers and professors came from the same higher-end socio-economic and geographic background as himself. This blue-blood pedigree, just like his "lone wolf" instinct, were two aspects of his personality (and which conveyed into his early writing) that he intentionally tried to diminish over time (he was once "placed among the caustic aristocrats of American verse").¹¹ He understood himself, and who wanted to be, and took active measures as his career progressed to grow as a poet and a man. "And I've realized that there's a certain way you can be snobbishly grown up; Frost's poems never had that quality, but mine used to."¹²

America was attacked by the Japanese on December 7, 1941 but America's eventual involvement in the growing worldwide conflagration had been apparent to many since the Nazi's invaded Poland in 1939. Meredith's previous inclinations towards military studies and his knowledge of world history and affairs made it apparent that he, and most others of his generation, would eventually serve in uniform. However, familial reticence is hard to overcome, so upon graduation he took a "copy boy" position at the *New York Times*. About a year later, in May 1941, before we'd officially entered the war, Meredith enlisted in the Army as a

¹¹ Young, Vernon, et al. "Poetry Chronicle: The Light is Dark enough." *The Hudson Review* 34.1 (1981): 141. Print. p.149

¹² Gerald, Gregory Fitz, et al. "The Frost Tradition: A Conversation with William Meredith." *Southwest Review*, vol. 57, no. 2, 1972, p. 115.

private and rose quickly the few steps to corporal, eventually working in public relations after his initial entry training until January of 1942. In a November 13, 1941 letter to Meredith, Dean Gauss wrote, “I wish I could tell you how much it means to me to us here to see recent Alumni of your character and capacity so willing and eager to do their part.” This sort of positive reinforcement from a man Meredith so admired must have buoyed him in his long-held desire to serve in uniform despite the previously noted disapproval of his father.

Meredith’s writing skills helped him rise quickly in Army public relations, but that wasn’t where he wanted to be. Meredith wanted wings. In June of 1942 Dean Gauss of Princeton was asked for a character reference as part of Meredith’s background investigation for transferring to Navy aviation. The Dean wrote in reply that Meredith did “unusually able work” while his student, and that “Few men showed deeper and more wholehearted devotion to their country than he,” and that Meredith was “less interested in a commission than in doing his duty.” This is exactly the type of endorsement one would expect, but it still speaks highly of young Meredith.

Later in life, Meredith would write often about his mother, but rarely about his father. Other than the issue of military service, and the to-be-expected father/son conflicts that occur as a younger man grows into his own individuality,

there might have been other issues where the young Meredith did not receive his father's approval, and we can look to the Oct/Nov 1962 *Poetry* for insight into what their interactions might very well have been like over time.

For His Father

When I was young I looked high and low for a father,
And what blond sons you must have tried on then!
But only your blood could give us our two men
And in the end we settled for one another.

Whatever death is, it sets pretenders free.
The secret loss or boyhood or self-defense
That won me your affectionate pretense
Is in a grave. Now you judge only me.

But like a living son I go on railing
A little, or praising under my breath,
Not knowing the generosity of death,
Fearing your judgement on my old failing.

Dear ghost, take pleasure in our good report,
And bully me no further with my blame.
You use my eyes at last; I sign your name
Deliberately beneath my life and art.

Shame, pride, rebellion, grief, acceptance, judgement, and undeterrable-despite-it-all love all equally come through in these few, short, highly crafted and emotionally charged lines. The reader need not have any prior knowledge to detect the complications of this father-son relationship.

Just nine months after entering the military, in February 1942 he was accepted into the Navy for aviator training, and served on active duty until February 1946. Perhaps it was growing up on the water near boats that prodded him to leave the Army for Naval aviation, but it was more likely the chance to use his intellect to greater purpose and the challenge that entailed. In 2003, James Bradley published *Flyboys : A True Story of Courage*, chronicling the experiences of Naval Aviators in the Pacific, and “These airmen would go to war sitting down. As warriors they were prized not for their brawn but for their brains. Throngs of fighting men were trained not to develop calluses but to master syllabi. Navigation, dead reckoning, map reading, code recognition, and myriad mechanical challenges faced these Flyboys.”¹³ Meredith would make good use of his intelligence with these colleagues. Also, I believe, much of the “precocious” and “lone wolf” aspect of Meredith’s personality remained intact this early into his military career, and relying on his own intelligence and instincts as a pilot likely had greater appeal than being an anonymous member of a larger team in the Army.

In an interesting case of what-might-have-been, Meredith had requested to remain in uniform on active duty following the end of WW2, but his request was denied, so he went on to teach poetry as a Woodrow Wilson Fellow at Princeton (where he was an assistant to the well-known poetry critic and professor R. P.

¹³ Bradley, James. *Flyboys : A True Story of Courage*. 1st ed., Little, Brown, 2003. p.123

Blackmur and began publishing book reviews of his own), and the University of Hawaii between the wars. His first book, *Love Letters from an Impossible Land*, came out during WW2 (compiled by two of his friends back home while he served in the Aleutians Islands off the Alaskan coast) and his second book, *Ships and Other Figures*, was published in 1948 during this fellowship at Princeton.

Order is the sense by which Meredith experiences all poetry. When discussing his own and other's works, he always goes back to how a poem embraces, disregards, or returns to order. In a 1983 interview with Ed Hirsch (published in 1985), he said he saw himself as a "lyric poet" and only made poems "out of insights I encounter," and "I wait until the poems seem to be addressed not to 'Occupant' but to 'William Meredith'", and "I think...poetry and experience should have an exact ratio".¹⁴ All of these are precise guidelines for how he writes, perceives, and relates to poetry. There is order and then there is chaos. Meredith's poetry was clearly in the order camp.

While this may be attributed to his upbringing and simply to his own poetry aesthetic, it is also highly likely contributed to by his military training. The military is designed to function in chaotic environments, and has often been

¹⁴ Hirsch, Edward, and William Meredith. "The Art of Poetry XXXIV : William Meredith." *Paris review* (1985) Print.

referred to as “organized chaos.” All branches use highly organized systems to facilitate operations, and pilots most significantly rely on systems & checklists to mitigate errors. When lives are on the line, attention to detail is paramount—order saves lives.

Order is also reflected in the traditional forms used by the poets he studied and were influenced by in his youth—Hardy, Yeats, Auden, Shelley. Many of his early poems were in traditional forms and he was fairly established in his career before began writing outside of these traditional forms. Collier said that “William’s insistence on form was the verbal equivalence of manners, the enacting of ceremony, protocols really for controlling the emotions that lay beneath the experience at hand...Form was rooted in his life.”

Later in his life he credited Robert Frost for helping him venture from what he called “borrowed rhetoric” of his early work, but he always kept traditional forms close to his heart and style. As poet and professor Linda Gregerson noted in her 1988 review of his second to last book, *Partial Accounts* : “Here is a poet who asks us seriously to consider the rhymed quatrain as a unit of perceptual pacing, the villanelle as the ambivalent and ritual simulation of fate, the sestina as a scaffolding for directed ruminations, the sonnet as an instrument for testing the prodigious or the ineffable against the long-for-shapeliness we know as

‘argument’.” She goes on, “Meredith has a habit of talking back to his elders. He writes in alliterative tercets that hearken back to the very beginning of poetry in English” and “He pursues in rhymed trimeter an Audenesque intractability”¹⁵

But the reviewer did not note is that he also not only models previous poets in *Partial Accounts*, he directly references and interacts with them (“Talking Back (To W.H. Auden)” and “What I Remember the Writers Telling Me When I Was Young” (for Muriel Rukeyser).” Previous literature plays a huge role in the subject and form of many of Meredith’s poems, as we’ll soon explore.

In a couple of his books he provided prose explanatory statements with his poems, to give the reader details to assist them understanding the poem, and he likens this to what a poet might say during a reading to set the stage and help the audience better understand what they’re about to digest.¹⁶ Most of these notes were related to military terminology and operations, but not exclusively—occasionally he would do this for literature he references in his poems. He received mixed reviews for this practice, and it mostly fell off in his latter books, but he couldn’t curb this practice completely, and it was used a few times in his final book. Again, order prevails in Meredith’s poetry.

¹⁵ Gregerson, Linda. "Book Review: Partial Accounts: New and Selected Poems." *Poetry* 151.5 (1988): 423-426. Print. (p.423-424)

¹⁶ Gerald, Gregory Fitz, et al. “The Frost Tradition: A Conversation with William Meredith.” *Southwest Review*, vol. 57, no. 2, 1972, pp. 115.

The vocabulary he uses in his poems is evidence of his Princeton education and is another reinforcing factor for his reputation as an “academic” poet. He was known for his “exacting diction which has heretofore been a signature.”¹⁷ He can’t escape his education and intelligence; it keeps bubbling up in his writing his entire life. Though he never truly tried to escape it, he did try to make less apparent at certain points.

He always seemed to think of himself as a “B” poet, or “minor poet” (even referring to himself as such in *Efforts at Speech*’s poem “Grace”), despite a plethora of awards and external validation on the quality of his verse. I believe this was in part due to the wide acclaim his good friends received during their lifetimes (Lowell, Berryman, Auden, Frost), but also in part due to the high acclaim those he was inspired by, and influenced by, received (Yeats, Frost, Shelley, Auden, Keats). But this consideration of himself as such wasn’t from self-pity, but rather from what he believed to be an honest, intellectually unbiased assessment of his place on the rung of poetry (with also a strong dose of professional-fronting humility masking a strong sense of self-confidence, but the manners of a gentlemen as he conceived himself to be (and was), encouraged a certain level of public modesty). He went on in the poem “Grace” to use humor effectively to take the sting out his

¹⁷ Young, Vernon, et al. "Poetry Chronicle: The Light is Dark enough." *The Hudson Review* 34.1 (1981): 141. Print. p.149

self-assessment, writing: “Finally, you will have to look me up / in the joust of modern poets / where my pen name, *Lancelittle*, / may not yet have been appeared, / or already have been expunged...”

On the matter of grace, Meredith consistently demonstrated the gentlemanly decorum for which he was known in his poems, lectures, essays, criticism, and interviews. When asked by an interviewer to agree that Robert Frost was harsh under certain circumstances, he asked the interviewer, “Are you a harsh man under certain circumstances?” with the obvious answer from the interviewer being, “Yes.” “Well,” Meredith replied, “that far I’ll go. He was also, as you know, secretly very generous to people.” And when reflecting on less than glowing reviews authors sometimes receive, he did not espouse animosity towards critics, only right-sized self-reflection, “Reviews are helpful, I think, only in telling you what misunderstandings you have allowed range for.”¹⁸

Meredith received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1975/76 and used it in a detailed study of Percy Blythe Shelley, Edward Trelawny, Joseph Severn, and John Keats¹⁹. He had already co-edited a book in 1968 with Randall Jarrell’s first wife, *Eighteenth-Century English Minor Poets*, and now wanted to dig deeper on his own into the lives of these late 19th Century men. After the springboard of the

¹⁸ Gerald, Gregory Fitz, et al. “The Frost Tradition: A Conversation with William Meredith.” *Southwest Review*, vol. 57, no. 2, 1972, pp. 114-116

¹⁹ Email correspondence with the Guggenheim Foundation, received 29 October 2018

Fellowship, he spent the latter half of the 70's "writing about Edward John Trelawny, the friend of Shelley and Byron" and published the poem "English Accounts" in 1997's *Effort at Speech* (a previous version was titled "Trelawny's Dream").

Criticism of Trelawny paints the picture of a liar, poser, and possible con-man, responsible for Shelley's death (reasonably undisputed), not the dashing world-travelling corsair and adventurer he wanted his literary benefactors, and the world, to believe himself to be. Meredith defends Trelawny, though. "He was an outsize and attractively outrageous man, and probably only the fact that I managed to survive, in character, a friendship with Frost emboldens me to keep Trelawny for an imaginary playmate." Meredith wanted to write "a series of poems" about him, in part because, "I have come to like and believe him. I believe he tells by and large generous truths about Shelley and Byron, the former of whom he idolized, the latter of whom he saw plain... a temporarily unfashionable position..."²⁰ So we see the intertwining of a modern literary figure (Frost) and ones from the past (Byron, Shelley, Trelawny) influencing his work and sense of self.

²⁰ Reasons for Poetry and The Reason for Criticism. Two Lectures Delivered at the Library of Congress on May 7, 1979 and May 5, 1980. Retrieved 27 July 2018.

I propose that part of this fascination with Trelawny is that Meredith saw himself as the same sort of hanger-on to great men of his time, rather than as one himself. To himself and those closest to him he referred to himself as a B poet, and most of his poems the same—better than most but always “just” short of the mark. From the same poem, “English Accounts”, Meredith, in the guise of Trelawny, writes “Though I am still a strong swimmer / I can feel the channel widen as I swim.” Meredith/Trelawny think they are progressing towards their goals, but the goals always remain ever just out of reach. We hear this sentiment repeated by successful people from all walks of life, especially of the creative variety, so I can see how Meredith would have felt slightly inadequate and seemingly never progressing—even though he was just around the corner from being named the Consultant for Poetry at the Library of Congress.

The influence of one poet on another can change over time, as the receiving poet changes and grows, and the preceding poet no longer speaks the same way to the emerging poet. Yeats is one such influence on Meredith, who read a lot of him during WW2 but not much after. Meredith’s “The Chinese Banyan” (From 1958’s *The Open Sea*) is in the same form, iambic trimeter, as Yeats’ “The Fisherman.”²¹ It is easy to understand how Meredith might have felt compelled to move away

²¹ Gerald, Gregory Fitz, et al. “The Frost Tradition: A Conversation with William Meredith.” *Southwest Review*, vol. 57, no. 2, 1972, p. 116.

from his earlier influences as he gained prominence and began pushing his own boundaries (the natural trajectory for a poet's growth, but it's hard to suppress the pull of a first love). Yeats' influence might have waned in Meredith's middle years, but Meredith did take a 2006 pilgrimage at the age of 87 to Yeats' home turf. He told his host that Yeats was his favorite poet and repeatedly stated, "'I am 87, and I am in Ireland. I am a happy man.'" Richard Harteis, Meredith's life partner, said it was the fulfillment of a life-long dream for Meredith.²²

In speaking of his influences during an April 7, 1971 interview, Meredith states:

The ocean and trees strike me as being parts of natural experience that make metaphors in the head when you're sleeping, or when you're at the edge of consciousness, where poems come from. And I've become more and more fastidious about wanting to know what's happening there. I know a little bit about the ocean, I know a good deal more about trees, not because I'm attempting to flee from technological society, but because that seems to me where it's at in the terms of my imagination.²³

I believe the impact of the ocean in his writing is fairly well known and evident, given his first few books and their prominent Navy/Ocean/Sea subject matter and titles (*The Open Sea, Ships and Other Figures, The Wreck of the Thresher*). What is less evident, given that the references are sprinkled throughout his works and rarely included in poem titles, is that over the

²² Harte, Jack. *An Irishman's Diary: Jack Harte on William Meredith's pilgrimage to Yeats's Sligo*. Jan 6, 2015. <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/an-irishman-s-diary-jack-harte-on-william-meredith-s-pilgrimage-to-yeats-s-sligo-1.2055604>, retrieved 28 July 2018

²³ Gerald, Gregory Fitz, et al. "The Frost Tradition: A Conversation with William Meredith." *Southwest Review*, vol. 57, no. 2, 1972, p. 109.

course of his career, he mentions specific types of trees in a significantly large portion of his poems, and used trees allegorically in love poems. It wasn't until I walked the grounds of Connecticut College where he taught for so many many years that I fully understood the Meredith-Tree relationship. The grounds are nothing but magnificent tree varieties, and the college is known for its 750-acre arboretum (began in 1931) and botany programs. Surely this played a role in his choice of teaching locations. He was a hobby arborist, and his home on the Thames river in CT was his personal lab.

Tree Marriage

In Chota Nagpur and Bengal
the betrothed are tied with threads to
mango trees, they marry the trees
as well as one another, and
the two trees marry each other.
Could we do that some time with oaks
or beeches? This gossamer we
hold each other with, this web
of love and habit is not enough.
In mistrust of heavier ties,
I would like tree-siblings for us,
standing together somewhere, two
trees married with us, lightly, their
fingers barely touching in sleep,
our threads invisible but holding.

A Couple of Trees

The two oaks lean apart for light.
They aren't as strong as lone oaks

but in a wind they give each other lee.

Daily since I cleared them I can see
them, tempting to chain saw and ax—
two hardwoods, leaning like that for light.

A hurricane tore through the state one night,
picking up roof and hen-house, boat and dock.
These two stood: leafless, twigless, giving lee.

Last summer ugly slugs unleaved the trees.
Environmental kids wrote *Gypsy Moths Suck*.
The V of naked oaks leaned to the light

for a few weeks, then put out slight
second leaves, scar tissue pale as bracts,
bandaged comrades, lending each other lee.

How perilous in one another's V
our lives are, yoked in this yoke:
two men, leaning apart for light,
but in a wind who give each other lee.

One need look no further than the opening lines of Frost's *Birches*
(published in 1916), and one of Meredith's early idols, to see similarities—
first person narration, nature's impact on the subject trees and the
imaginative journey that begins with these observations:

When I see birches bend to left and right
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay
As ice-storms do. Often you must have seen them
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
After a rain. They click upon themselves

As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust—

Frost first influenced Meredith as a young man, and Meredith's undergraduate senior thesis (1940) was on Frost. Despite Frost's fame, Meredith's *An Analysis of the Poetic Method of Robert Frost*, was "one of the first essays to analyze Frost's poetry." In it we see some ideas that will manifest themselves later in Meredith's work. He takes Frost's "Everything is as good as it is dramatic," and reasons that clearly defined characters in vividly described settings will enhance the narrative tension in a poem and engage the reader. He also surmises from his analysis that "Frost places the burden of interpretation on the reader while simultaneously indicating his intended meaning," (most of Meredith's work does this, but not all, given the many explanatory notations he offered in some of his works), and that other Frost beliefs helped mold his "initial perceptions of poetry and its role in society."²⁴

They met in person when Meredith began teaching at the Breadloaf Writers' Conference (1958-1962), became friends, and remained friends for the rest of their

²⁴<http://collections.conncoll.edu/meredith/works/thesis/>, retrieved 20 July 2018

lives. Meredith even accompanied Frost on a reading tour in 1960.²⁵ Meredith said of his time with Frost, “I feel that was one of the great instructions of my life, just to hang around and watch how he took things, his absolute solidity in the face of the twentieth century that he never made. I think that’s one of the things that I’ve learned—that poems have to be one’s own identity.”²⁶

He credits Frost with “making me, in my own way, strive for the kind of colloquial language that distinguishes his poems. I see a decline in the borrowed rhetoric of my first book, and gradually my poems begin to sound more and more like me—sometimes to the point of blank dullness, but anyhow they’re my own. I learned that from his poems. . . . And I learned from him how to find poems, to stalk them.”²⁷ Elsewhere Meredith notes how in writing “In Memory of Robert Frost” he said he ‘knocked out a lot of carefully rhymed iambic pentameter and tried for flatness of tone,’ so again we see a deliberate divergence from his preferred inclination.²⁸

²⁵ Rotella, Guy L. *Three Contemporary Poets of New England : William Meredith, Philip Booth, and Peter Davison*. Boston : Twayne Publishers, 1983. Print. Twayne's United States Authors Series ; TUSAS 437; Twayne's United States Authors Series ; TUSAS 437. p.7

²⁶ Gerald, Gregory Fitz, et al. “The Frost Tradition: A Conversation with William Meredith.” *Southwest Review*, vol. 57, no. 2, 1972, p. 114.

²⁷ Gerald, Gregory Fitz, et al. “The Frost Tradition: A Conversation with William Meredith.” *Southwest Review*, vol. 57, no. 2, 1972, p. 115.

²⁸ Gerald, Gregory Fitz, et al. “The Frost Tradition: A Conversation with William Meredith.” *Southwest Review*, vol. 57, no. 2, 1972, p. 113

Here, he again subordinates his own work, but clearly feels indebted to Frost for the lessons. Frost also helped with his attempts to “keep a sense of humor always at the corner of the picture,” but he equally credits “Auden’s phrase for the artist, *homo ludens*, man playing,” as an inspiration to retain humor in his work and outlook on life. This comes from Auden’s 1962 much read and referenced collection of essays *The Dyer’s Hand*, but Auden most likely got the idea and expression from Dutch historian Joahn Huizanga’s 1938 book *Homo Ludens*. Perhaps this is another example of the hard-to-detect threads of literary influence across time.

Meredith directly attributes “Walter Jenk’s Bath” (originally appearing in *The New Yorker*, June 8, 1968) as a “critical gift from Frost, a poem his critical insight had enabled me to find.”²⁹ The gift was advice to get himself, the poet, out of the way and so Meredith “gave the poem away. I gave it to a fourteen-year-old high-school student, approximately one-third my then age.” He made the teenager black and a resident of a town in Wisconsin Meredith had only spent one night in while passing through (Meredith’s initiative with founding the Upward Bound program at Connecticut College and his involvement with it from 1964-1968 (the year “Walter Jenk’s Bath” was published in *The New Yorker*) likely also

²⁹ Reasons for Poetry and The Reason for Criticism. Two Lectures Delivered at the Library of Congress on May 7, 1979 and May 5, 1980. Retrieved 27 July 2018.

contributed to his creating a poem from a young African-American's perspective). What's also interesting is that this influence from Frost—gifting a poem to another persona—along with the success of Meredith's good friend John Berryman was having with his persona-based *Dreamsongs* collection, could very likely have contributed to Meredith's subsequent 1975 book, *Hazard the Painter*, being an entirely persona-based collection.

For Meredith, poetry was generally not a weapon to wielded in a political cause (though certainly others were free to do so), but rather his “human concern, as a poet, requires me to look at and answer these political questions, but not necessarily to tell other people the answers and certainly not to write propaganda poems.” He goes on with his always subtle humor to reinforce this belief, when he states “one has to do what's in character; don't for instance, think you can judge the excellence of a modern poet by his attendance record at anti-Vietnam rallies.”³⁰ He said all of this publicly in 1972, but privately it seems political issues still took up some of his emotional and writing energy.

Despite this, he did say that during the Vietnam War his “political conscience” had him rethinking his naval vessel poems published after

³⁰ Gerald, Gregory Fitz, et al. “The Frost Tradition: A Conversation with William Meredith.” *Southwest Review*, vol. 57, no. 2, 1972, pp. 110.

WW2 because “World War II was very much more plausible than any violence that this nation has been involved with since, to my mind.” He was proud of what he and his countrymen did during their war, but poems like his “we probably won’t have again because of what we’ve done to the sea and because of the promiscuous bloodiness of our wars.”

In 1980’s *The Cheer* he got around to publishing his 1969 poem “A Mild-Spoken Citizen Finally Writes to the White House” and “Nixon’s the One” in 1975’s *Hazard, the Painter*. In both of these the speaker is taking to task an America that has gone off the rails by a leader deemed unworthy of the office. So while none of his political poems are purely propaganda, as his moral compass and sense of manners would not allow him to do that, these poems are clearly release valves for his mind. We see a poet reflecting on a country diverging from the one he proudly served while in uniform, and a poetry commenting on a contemporary political issue.

But nearly 25 years earlier Meredith hit on a truth we writers and readers never seem to grasp and constantly have to re-learn regarding poetry and politics—every era can be seen as a turbulent time, “a time like this”, particularly to those living in it. Even the Greeks and Romans had writers bemoaning the decline of

current society and its leaders, and the approaching apocalypse—just around the corner. In 1948's *Ships and Other Figures* "Envoi", he writes:

Go, little book. If anybody asks
Why I add poems to a time like this,
Tell how the comeliness I can't take in
Of ships and other figures of content
Compels me still until I give them names;
And how I give them names impatiently,
As who should pull up roses by the roots
That keep him turning on his empty bed,
The smell intolerable and thick with loss.

But despite each turbulent time, it is the duty of the poet to continue to still bring words to bear and bring art into the world. This is another gift poetry offers us to all—the same eternally repeated feelings and concerns brought to us freshly in the words of our time and the context of our culture, so we—the people of each age—can understand them. Meredith knew this, too. At a 1979 conference in Struga, he presented "The Language of Poetry In Defense of Human Speech,"³¹ where only one of twenty-eight excellent points he made was:

When I am writing a poem, in the State of Connecticut,
in the United States of America, in 1979, I listen not only to the
content of the poem but for words which the people of my time

³¹ Meredith, William. "The Language of Poetry in Defense of Human Speech: Some Notes on the Topic of the Struga Symposium of 1979." *The American Poetry Review*, vol. 8, no. 6, 1979, pp. 14–15.

and place would hear as the most precise (and therefore delightful) expression of that content. My listening is deliberately local: a time, a place, a social ambiance. What I hope to hear is a voice, a dialect of the mind.

He was raised Episcopalian but a practical, daily faith practice does not appear to have been a central part of most of his adult life, despite occasionally referencing faith or God in his work. Later in life he would fairly regularly give faith-tinged orations at his college's Chapel. In 1958's *The Open Sea* he writes, "Although not yet a man given to prayer, I pray / For each creature lost since the start of the sea, / And give thanks it was not I, nor yet one close to me." This poem is a precursor to *The Wreck of the Thresher*, and perhaps informs why that poem was so emotionally compelling a few years down the road. Note the first instance of the word "yet". It acknowledges the speaker's belief in God's involvement with man, a speaker unwilling to directly subordinate himself to a higher power at this particular time, but knowing he should/would at some point in life. These thoughts regarding God's involvement with us continued in his life. But maybe God speaks through people. "I suppose it seems to me that the priestly function of artists in a society is to administer spiritual vision," he said in 1983.³²

One gets the sense the few overtly religious themed poems he wrote were done more as intellectual exercises or historical musings, and with an intellectual's

³² Hirsch, Edward, and William Meredith. "The Art of Poetry XXXIV : William Meredith." *Paris review* (1985) Print. p.39

undertone that perhaps formal religion does more harm than good but that it does have a place in civilized society.

For instance, “Notre Dame de Chartres” tells the story of a relic (the shirt worn by Mary, the mother of Jesus, at his birth) being spared in the fire that mostly destroys the church, but the speaker hints his faith is not the same as the true believers, who thought this a miracle. To the speaker, the miracle is “the faith that burned / Bright and erroneous / and built that house.” To the speaker, the tenets are wrong, but the result, a beautiful gothic church in France, are right. The speaker refers to “the legend of God’s mother,” not Mary as divine vessel.

One thing I really liked about this poem though is the final line, where, after speaking the whole poem about the mother (Mary) of God (Jesus), the “father” finally enters the story. The shirt was saved only because the church (the “house”) was made of stone, and it was “the stone that slept in the groin of France.” God might not always be right, the speaker seems to say, but what beauty man has built in God’s honor. And this church wasn’t the only product of France to impress and impact Meredith’s life.

When discussing the reason he translated Guillaume Apollinaire’s *Alcools* : *Poems 1898-1913*, published in 1964, the same year *The Wreck of the Thresher*, Meredith begins and ends the discussion with the same thought, worded

differently. He begins with “It may have to do with our needing to refresh the themes and images of our own poetry at this moment,” and ends with “because those poems [*Alcools*] not only had enormous excitement for people of our moment, but they also, I think, were very useful for me. I don’t believe any poet gets involved with a translation that doesn’t have something to do with where’s he’s going, too.”³³ Meredith found something he needed in Apollinaire and dove in. Steegmuller noted that “All of *Alcools* is particularly interesting because in it we witness the actual birth of a new poetry.” So where was Meredith going at that time?

Well, keep in mind, he had always stayed true to order and traditional forms as a guiding principle— “my formal proclivity” he called it. “If there is a certain excess of formality in my poetry, it’s because the poems that move me most deeply were from a more decorous period of American poetry.”³⁴ I would add that is not just the more “decorous” periods and styles of American poetry, but also those of the poets across the pond—Shelley, Yeats, Apollinaire. In discussing his translation of Apollinaire’s “Autumn Crocuses”, Meredith notes, “I have been influenced by the sonnet-like original version of this poem. A skilled reader of the French would have no trouble reconstructing anapaestic tetrameter lines,

³³ Gerald, Gregory Fitz, et al. “The Frost Tradition: A Conversation with William Meredith.” *Southwest Review*, vol. 57, no. 2, 1972, pp. 112.

³⁴ Gerald, Gregory Fitz, et al. “The Frost Tradition: A Conversation with William Meredith.” *Southwest Review*, vol. 57, no. 2, 1972, pp. 116.

irregularly rhymed.”³⁵ He knew formal poetry instinctively, and had to strive consciously to not create such. This “proclivity” was ingrained in his nature and his training.

Perhaps by this point in his career, he was feeling stilted, restrained. In an undated interview for *Poetry Miscellany*, a copy provided by the interviewer, poet Richard Jackson, and published sometime in the 1980’s, Meredith mentioned “I felt formal prosody was chaining me, that I was playing it safe behind rhyme and meters.” Seeing the success some of the wilder and looser poets of his day were having, he couldn’t quite admit to modeling them, the anti-thesis of who he thought himself to be, but he could again go to his “elders”—in this case, Apollinaire—for guidance and inspirations, while still maintaining an academic and intelligent sheen to his work. “Apollinaire’s was one of the first really open imaginations in poetry, or so I think. And I have one of the up-tightest imaginations in modern poetry, or so I think. So I realized this was an affinity I had found that would be good for me to explore. I wrote some poems when I was working on Apollinaire that started me in a whole new direction.”³⁶

³⁵ Apollinaire, Guillaume, and Francis Steegmuller. *Alcools : Poems, 1898-1913*. Translated by William Meredith, First ed., Doubleday & Company, 1964. p. 226.

³⁶ Gerald, Gregory Fitz, et al. “The Frost Tradition: A Conversation with William Meredith.” *Southwest Review*, vol. 57, no. 2, 1972, pp. 112

Meredith published hundreds of poems over the course of his career, in a wide variety of styles, all of which contributed to him developing his own intelligent and accessible verse. But he knew his style wasn't the only style, and that advocating for poetry as a whole is how it would become appealing to more practitioners and readers. In two lectures delivered at the Library of Congress one year apart during his tenure as Consultant in Poetry, Meredith eloquently argued for a "more generous definition of poetry" and for a "similar generosity of spirit among the critics." To support his positions he quotes Eliot, Ashberry, Auden, Pinsky, Hass, Frost, Zbigniew Herbert, Rilke, June Jordan, and Jarrell (who also quotes Whitman and Tennyson). All of these other writers informed his beliefs about the role of poetry in our society and helped to propel him towards and sustain him as our country's top-positional-poet.³⁷

Years earlier, in a May 1966 he had already crystalized his beliefs about the role of art in our society and in our education programs. In response to the Princeton Chairman's article on the future of "the creative arts at Princeton," Meredith defends the creative arts at Princeton and discusses the differences between the scholar and the artist:

³⁷ Reasons for Poetry and The Reason for Criticism. Two Lectures Delivered at the Library of Congress on May 7, 1979 and May 5, 1980. Retrieved 27 July 2018.

Creative activities are being used by today's students in a somewhat new way: to explore their most serious beliefs and feelings. Art can accommodate the complexity of their world more flexibly than the subjects they are studying, on the one hand, or the very limited roll they are allowed to play in their society, on the other... Scholarship is an act of orderly enquiry. The creative discipline is much more radical: it is frequently obliged to be controversial, individual, rancorous, destructive. Scholarship can be taught and graded, with rough justice and occasional injustice. Art, in its own time, cannot.³⁸

My brief study of William Meredith has shown me the proof of these last two sentences, and that direct influence can be discovered, attributed, and acknowledged (by the poet, critics, and scholars), and that there will also always be environmental/circumstantial influences at work on a poet, some more discernable than others. Poets evolve over time, as does our concept of poetry, and being open to both allows the poet, the readers, and poetry to grow, and poetry to evolve with the times in one continuous circle.

Meredith was formally trained by and informally mentored by some of the best poets of his day; he sought guidance from the poets who came before him and offered him the opportunity to share in an orderly poetry experience early on as he preferred, experimented away from, but ultimately returned.

However, my biggest takeaway from this short study is this: it is our tendency to put poets into categories and compare them with other writers, previous and

³⁸ *Daily Princetonian*, Volume 90, Number 21, March 3, 1966, retrieved 27 July 2018

contemporary, as an aid to try and help us grasp their work. But in studying Meredith's works and his writings about other poets and their poems, I was struck by the realization that perhaps we do not always imitate writers who've come before us—often we won't have encountered them by the time we write something similar—but rather as we progress in our study of earlier poets, we recognize the affinity of our earlier work with theirs—their habitual subjects, voice, style of writing, etc.—and begin to develop the language to describe our similarities to them and advocate our appreciation for our poetic forebears. It is through this “language of the tribe” that Meredith so often referenced in interviews that he has helped me begin to develop by letting me borrow his eyes for awhile.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE TRIBE: WILLIAM MEREDITH & ROBERT LOWELL'S LAST DINNER TOGETHER

By Michael Collier

Before I read any of William Meredith's poems, I read this: "Meredith is an expert writer and knows how to make his meters and sentences accomplish hard labors. His intelligent poems, unlike most poems, have a character behind them." That's what Robert Lowell wrote about Meredith's third book, *The Open Sea* (1958), and it was used as jacket copy in 1970 for *Earth Walk*, Meredith's new and selected poems. If I was uncertain about what Lowell meant by character, I didn't have to look very far to find out. In a short foreword to *Earth Walk*, Meredith says, "An author's chronological account of his work, like the selected poems here, insinuates an autobiography or at least a character that he would like the reader to accept: that of a candid man paying scrupulous attention to the events of his life." And a few sentences later, "To say that a man's poems are honest is to say more about the terms of poetry than about the man." I liked the idea that a poem could be honest, more honest than the person who wrote it, and yet the poem might have the effect of making honesty the poet's goal. I thought of honesty as a form of truth—and at eighteen, which was my age at the time, I wanted to speak truth; but also at that age, I believed truth was something you felt and declared rather than noticed and made, that honesty was intrinsic rather than hard-won.

In his essay, "In Loving Memory of the Late Author of Dream Songs," Meredith, writing about the time he spent accompanying John Berryman to Goddard College in 1971, a few months before Berryman killed himself, recalled the yearning the two had for "decorum and even old-fashioned manners." Meredith wasn't speaking about manners as "social behavior," of which he characterized their own as "dubious," but rather as a "social ideal." He saw manners in the same way he saw literary form: as "an agreed-on language, an established position from which you could negotiate with accuracy toward or away from human intimacy." Meredith's discussion of manners and decorum lead him to make a distinction between two kinds of honesty. One was "promiscuous honesty" that was "preferred to conventional manners," which he saw everywhere in the culture of the 1960s and 70s. "Promiscuous honesty" entailed "an evasion of the social predicament" and

pretended “to candor.” The other form of honesty recognized “that all honest engagements are negotiations...that require the expense of attention.”

In “Morning after Dining with a Friend,” a poem from Robert Lowell’s last book, *Day by Day* (1977), published just before his death, he describes his first encounter with Meredith, in 1955:

I met you first at the old Met Opera Club,
shy, correct, in uniform,
your regulation on active duty
substitute for black tie—

Poet and aviator
at 36,
the eternal autumn of youth.

Meredith had been a pilot in both the Army Air Corps and the Navy during World War II and after the war went into the reserves before he was called up for duty in Korea, in which he served as a Navy carrier pilot. Meredith liked flying, and as a gay man he liked the company of men, but he also felt compelled to continue to serve his country. Of that generation of poets who served in the military in WWII, I can’t think of another who still would have been on active duty in 1955, two years after the end of the Korean War. In the same way that he believed in a social ideal of manners and decorum, he believed in ideal forms of citizenship. Serving one’s country in the military was a way of negotiating honestly with the obligations of citizenship. This didn’t mean that he believed military service was the only way to negotiate those obligations, but rather that it was the way he felt compelled to respond, given his character and temperament, just as it was in Lowell’s character to fulfill his obligation as a citizen during WWII in jail, as a “fire-breathing Catholic C.O.”

Even in the rarified world of the Metropolitan Opera Club of the 1950s, Meredith substituting a military uniform for black-tie, which of course is just another sort of uniform, would have set him apart, would have made clear that he wanted to be taken not only as a “poet and aviator” but as a cultivated officer and gentleman. And yet Lowell, in his poem, sees through Meredith’s presentation of self to that essence of his character that is both “shy” and “correct.” Those two words crucially bring the meeting to life, and through them Lowell negotiates the encounter in an act of “scrupulous attention” or rather at the “expense of attention.”

As if to prove how difficult it is to sustain attentive honesty—or perhaps how little you need to establish it—Lowell’s description of Meredith as “the

eternal autumn of youth,” five lines later, has the feel of mere representation. What Lowell calls an “image” at the start of the next stanza takes up the real occasion for the poem: a meeting they had, their last, in March of 1976, in Cambridge and Boston. Lowell sets the scene:

Waking wifeless is now a habit—
hearing the human-abstract rush of traffic,
another night, another day
entertaining nothing but my thoughts—
Why have I twisted your kind words
and tortured myself till morning?
My brain keeps flashing back last night—
a booth in the Greek restaurant,
now fronting the Boston Combat Zone—
“We’d be mad not to take a taxi back.”
“I think Frost liked me better
but found you more amusing.”

In the twenty or so intervening years since their first meeting, Lowell and Meredith had become good friends. In 1975, as a student of Meredith’s at Connecticut College, I was invited to drive with him to Cambridge to hear Lowell read at Harvard. Lowell wasn’t expecting to see Meredith that night, but when he saw him standing (I can’t help now but think “shy” and “correct”) in the outer ring of friends and well-wishers after the reading, Lowell lit up with pleasure and immediately made his way to greet him as well as to suggest he come to a party afterwards. What I witnessed in Lowell was a moment of genuine warmth and affection, almost of surprise and relief at having discovered a path to intimacy in an otherwise public event. If I hadn’t already observed Meredith’s interactions with others with whom he shared deep, long friendships (such as Muriel Rukeyser, Robert Penn Warren, and Richard Wilbur) I would have said Meredith’s own reaction to Lowell that night had been reserved or even deferential rather than a manifestation of the quiet way he had of soliciting a response with a gentle, calm rectitude—a formal welcoming that offered a serious, principled smile. For Meredith, any human interaction was an opportunity for an honest encounter, not to be squandered, and yet there was nothing dour or morally pinched about it. In the two-and-a-half years that I had been Meredith’s student, and then in the several before he had a catastrophic stroke, in 1983—and even in the decades beyond until he died, in 2007—I spent many hours in his company and I can’t remember ever having had a trivial conversation with him. It’s not that you couldn’t talk about trivial things, but he had a way of finding in small talk larger concerns.

Lowell died on September 12, 1977, not long after Helen Vendler reviewed *Day by Day* in the August 14 *New York Times*, ahead of its official publication date. “Morning after Dining with a Friend” had been written after Lowell had sent Meredith a series of poems that would appear in *Day by Day*. These poems became one of the topics of conversation the night of their meal at the Greek restaurant. Meredith was under no illusion about his gifts as a poet compared with Lowell’s. In fact, he liked to say of himself that he was a B+ poet, a characterization that always made me, and other friends, uncomfortable. Even if it carried some truth when he compared himself to Lowell, it made for a rare awkwardness. I never knew quite how to respond. Was Meredith wanting me to reassure him that in fact he was better than B+? Was I supposed to admire his honesty? It also made me aware, as Lowell’s poem does (“I think Frost liked me better / but found you more amusing”) that friendship aside, Meredith was always aware of the literary pecking order. I mention this not to point out a flaw or contradiction in Meredith’s character—although why not?—but rather to show how manners and decorum, if they’re worth anything, are in tension with the social ideal they imagine. In other words, manners and decorum could miss their mark, so to speak, but that didn’t mean they were false or artificial. Instead, like everything else that has to do with human relationships, they were complicated and imperfect.

In his essay, “Remembering Robert Lowell,” Meredith gives his own account of their dinner and final meeting. Written within a few months of Lowell’s death, the essay uses the occasion of their last meeting to describe their friendship. Some time had passed since they had seen each other, and Lowell, Meredith reports, lamented, “Our not getting together yearly is unnatural, isn’t it?” Meredith tells us that he had not “heard much about the new book [*Day by Day*]” but had been shown “some revised and written-over poems from...the ‘Ulysses and Circe’ series.” He also says that Lowell did not make mention of the changes occurring in his marriage to Caroline Blackwood. “We were not suddenly that intimate,” Meredith writes, noting that “after almost two years; the friendship had suffered disuse, and that matter was private.” Nevertheless, Lowell did tell him about a recent hospitalization at McLean’s, which Meredith recalled as being for “tests in preparation for a new treatment.” The tests also revealed Lowell had suffered recently from a mild heart attack, a harbinger of his death.

The fact that they had not seen each other for a few years is the likely reason for Lowell’s poignant description of Meredith—no longer “the eternal autumn of youth”—that leads to the end of “Morning after Dining with a Friend.” Lowell writes:

That image has gained body:
yet shrinks back this morning
to its greener Platonic shade,
the man of iron—
not drinking, terrified
of losing your mind...
turning to me, calm
by a triumph of impersonation:
“if you could come a little nearer
the language of the tribe.”

Meredith remembers that at one point coming back from the men’s room and passing through a “long, empty space of half-light,” Lowell remarked, “It seems strange to see you with white hair.” Of course, the unspoken conversation Lowell was having with himself was as much about his own preoccupation with aging as it was with his friend’s, a preoccupation that is everywhere present in the poems he was writing at the time. Meredith had also confided to Lowell—his way of being intimate—that he had stopped drinking and was “terrified / of losing [his] mind.” During the night, Lowell not only twists his friend’s words but is haunted by the recognition they are both getting old. In the morning, however, the “image” of a white-haired Meredith, “shrinks back... / to its greener Platonic shade.” The epithet Lowell finds for his friend, “the man of iron,” gives corporeal substance to the metaphor of “Platonic shade” and has the effect of slightly mythologizing Meredith. But I think the epithet also cuts in a different direction, less positive, and anticipates the penultimate stanza, which asks us to consider that the “man of iron” is a façade.

Meredith had not seen “Morning after Dining with a Friend” until it was published in *Day by Day*—and, actually, I believe I brought the existence of the poem to his attention. Although Lowell did not identify who the friend was, the details left little room for doubt. Also, I was certain it was Meredith because I had heard him frequently talk about the “language of the tribe” in the classroom and in conversation, elsewhere. “The language of the tribe” is a notion Meredith adapted from T.S. Eliot’s incorporation of Mallarmé’s line (“*Donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu*”) in “Little Gidding,” which Eliot renders as “To purify the dialect of the tribe.” For Meredith, however, the purified dialect of the tribe was not to be found in Eliot or Mallarmé but rather in the very American idiom of Robert Frost. Frost, on whom Meredith wrote his undergraduate thesis, composed in a colloquial American idiom based on speech patterns. Meredith believed that poetry should be accessible

to any moderately educated person. He also felt it should be useful and be a source of delight in our lives. The language of the tribe was the key to both accessibility and usefulness.

In his remembrance of Lowell, Meredith describes the usual part he played in their relationship as writers, one in which he frequently asked questions about “places where [Lowell’s] poems were unclear: where the reader was not told clearly what the poem was saying (rather than what it meant).” This was a role that began in 1969 when the two poets were together in Madrid. While there, proofs of Lowell’s first *Notebook* arrived from the publisher and needed to be corrected. Meredith recalls how many of the last-minute changes Lowell made were the result of his convincing Lowell to “clarify passages...that were not clear, not located in the poem as they were in his experience.” Meredith had long believed that Lowell’s poems “made severer demands on their readers than they needed to,” a belief that was in keeping with his assessment “that many modern poets neglect the vulgar energy of speech for a literary language of their own.” Because Meredith had seen only a few “revised and written-over poems” from *Day by Day*, he did not have a better sense of how much nearer Lowell had in fact moved to the language of the tribe, as Meredith conceived it. Nevertheless, from the little he’d seen, he “found [the poems] more accessible” and told Lowell before they left Dunster House for the Greek restaurant that “his language was moving nearer to the language of the tribe.” Meredith’s comment sounds descriptive rather than proscriptive, which is how Lowell must have heard it or thought he heard it, and as such it had carried the ring of a pronouncement that perhaps became the source of Lowell’s self-torture.

After dinner, Meredith drove them back to Dunster House, where Lowell inscribed a copy of his *Selected Poems*. The inscription reveals that he was already turning over and worrying his old friend’s remark. At first, Lowell inscribes, “One’s books moving n...,” but then he strikes it out and replaces it with, “One’s language moving nearer the language....” The slip, if that’s what it was, is interesting and revealing. By substituting “books” for “language,” and language was without question the word Meredith would have used, Lowell has in mind the literary artifact that language produces rather than the human fabric and connective tribal tissue Meredith had in mind. “Books” indicates a moment of inattentiveness that Lowell recognizes and quickly corrects. The dedication page with its hesitant, revised inscription is a metaphor, an accurate and graphic symbol of Lowell’s life and art, which was writ large with revision. As Lowell adjusts and revises his inscription so that it comports more closely with Meredith’s actual words, he literally enacts

(inscribes) in front of his friend, and on the page, the direction his friend wants Lowell's poems to take—"to move nearer the language of the tribe."

We might think the revised inscription, which includes, Meredith tells us, "a phrase still undeciphered" and is signed, "Love, Cal," might be the end of the episode, but it is in fact something like a mid-point. "Morning after Dining with a Friend," begins with Lowell opining that "[w]aking wifeless is now a habit." It's easy to imagine him adrift in bed, "entertaining," he tells us, "nothing but his thoughts" as he listens to the "human-abstract rush of traffic" coming from Memorial Drive along the Charles. In this abandoned, slightly self-pitying state, he asks, "Why have I twisted your kind words / and tortured myself till morning?" While it's possible the only kind words Lowell twisted were the ones Meredith used about the language of the tribe, it's likely there were other aspects of the evening that made Lowell's night fitful and self-recriminating. The poem carries with it a parenthetical marker or subtitle "(Some weeks after Logan Airport)" which refers to "Logan Airport, Boston," the opening poem of the second section in part III of *Day by Day*, dedicated to his wife. Another poem, "Suburban Surf," with its parenthetical "(After Caroline's return)" closes the section. The first poem laments Blackwood's departure, while the second marks her return. In between these poems, Lowell has placed "Morning after Dining with a Friend." In the poem about Blackwood's departure, Lowell is preoccupied with the hardening of "mannerisms" that take place in people and in relationships over time, as well as the unrelenting process of aging. "I cannot bring back youth with the snap of my belt," he writes in "Logan Airport, Boston." And further, he asks, "Is it cynical to deliquesce, / as Adam did in age, / though outwardly goldleaf, / true metal, and make-up?" (No wonder, he was struck by the dissonance of seeing Meredith's white hair.) In "Suburban Surf," Lowell is awake in bed listening to the surf of morning traffic, but now he's holding his wife in his "insomniac arms." When she wakes, he says she is "like a bear tipping a hive for honey," shaking "the pillow for French cigarettes." What follows—"No conversation"—reminds us of the hardened mannerisms of "Logan Airport, Boston" and Blackwood's departure, and so Lowell turns his attention to the traffic and finds in its "whooshing waves," its "mechanical— / soothe, delay, divert," a kind of "truce with uncertain heaven." After which, he makes this assertion, "A false calm is the best calm." Or is it really a question he's been asking himself, one that he carried over from his dinner with Meredith?

Perhaps the most powerful lines in "Morning after Dining with a Friend" occur after Meredith reveals his terror over losing his mind. At that point, Lowell tells us, Meredith turned to him "calm / by a triumph of impersonation." Similarly to "man of iron," the line "a triumph of

impersonation” contains ambiguity. It’s not clear to me if Lowell trusts Meredith’s “calm” demeanor or if he finds in his “triumph of impersonation” an achievement to admire. A poet I know, who is a scholar of Lowell’s work, told me “Lowell’s depiction of Meredith is harsh, typically harsh.” Harsh might be one way to read this part of the poem, but given Lowell’s strategic placement of it in *Day by Day* and the way it’s framed and refers to Blackwood’s going and coming, it seems more likely that Lowell found in his encounter with Meredith a powerful and perhaps rueful confirmation of his own preoccupations.

If Lowell found himself wondering the next morning why he had twisted his friend’s kind words, Meredith found himself puzzling over the revised and partially undeciphered inscription. In his remembrance of Lowell, Meredith writes: “Before I saw ‘Morning after Dining with a Friend,’ but after I had pondered the inscription, I wrote a poem in his memory containing this line: ‘Your language moved slowly towards our language.’” Here the impulse is clearly descriptive, and it counters, without foreknowledge, Lowell’s memory of what was said: “If you could *come* a little nearer / the language of the tribe” (my italics). Meredith’s remark about Lowell’s new work, he offers, “was intended as praise,” and he believed Lowell understood it as such, even though Lowell’s poem “would suggest something more ambivalent on one or both sides.” Although Meredith was given to say that Lowell was his “better,” he wasn’t going to have his friend put words in his mouth. Nor was he going to give Lowell a pass because he had died. Nevertheless, his remembrance also demonstrates that he understood the responsibility he had to be as fair as possible in his recollection of their last meeting because Lowell could offer no response. Generosity, which was a natural part of Meredith’s character, demanded that he assign a portion of blame to himself for their misunderstanding. He writes, “I meant...to say” to Lowell “that I was glad that the new poems seemed nearer to the density and energy of common verbal experience”; and then he speculates, again generously, about what might have happened during the night that caused Lowell to twist his words. Meredith suggests that Lowell was so used to having his friend ask him questions about his poems that during the night Lowell rephrased Meredith’s remark “as a question, and that he attributed that question about his language to me, who had asked him so many.” Perhaps there is no better illustration of what Lowell meant by the character behind Meredith’s poems than his attempt at an honest and balanced appraisal of what took place between them that night. It provides a model for how to negotiate a disagreement with a friend in public, and, more delicately, with a friend who is dead.

Lowell's twisting of his friend's kind words was not the only kink of misquotation in "Morning after Dining with a Friend" that Meredith felt compelled to straighten. Another instance occurs when Lowell has Meredith say, "I think Frost liked me better / but found you more amusing." "Amusing," Meredith writes, "is not a weighty word in my vocabulary, not a praise word, certainly not a word adequate to the felt disturbance of heart, dazzle of mind, that one experienced in Lowell's company." "Amusing" did not capture the "profound gaiety" Lowell exhibited as a "great mimic" and "a playful father." What Meredith remembers saying is, "I think Frost found you more interesting." In the same way he took a portion of responsibility for Lowell's misunderstanding his response to the new poems, Meredith admits, too, that what he "meant to say to him that night" was that he "envied him that [Lowell] could interest Frost more than [he] could have hoped to." To most readers, the difference between "amusing" and "interesting" might not seem crucial—but to Meredith, and this again speaks to his character, "amusing" was an insufficient word to carry the weight of what he was trying to say; and part of what he was trying to say was that he envied Lowell, which is not an attractive thing to admit, especially to a friend.

The generation of poets of which Meredith was a prominent member was not known for its optimism. Many of its poets led tragic and painful lives. It was also a generation greatly influenced by literary experiments and cultural upheaval that called into question and often denounced the traditions and conventions that had guided poets for centuries. Meredith's natural modesty—and his belief in manners and decorum as a reflection of an ideal for human interaction—called him not so much to stand against the upheaval but to offer an alternative. He had watched two of his poet friends, John Berryman and Robert Lowell, as they took themselves again and again to the "dark brink" of personal disaster. Their poems often enacted the drama of their perilous lives. Meredith understood that their art was an honest, hard-won, and accurate response to their experience. They were acting in character, just as he was when Lowell met him at the Metropolitan Opera Club. The alternative Meredith offered was in many ways unfashionable, as it still is today. I'm not talking about the style of his poems, because all styles eventually become unfashionable, and this is often especially true for much experimental writing. No, what was unfashionable then and now was the calm, equitable, reticent, scrupulous decorum of human interaction that his poems tried to enact. In his poem, "In Loving Memory of the Late Author of Dream Songs," Meredith writes, "I do what's in character, I look for things / to praise on the river banks and I praise them." While this statement sounds

pretty straightforward, it's not. Listen to how the stanza preceding those lines will have complicated the meaning of praise:

Morale is what I think about all the time
now, what hopeful men and women can say and do.
But having to speak for you, I can't
lie. 'Let his giant faults appear, as sent
together with his virtues down,' the song says.
It says suicide is a crime
and that wives and children deserve better than this.
None of us deserved, of course, you.

Meredith finds a way to criticize and chide Berryman for his suicide, yet at the same time he weighs that against the poet's many "virtues" and the privilege of having had a friendship with him. Meredith takes his license for the poem by asserting his preoccupation with "morale." In another poem, "Hazard's Optimism," he tells us that Hazard, his superego, "is in charge of morale in a morbid time." Webster's defines morale as "the mental and emotional condition (as of enthusiasm, confidence, or loyalty) of an individual or group with regard to the function or tasks at hand." Meredith's formulation of the task, both of poetry and life, is to discover "what hopeful men and women can say and do." This is in keeping with Meredith's belief that there are three fundamental stances poets and poems can take: dissident, apologist, or solitary. The dissident's underlying stance is that of social critic; the apologist's is "acceptance or approval of the human or social predicament of his tribe"; the solitary's is of the poem "talking to itself" with "no implicit agreement about social needs or predicaments." Although all three stances can be found in any single poet, and potentially all at once, Meredith thought by attraction, temperament, and circumstance, one of the stances was apt to prevail at any given time. For most of his life, Meredith assigned himself the stance of an apologist, not because he was against political dissent (take a look at his poems "Nixon's the One" and "A Mild-Spoken Citizen Finally Writes to the White House"); and not because his poems couldn't strike a solitary's pose (take a look at "Country Stars" and "Ideogram"); but because by temperament he believed the task at hand was to boost the morale of the tribe—and one of the ways to do this was to defend and keep alive social manners and aesthetic forms that remained useful.

"Apologist" nowadays has lost its older meaning of someone who defends a set of beliefs and has become a synonym for someone who often excuses the inexcusable. Meredith was fiercely not that kind of apologist. He was an optimist. The energy of the optimism that comes through his poems was his

life's work, and late in his career, his mission was to celebrate the best aspects of humanity and the human spirit. His optimism was progressive and inclusive—and the decorum that guided it was fueled by a desire to find “the right words,” as he says in “The Cheer.” Like Hazard, Meredith was “[g]nawed by a vision of rightness /that no one else seems to see.” What this vision required of him was to “bear witness” to “the shaped things he’s seen— / a few things made by men, / a galaxy made well.” Lowell may have found a willfulness in Meredith’s optimism and his resolve to put a good face on the human predicament, a phrase Meredith liked to use. Perhaps this is why he perceived his friend’s calm as a “false calm,” arrived at “by a triumph of impersonation.” I believe that Meredith’s optimism was an honest expression of who he was, a “hopeful” man, and it was crucial for his art to reflect that, which it did.

I can’t think of any poet of his generation or in the generations since who would risk titling a book of poems *The Cheer*, and yet that’s what Meredith called his last book, published in 1980, a few years before a stroke took away his ability to write poems. The risk, of course, is that readers accustomed to Lowell’s self-described “lurid, rapid, garish, grouped, / heightened from life, / yet paralyzed by fact” “snapshot[s]” might find a cheeriness in cheer—but that’s not what Meredith offered. He offered a way for us to access the optimism he believed was inherent in words. “Cheer or courage,” he writes, “is what [the right words] are all born in.” This is the profoundly comforting message that words and language carry, and as such they ask to embody their native cheer and courage, “even,” as Meredith concludes his poem “The Cheer,” “when it seems quite impossible to do.” By suggesting to Lowell that his work had begun to move nearer the language of the tribe, he was suggesting it was coming closer to inhabiting the native optimism words contain. For Meredith, this was one of poetry’s imperatives. To recognize it was a form of praise, and to be calm in that recognition, especially in the terrifying face of one’s own decline, was not an impersonation but an assertion of character.

(This essay was written to honor the centenary of William Meredith’s birth.)

Enabling Love

*A
Tribute
To
William Meredith*

By Tom Kirlin

Winner of the 2019 William Meredith Award in Poetry

Poets'  Choice

A Major Work

Poems are hard to read
Pictures are hard to see
Music is hard to hear
And people are hard to love

But whether from brute need
Or divine energy
At last mind eye and ear
And the great sloth heart will move.

—William Meredith

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Acknowledgements

William Meredith, *Partial Accounts: New and Selected Poems*, Alfred A. Knopf (New York, 1987)

“Why the Soul Loves Catfish,” Tom Kirlin, *Under the Potato Moon*, Little Red Tree Publishing, LLC (New London, 2013)

I
You Move Among Us

“A poet penetrates a dark disguise
After his own conception, little or large.
Crossing the scaleless asia of trouble
Where it seems no one could give himself away,
He gives himself away, he sets a scale.”

A Korean Woman Seated By A Wall

March
or April
there
will be
FROST
p a r a d e s complaints
a
f
l a
o
t
of
buck-
naked [poetic]
dreams
HOWLing up
Kitemaug
Road
as
a
Ch i l l
brick WiND
cuts its
sharp teeth

on the
 TANGled

 INNARDS

 of “We the People”

 for OH! You

 & Far too

 Many Poets

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 buried

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 (Wyoming).

 Yes you, Sir William, you & your

 Astringent

 Sweetwater

 WORDs

still wet
 my
 whistle

 & warm
 our
 Cheeks
 Your poems
 as

 as
 Fierce

 any
 Fleet
 of
 20th Century
 Poems

 for
 You
 set

 Ablaze
 the
 brute Heart

 and Named
 (our divine)
 needs.

 Indeed:::
 Your
 Flight
 deep
 inside

 the Psyche

EXPLODES

inside a Reader,

FORcing

U.S.

to EXamine

each Day

(more)

Honestly, Freely

(& for)

whatever reason

WHATEVER

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to

become

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will

not

be

easy.

HOVERing

now (slightly) beside

VIGIL

-ilant

ENDuring

words

you keep

(somewhat)

a l o o f
 Your AIR borne Legacy
 re ceding
 though not completely
 for who can forget
 you
 Received
 the PULITZER Prize
 Are recognized by
 The Academy of American Poets
 The Poetry Foundation
 &
 The ENTIRE
 nation
 of Bulgaria
 PLUS were
 a Visiting Artist to
 Russia, India, Bulgria, Ireland, Greece.
 Yet
 the Norton Anthology
 dropped you (recently)
 You,
 a Cultured Voice,

not even mentioned
in the State Department's own
"American Poetry, 1945-1990: The Anti-Tradition."

True:

You are no
Anti-Traditonalist!

You strafed
us with

Sonnets Villanelles

Sestinas, etc.

(plus)

that Constant RAPID

Friendly

of fire

P
O
R
C
U
P
I
N
E

rhymes

hitting each mark
in the wee dark hours

of our wine-soaked

MORTALity.

That you do/did
so
(well; repeatedly)
stands as

TESTament
to
Your
own
DIFFicult
CHOices

as you seized & accept

CONsequenCES
disPLAYed

Compassion (wit) COurage duty

Especially!
in

PARTIAL ACCOUNTS

(an Old Soul's war stories, told by its boyish KEEPer).

Yes, Sweet William, we COMMend and Thank You
for
(bringing into) Being
a more Literate
IMAGIn ation.
Now it is ours
to Keep.

II

The Literate Imagination

“The ocean was salt before we crawled to tears.”

The Wreck Of The Thresher

Your craft seldom
levitates/radiates

BEAUTY.

No. Your Carrier ship/words
dredge deeper, lifting

Submerged

Grief
(oh, how you yearn for
land
for Trees!)

mixing the body's Wet Dirt

with chaste hard Music

so what I hear
is

Anglo-Saxon

that you hang like a

WREATH of

dry-eyed Love

around

(stiff) Necks, OUR

and so encourage US

to follow your

Warrior spirit

into the ENDLESS

Battle That is Poetry
(which turns stone)

into
flesh & being:

“Like that Greek boy whose name I now forget
Whose youth was one long study to cut stone;
One day his mallet slipped...
So that the marble opened on a girl
Seated at music and wonderfully fleshed
And sinewed under linen, riffling a harp;
At which he knew not that delight alone
The impatient muse intended, but, coupled with it, grief—
The harp-strings in particular were so light—
And put his chisel down for marveling on that stone.”

A View of the Brooklyn Bridge

You chiseled

Away

at your Soul

in so many ways,
knowing:

“Poems are hard to read
Pictures are hard to see
Music is hard to hear
And people are hard to love”

A Major [autobiographical] *Work*

And well before
 your Craft
 was half-grown, you poked about
 life's
 TRASHcans
 for bits of
 half-NIBBLED
 Humanity
 —and when caught
 like a Raccoon
 in the act, stood on your own two hind legs
 and didn't back off.
 Your
 (animal)
 Instinct
 for Survival
 your Intellect
 Command
 ing
 our singular
 Attention!!
 (precisely)
 BEcause
 You so unflinchingly examine
 the dog in every
 Man.
 You stare at us
 looking

Up &
D
o
w
n
fearlessly
polishing the Form
in your Heart
our eyes, the souls
and INVITE
us In
demanding
we too stAND
Straight
Keep time
and MEASure
as Together we
Navigate
the unmoored
Past Present
& Future.
And, EVER the Raccoon,
You
Slow-Dance
with words

Athletically
with Wit & Heart-felt
Compassion
as if
HOPing to
trap
the (half-
absent)
Conscience.
Yes, as Muse, You
rap at our door
Once Again,
NEVER more
tellingly
than this,
the 10th year of your PASSing
the 30th ANNIVERSARY
of
Partial Accounts.
Let us, therefore,
Kind Reader,
CELEbrate:

“The Muse and Her Gentleman”

I.

Touched by illiterate longing, he was like the man
Who could lay a hand across her heart
And you might think this is because his hand
Was unfamiliar, but, truth is, she
Had never had a man who was a friend.

Now he is both afraid of what she is
And does, and interested because she says she is
A dancer at a downtown gentlemen’s club.

She could touch his arm, intimately,
Or not; he could send flowers, or flowery words,
To her hotel room, saying he is coming, or not.
He thinks he talks too much, and is not beloved.

*What do you call this awkward silence which stands
Now between dead poets, honest praise & us—
We the living, naked, afraid; they, humble revenants?
Aren’t time & death sufficient
To meet the requirement of love?*

II.

True remembrance is neither rich, nor poor
Nor orphaned, nor vain, nor ignorant. Death is well-read;
Remembrance pensive, private, unsettled, awake, irreverent
Deep inside us. In death, true friendship
Becomes neither sleep nor sufficient.

Once among the living, William is become a Muse
—Your daughter, my son, a love among us for words
Borne well after high school graduation.

This morning, on-line, feeling orphaned, she looks
For empty space. His grave is full. My page
Undone. A wicked wink and her will is one.
We write for less literate daughters and sons.

Still, she's touched. A tear runs, perhaps in raccoon
Sorrow. She looks hard at you—he at us
And laughs off these slight bumps, but not first before
Turning and sticking us with that wry, untimely smile.

You, Sir William the Pen, will never be
“A fresh joint/ tossed into damp sand.”

III
It was May

“It was May
When things tend to look allegorical.”
Roots

How
did
you
TRANSform
yourself
from
Ariel
Warrior
to
(grounded)
Poet?

Clearly, you joined a Company:

Frost
Auden
Yeats
Lewis Thomas
Robert Penn Warren
Other Poets

who
dined (daily) on
NOTHING
but
Harsh Truth
and
(hard)
Consequences.

“Every last creature
Is the one it meant to be.”
Consequences: ii. of love

HAUNTING
 lines
 that you applied
 to yourself
 as well as
 US
 (admittiing)
 you stole
 into FROST's company
 with
 Lies
 (which) sometimes
 are necessary
 to gain
 Admittance... no, rather
 you sought
 "respite from that blinding attention, [and]
 More likely, a friendship
 I felt I could only get by stealing."
In Memory of Robert Frost
 Another
 of your poetic
 Revelations
 is equally REVEALing:
 "Whatever death is, it sets pretenders free."
For His Father
 which then is
 Exceeded
 by these lines:

“I have been, except on one occasion
Myself. It is no good trying to be what you are not.

We live among gangs who seem to have no stake
In what we’re trying to do, no sense of property or race,
Yet if you speak with authority they will halt and break
And suddenly, one by one, show you a local face.”

Consequences: iii my acts

Perhaps the
Korean
woman
made you do & say it,
the one
who wore a mask
of such Suffering

that you,
William the Aviator,

U
A L
V T

from your bomber’s Seat
into Poetry & Teaching

(LEAVing
the AFFAIRS of War

to

the Grim Reaper).

And while you SPARE us
 the Grimace
 of war,
 of say,
 Guernica,
 no doubt
 somedays
 you leaned
 FORward
 behind your desk
 & wondered why
 the Young
 seem so easily
 Distracted
 AD miring
 the color of their socks
 & the size of their
 Thighs,
 many for- EVER
 Ignorant
 that soldiers
 lost more than
 their
 METriCAL
 feet.
 So yes, I Take Heart
 from your early Poetry, especially

your landing
 of this Colliquy
 with your own

budding Muse,

Mrs. Leamington.

“Mrs. Leamington stood on a cloud
 Quarreling with a dragon—it was May,
 When things tend to look allegorical—
 As I drove up the hill that silhouettes
 Her house against the east. In any month
 She’s hard to place—scattered and sibylline:
 She hangs the curtains for me in the fall
 (Rather than let me ruin them myself)
 And warns me about thieves and moths and women—
 Nothing for money, all for neighborhood.”

(Mrs. L, a fussy busybody, spies the root of Ambiguity’s tree)

“And we rode the hairy serpent through the grass
 To the edge of the rectangle she was turning up,
 But he was saying nothing, by his depth
 or diameter, about which way he’d come from.”

Poet & Muse you two pause
 for coffee.

That’s when you, William the Pen
 notice the root of all poetry
 is (quite)

Quotidian:

“Dishtowels and her nylon underwear
 Were on the clothes tree; straining at the door
 Was her Mercedes. It was half past eight.
 We sat in the kitchen on her good antiques.

‘Have you ever really thought about the roots.’
 She asked, filling a pair of luster cups,
 ‘What a world they are, swaying in the thick air
 Under us, upside down?’

Your answer would move Socrates:

I’d thought about them
 All the week before, when the elms were budding...
 And I’d thought how their roots all year around
 Would keep that primavera delicacy.
 So I said, ‘I have, a little. What about them?’

That’s when She(lley) says:

“When I was a girl, my father put those cedars
 In the hedge along the road. He told me then...
 That a tree repeats its structure, up and down,
 The roots mirroring the branches....”

(A mild disagreement ensues about trees in Fragonard)

and Mrs. L (being Frostian)

claims Shelley’s Figures
 look like... Roots.

No, more

like coral, you, William the Aviator say.

Mrs. Leamington (immediately) proceeds
 to pull out her:

“book of reproductions
 And showed me the lady swinging on the swing
 In a mass of greenery and silk and cloud.
 Then suddenly she turned it upside down
 And the cloudy leaves and the clouds turned into rocks

And the boles of the tree were gripping them like rocks.”

That’s when Mrs. L. concludes her
(poetic) Homily

(as you so often do) about Shelley, a Poet who

“...met his own image walking in the garden.
That apparition, sole of men, he saw.
For know there are two worlds of life and death:
One which thou beholdest; but the other
Is underneath the grave, where do inhabit
The shadows of all forms that think and live,
Till death unite them and they part no more....

“The strangest thing would be to meet yourself.
Above the ground or below I wouldn’t like it.”

Roots

Dear William, how far you have traveled
from

“War’s unfeatured face”
(where)

“The far-off dying are her near affair;
With her sprung creatures become weak or strong
She watches them down the sky and disappear,
Heart gone, sea-bound, committed all to air.”

Carrier

William Morris Meredith, Jr.

I do believe
your first TRULY
stepped
ashore

from War's
scalloped
blood-stained
Seas
by walking
through
Shelly's MAZE
of Allegory.

For, as you say:

“Shelley’s houses and walks were always a clutter of women,
And god knows what further arrangements he kept in his mind.
Drole de menage, Rimbaud said of himself and Verlaine,
As if there were any other kind.
In Yeats’ tower, in all that fakery of ghosts,
Some solid women came and slept as Mrs. Yeats’ guests.
We are most our own strange selves when we are hosts.”

*Five Accouns Of A
Monagomous Man
v. lines from his guest-book*

So... back (for the moment)
to Mrs. Lemington.

Once scattered as a cloud,
your Muse

grew eager to go:

“back to my spuds, she said. Don’t you hate that word? Yet it’s good Middle English. Stop on your way home. By then perhaps we’ll both have earned a drink.”

Roots

William the Aviator has met his match, his Muse

and Knows she

“...likes to split an apple down the middle
And with her hands behind her back ask them, which?
The other children fall in with the riddle
But he says, both hands! both hands, you sly old bitch!”

the poet as troublemaker”

Ah! Such a
World-
view

brings

with it

A World
(of troubles).

A world
You

take Root

(and we)

grow into.

IV

The End of Deception

“There is no end to the
Deception of quiet things
And of quiet, everyday
People a lifetime brings.”

The Chinese Banyan

The Korean War
 exhumed
 the Grief
 you carried
 (always...)

 nay
 Embraced
 its Stoic musings
 as you watched

Worlds at War
 and
 y/our
 (Grecian)

 Urn
 shatter:

"...what is it in suffering dismays us more:
 The capriciousness with which it is dispensed
 Or the unflinching way we see it borne?

...

Ah, now she looks at me. We are unmasked
 And exchange what roles we guess at for an instant.
 The questions Who comes next and Why not me
 Rage at and founder my philosophy.
 Guilt beyond my error and grace past her grief
 Alter the coins I tender cowardly,
 Shiver the porcelain fable to green shards."

*A Korean Woman
 Seated By A Wall*

No longer
 content with such sentiments
 as those you told yourself

 in pastoral youth, when

“Days like today we are the clouds’ men
 And what they do all day is our concern.”
The Impressment

You grew into

A Field of VISION

W i d e n i n g

your reach
 as you began to speak

Directly
 to
 your
 audience.

Sentences grow

COMMUNAL

—more than a few
 laced with
 (in)temperate
 regret

that even Grief

can become

a commodity:

“My desperate friends, I want to tell
 Them, you take too delicate offense

At the stench of time and man's own smell.
It is only the smell of consequence."

Consequences: i. of choice

Now, when you speak

to a (post-war)
Audience

I feel each distance GROW
(as, quietly, we fall to y/our knees)
and loudly praise

St. Consequence
as if sanity could take shore-leave

from War's Cathedral:

"Let saints and painters deal
With the mystery of likeness. As for him
It scares him wide awake and dead alone.
A man of action dials the telephone."

Barcelona

As your friend Auden said: "poetry changes nothing."
[maybe; except those who read & write it?]

Such extreme feelings,

grow (once, briefly)

into a

Self-Effacing
Mask

(an affliction not uncommon at the time
of Berryman and Lowell)

which you later name:

Hazard, the Painter.

But before

we wander on ahead

let me

P

E

E

K

at what

several ART - poems

say

about the

LIMitations

of

Human Speech,

You start with the Body's Splendor:

"With flanks as clean as bone they signal one another
On the far side of a trench of music—
Such breasts and hair, such bold genitals
Until you would think we were the caged ones....

Yet it is not only their perfection detains
Us in the paunchy dark, it is pity too.
That they must signal that way, like eloquent mutes?

Yes, and a longer affliction of splendor:
That it cannot reproduce its kind."

The Ballet

This submerged admission
of human-kind's limited

Linguistic
AMPLITUDE

hums

beneath

the surface of your own
SUBdued
artistic order, Sir William, which

you later acknowledge:

“It’s not the tunes, although as I get older
Arias are what I hum and whistle.
It’s not the plots—they continue to bewilder
In the tongue I speak and in several that I wrestle.

An image of articulateness is what it is:
Isn't this how we've always longed to talk?

...these measured cries [opposite] the clumsy things we say
In the heart's duresses, on the heart's behalf."

About Opera

I may make more of what you see and feel or say
than you intend,

the end of
Self-Deception
risks our discovering

a deeper truth

—the Death of Empathy—

which

HOVers

just ahead

for us

and (if in

forgetfulness)

you.

V
Self-Reckoning

“At the edge of the Greek world, I think, was a cliff
To which fallen gods are chained, immortal.
Time is without forgiveness, but intermittently
He sends the old, sentimental, hungry
Vulture compassion to gnaw on the stone
Vitals of each of us, even the young, as if
To ready each of us, even the old, for an unthinkable
Event he foresees for each of us—a reckoning, our own.”
Last Things

Hazard the Painter

is neither
Greek god

nor

shattered

(Grecian) Urn.

He is the MASK

you William the Artist

don

(it seems to me)
briefly

to

S P L I T

yourself in two

to MOCK

the world
the limits of
ART

with wit
and Irony.

Life's PUNch
line?

The artist is

“strickly a one-joke painter.”

[she/he must tell the truth]

Or, in Hazard's words, as he examines
Meredith's word-paintings:

"The fact that I don't like his pictures
should not obscure the facts
that he is a good man
that many admire his work (his canvases
threaten my existence and I hope
mine his, the intolerant bastard!)
that we are brothers in humanity
& the art. Often it does, though."

*Hazard Faces a Sunday
in the Decline*

Some might say this line of argument

CONFUSEs

Biography
mit
Poetry

but
William
launches

His self-critique

by dangling

UP Side

D
O
W
N

inside his

This Icarus flight
—inward—to artistic
boundaries
 offers young poets
 rare
 (and courageous)
 glimpses
of the
 IMAGINation
in Limbo
 William
 talking to himself
 (wryly)
EXAMing
 his Life
 and Accomplishments
his “Body of Work”:
“I look out these two holes, or I run
into the other two and listen. Is Hazard trapped in here?
I have had on this funny suit for years, it’s getting
baggy, but I can still move all the parts.....
People sometimes touch it, that feels good
although I am deep inside.
I do not find it absurd—is this because
I am used to it? (trapped in it? Where are we?
This is certainly not rubber or a cheap plastic.)

If I crawl out of it at night, it comes
snuffling after me and swallows me. It says

it is looking for pictures. I tell it
it has come to the wrong man."

Where He's Staying Now

So what does the artist

"in charge of morale in a morbid time"

see and say to himself?

"Tonight Hazard's father and stepmother are having
jazz for McGovern. In the old game-room
the old liberals listen as the quintet builds
crazy houses out of skin and brass, crumbling
the house of decorum, everybody likes that.

For decades they have paid for the refurbishing
of America and they have not got their money's worth.
Now they listen, hopeful,
to the hard rock for McGovern."

Politics

Long gone are the Allegories
the colloquies and

DIALogue

with Shelly's Muse.

William the Walking Hazard

a Revenant

wandering through
Post-War society

steps

past

beer cans
 & car accidents
 and into a Lovely, yet Ancient
 (forboding?) Landscape, where
 “Ladyslippers,
 gypsy plants long
 absent, have come
 back this cold May.
 Erotic, stern
 ambiguous
 shapes, they can blight
 or prosper a
 season’s footwork
 for who finds them.”

You, William (now turning back toward us)
 stop to contemplate
 stones & Boulders
 (one)
 as

LARGE
 as
 any Mastodon who

“came riding here
 like hunters, on their ice-barges,
 and where they debarked, they stay.

Sometimes [Hazard] digs up sharpened ones,
 flints- and quartzes-come-lately,
 flown here on the ends of sticks
 by hungrier men, wrestled to earth
 by rabbit or deer, little stones
 who rode to their quiet on flesh-barges.

What is held in perpetuity? The town hall
 with all the records will move off
 one day, without legal notice.
 The air that's passed through his lungs
 or the love through his head and loins
 are more his to keep than this boulder-camp,
 ready to move off whenever the hunt resumes."

Squire Hazard Walks

Lessons to be learned
 from
 Oblivion??

"He's with Yeats, for adult education—
 hand-clapping lessons for the soul,
 compulsory singling lessons for the soul,
 in his case, tone-deaf.
 He agrees with Auden, old people can show
 'what grace of spirit can create,'
 modeling the flesh when it's no longer flashy.
 That's the kind of lift he wants to his jowls....

And there *is*
 a way Forward
 (One which Mrs. Leamington would approve):

He is founding a sect for the radical old
 freaks you may call them but you're wrong,
 who persist in being at home in the world,
 who just naturally feel it's a good bind to be in,
 let the young feel as uncanny as they like.
Oldbodies, he calls them affectionately
 as he towels his own in the morning
 in front of the mirror, not getting any flashier.
 He thinks about Titan and Renoir a lot
 in this connection. Nothing is unseemly

that takes it rise in love. If only his energy lasts.”
His Plans For Old Age

But getting here
 has meant
 expending so much
 (poetic) energy

Repetition
 has begun to set in:

“Here at the seashore they use the clouds over & over
 again, like rented animals in *Aida*.”

Rhode Island

Quietly, as you lift Hazard’s
 Mask

you, William Meredith,

give us back

a

(FRACtured)

Poetic VOICE

in uncanny notes
 that warmly
 recall

Yeats, at Prayer

in search of
 Belief:

“Enabling love, roof to this drafty hutch...
take care of the haunts who stay with us here.

In a little space for a long while they’ve walked
wakeful when we sleep, averting their sad glance
when we’re clumsy with one another, they look
at something we can’t look at yet, they creak the boards
beside the bed we creak, in some hard durance.

And if we’re weary at night what must they be?
Bed them like us at last under your roof.

[W]ishing our sibling spirits nothing but good,
let them see these chambers once with the daylight eyes
you lend to lovers for our mortal time.
Or change some loveless stalker into me
before my bone-house clatters into lime.”

The Ghosts of the House

And your

E
N
ABLING

Love

is spoken to one person
and to ALL the living:

“What you have given me,
in these long moments when our words
come back, or breaths come back,
is a whole man at last,
and keeping me, remembers:

On deck one night, the moon past full
coming up over the planet’s edge,
the big globe ripping its skin,
the smaller already accepting its waning

and talking about vast skiey distances.
 I had not met you yet.
 Aft, the aircraft folded like mantises,
 ahead and abeam, destroyers running like hounds,
 and the wind.

A sentry walked off
 the rolled front of the flight deck,
 crying *oh* as he fell to the sea.
 Lost in the cold skin of the globe,
 he cried *oh* for less than, panted
 for less than love, going away,
 the loneliest noise that ever wound in my ear.

February 14

No longer
 at Sea,

 you've firmly
 Planted
 your Feet

in American Literature,

 your Poems
 have become
 Sentries
 to every
 attentive
 Generation:

“Gnawed by a vision of rightness
 that no one else seems to see,
 what can a man do
 but bear witness?

And what has he got to tell?
 Only the shaped things he's seen—
 a few things made by men,
 a galaxy made well.

Though more of each day is dark,
 though he's awkward at the job
 he squeezes paint from the tube.
 Hazard is back at work.

Winter: He Shapes Up

And yet....

Bear
 Witness to what?
 And how long, how Large
 grows
 DARKness????

VI
The Center Cannot Hold

“When I wake up, what am I to do
with this mortifying life I’ve saved again?”

Freezing. iv

The first hint is more than a hunch:

“I dreamt once they caught me and, holding me down,
Burned my genitals with gasoline;
In my stupid terror I was telling them names
So my manhood kept and the rest went up in flames.

‘Now, say the world is a fair place,’ the biggest one said,
And because there was no face worse than my own there
I said it and got up. Quite a lot of me is charred.
By our code it is fair. We play fair. The world is fair.”

Consequences. iii. my acts

And still the question hangs there
as if, like Hazard,

upside/down:

“what am I to do
with this mortifying life I’ve saved again?”

You answer yourself with a parable:

v.

To live out our lives under a good tyrant
is a lot to ask, the old man said.
There are reports that the swaggering brothers
and their wives and foreign in-laws
are shouting again, in the marble house
that looks down on the harbor and the town.
We know what they are capable of,
quarreling with one another
and in contention with the gods.
We keep indoors.
Impatience and ignorance sometimes ignite
in a flash of bravery among us,
he said. It is usually inappropriate.

vi

Some normal excellence, of long accomplishment
is all that can justify our sly survivals.

Freezing

Your answer, I believe, builds on an earlier dream:

*“(Sea-brothers, I lower to you the ingenuity of dreams,
Strange lungs and bells to escape in; let me stay aboard last—
We amend our dreams in half-sleep. Then it seems
Easy to talk to the severe dead and explain the past.
Now they are saying, Do not be ashamed to stay alive,
You have dreamt nothing that we do not forgive.
And gentlier, Study something deeper than yourselves,
As, how the heart, when it turns diver, delves and saves.)”*

The Wreck of the Thresher

As does the artistic mask that
first surfaced and

“settled like a sly disguise
On [the Korean woman’s] cheerful old face.”

In old age, there is nothing hiding
to or for or from.

“Like black duennas the hours sit
And read our lips and watch our thighs.
The years are pederasts: they wait
for boys and will not meet my eyes.

Two shapes it has traced honor this right hand:
The curve that a plane rides out
As it leaves or takes a deck on the scalloped sea...

And... his gauche fellow, moving symmetrically
Having described one body so well
They could dress that shape in air..."

Five Accounts of the Monogamous Man

Your Enabled Love

slips an arm

around

Richard's

waist,

He who meets your

Revenant

in lost shapes

He who carries

Your

Weight

up

&

D

O

W

N

stairs, tending

to the

Legacy.

All of which is as
it should be, for:

“The light
of love gilds but does not alter.
People don’t change one another....

The only correction is
by you of you, by me of me....

every last creature
is the one it meant to be.”

Consequences: Of Love

Kind words that open a door
 to Harsh Reality,

 dear William the Pen,

 (especially)

IF? If?? When???

one Applies

that Wisdom
to your

Later Poetic career

which begins
with this sentiment:

VII

Efforts at Speech

“Cheer or courage is what [poems] were all born in.
It’s what they’re trying to tell us, miming like that.
It’s native to the words,
and what they want us always to know,
even when it seems quite impossible to do.”

The Cheer

Having

Praised, Honored,
nay, Believed

Shelley Auden Frost Yeats

(so lawyerly the way

EACH
adjudicates
fear/ speech)

you now measure
yourself (harshly)
against

COntemporary

(generously,

repeating each
given name
a telling feat)

Richard Wilbur
Wallace Stevens
Robert Lowell (again)
Ernest Hemingway
Sylvia Plath
John Berryman (again and again)
Kurt Vonnegut
Sigmund Freud

Until a

STROKE

tore You r

T
 O from B
 N R from L
 G A I
 U I M
 E N B....

“Expressive Aphasia”

doctors
 call it.

But it seems
 (to me) you already

KNEW and had NAMED
 it:

“Effort at Speech.”

And (again)

It’s a
 brown-faced
 boy
 of fifteen or sixteen
 (his face “phrased
 like a question”)

who ROBS
 you of the Pen:

“Half of the papers lending me a name are
 gone with him nameless”

Your Wreck
 (still)
 produces
 Anguish
 Hope Suffering
 among dear Friends
 but most
 (in retrospect)
 I suspect
 Calm
 in those who never
 Claimed
 your embrace
 or shared
 your keen
 ATTention.
 So, later, after
 Adult On-set Autism,
 to
 watch you swim
 the
 Ocean of
 COURAGE
 makes us all want to
 C
 R A
 W
 L

through tears.

Even as You

Lamented

SUIcide

among writers, Poets, Friends

(and yet)

REFUSed

to
sink

into
Depression

or self-pity.

Instead, on first meeting you
I Imagined

Your
Imagination

(looking out those holes)

Not as Hazard, behind a mask

but an an ARTist robbed of

Expressive
Anticipation,
who kept:

“Walking home [as] I fraternized with
 shadows, Zig-zagging with them where they flee the streetlights,
 Asking for trouble, asking for the message
 trouble had sent me.

All fall down has been scribbled on the street in
Garbage and excrement: so much for the vision
Others taunt me with, my untimely humor,
so much for cheerfulness.

*Next time don't wrangle, give the boy the money,
Call across chasms what the world you know is.
Luckless and lied to, how can a child master
human decorum?*

*Next time a switch-blade, somewhere he is thinking,
I should have killed him and took the lousy wallet.*
Reading my cards he feels a surge of anger
blind as my shame.

Error from Babel mutters in the places,
Cities apart, where now we word our failures:
Hatred and guilt have left us without language
who might have held discourse.
Effort at Speech

Grief No longer submerged
 stakes
its (starker)
 claim
 to
 Days of Silent Sanity:

“Whether we give assent to this or rage
 Is a question of temperament and does not matter.
 Some will has been done past our understanding,
 Past our guilt surely equal to our fears.
 Dullards, we are set again to the cryptic blank page
 Where the sea schools us with terrible water.
 The noise of a boat breaking up and its men is in our ears.
 The bottom here is too far down for our sounding.
 The ocean was salt before we crawled to tears.

The Wreck of the Thresher

Silence

alone

answers that “sly old bitch”
 of youth

who hides Poetic Truth

(from all of us)

and holds out

Both Hands
 like:

“The woman who sailed her dinghy out in the Bay
 in the fall blow—autumn is for beginnings—
 and was found miles from the zig-zagging sailboat
 that she knew like a husband—either she sought
 a way to drown or the Chesapeake taught her, not both.

Either before I die I’ll falter and tell
 the strange secret I was given once as a token
 or I’ll manage to carry it with me.

Somebody knows or nobody knows these answers.

One of those appalling things is true too.”

Not Both

Equally true
William, is your Strength
of Spirit
which shines
through
a second "Crossing Over"
(into)

poetic SPEECH:

"That's what love is like. The whole river
is melting. We skim along in great peril,
having to move faster than ice goes under
and still find foothold in the soft floe."
Crossing Over

And, though said to one, you shared with us all in poetry:

"How perilous in one another's V
our lives are, yoked in this yoke:
two men, leaning apart for light,
but in a wind who give each other lee."
A Couple of Trees

VI

Impartial Laughter

“It is like finding on your tongue
right words to call across the floe
of arrogance to the wise dead,
of health to sickness, old to young
Across this debt, we tell you so.”

Talking Back
[To W. H. Auden]

What
 (more)
 do
 we LIVing
 owe

 you

 who
 M
 o
 v
 e

 (among) US

 like a chill breeze

 Scattering

 Memorials, Birthdays, holidays, Poems, Trips,
 Lovers, Articles, Books

 Prizes
 &
 such

 Generosity

 that ARTeries of
 Friendship

 harden into trees

 that a Racoön

 would love to climb
 even for the Briefest

chance to meet???

Beyond reading
your Essays, Reviews
Meeting the Acolytes Students

Revisiting Conversations
Praising the Grants, Awards

(twice, you were honored by the Library of Congress)

We take
Pleasure

in your Feast
of Poems

gristled
with Hard Truths.

And, Yes, of course,

we still will visit
you in

(new)

LONDON

Connecticut

(your ashes also

in

Bulgaria's

Rila Monestary).

But mostly
(and most personally)

I will continue to

REcall

that first meeting
at your party, in Bethesda, Maryland.

I had not yet greeted you
properly
 (even on a poetic
 trip)
but in that private session
you asked me to recite a poem
and once I did, you gripped affliction
by the throat and troubled out
fair words and lasting impressions.

Afterwards, happy to be included
you moved among we chatty few
picking up lipsticked glasses
from coffee tables, placing some
on countertops

as through it all, smiled and nodded encouragement
at this or that thought, a turn of phrase, caught
expressions. You clearly lived, in silence
the spellbound muse, then of a tender age
somewhat of scattered tongue
full of goodwill, grace and emotions unsung.

I suppose we relish most what most we choose
but like that witch who demanded
in youth one hand, you answered “both”
and now, in age, your smile
wryly countered: “neither.”

We poets often break one simple rule,
the truce between silence, death and
truth —and so sing out childish unfit
rhymes until in time life masters us
and we become finger-food.

Meantime, patterned as china, you gathered us
up that day, filling the room with senseless music.
Your crooked smile outlasts
the body, your poems now our muse.

VI

Epilogue

Why the Soul Loves Catfish

To William Meredith

Let's just say an elegant man
in a loose blue nightcap
with nothing, nothing on his mind
but the sky, surprised us
tracking game by starlight

shot you in the blind
made off with the lamps
of madness & climbed
scattering as ransom
this palpable absence

only time can refine—
swirling her honey head
making our bed, as constant
as taxes & crime....So welcome
if you can, ladies & gentlemen

an old roommate of mine:
a son of a gun—a hell
of a guy—a cat whose ass
rattles buckshot—the warden
my soul, serving life, plus 99.

Examples of Created Systems

For Robert Penn Warren and Eleanor Clark

i. the stars

We look out at them on clear nights, thrilled
rather than comforted—brilliance and
distance put us in mind of our

own burnings and losses. And then who
flung them there, in a sowing motion
suggesting that random is beautiful?

ii. archipelagoes

Or again, the islands that the old
cartographers, triangulating
their first glimpses of bays and peaks, set
down, and which the rich traveler, from
a high winter chair, chooses among
today—chains of jade thrown across the
torso of the sea-mother, herself
casually composed.

iii. work camps and prisons

The homeless
Solzhenitsyn, looking at Russia,
saw a configuration of camps
spotting his homeland, 'ports' where men
and women were forced to act out
the birth-throes of volcanic islands,
the coral patience of reefs, before
a 'ship,' a prison train, bore them down
that terrible archipelago
conceived and made by men like ourselves.

iv. those we love

Incorrigibly (it is our nature)
when we look at a map we look for
the towns and valleys and waterways
where loved people constellate, some of
them from our blood, some from our own loins.
This fair scattering of matter is
all we will know of creation, at
first hand. We flung it there, in a learned
gesture of sowing—random, lovely.

—William Meredith



Tom and Katherine Kirlin at New Year's celebration at the Bethesda house

ENABLING LOVE traces Tom Kirlin's long journey toward a deep understanding and empathy for the poetry of William Meredith. It is an appreciation based on years of friendship between the two poets in a format that is as complex as the mind of Meredith himself. Like an exquisite jigsaw puzzle or crossword, Kirlin plays with language through puns, synecdoche, broken word fragments, and provocative enjambments to give heightened meaning to Meredith's poetry. The style is challenging, but worth the effort as we follow Kirlin's exploration and the loving attention he gives to his colleague in the art. It is a fitting centenary tribute to a poet who has been described as a national treasure and lucky inheritance. We are equally lucky to have Kirlin's intense magnifying glass, enabling love.



Tom Kirlin won the Larry Neal Award for Poetry. He also received a grant from the District of Columbia Commission on the Arts and a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities for post-doctoral studies at Yale University. He taught at the University of Wisconsin-Madison before moving to Washington, DC, where he worked for several decades on energy, environment, science and technology policy issues, including the UN climate negotiations and the Kyoto Protocols. He later served as Vice President of the Center for the Study of the Presidency, a non-partisan group he helped rebuild. Following a summer at Bread Loaf, his first book of poems, *Under the Potato Moon*, was published by the Little Red Tree Press in 2013. Other poems have appeared in *Hungry as We Are*, *The WPFW Poetry Anthology*, and *Cabin Fever*. He and his wife, Katherine, helped celebrate the Smithsonian Institution's 25th Folklife Festival by collecting recipes and authoring the *Smithsonian Folklife Cookbook*.



William Meredith's was an extraordinary life. Poet, arborist and beloved teacher at Connecticut College for nearly 40 years, poetry, trees and students were his major preoccupations in life. He served as a Navy pilot in WWII and Korea ("I'd respect you for that if for nothing else," Robert Frost told him once when William described the thirty-two night landings he made on an aircraft carrier during the war.)

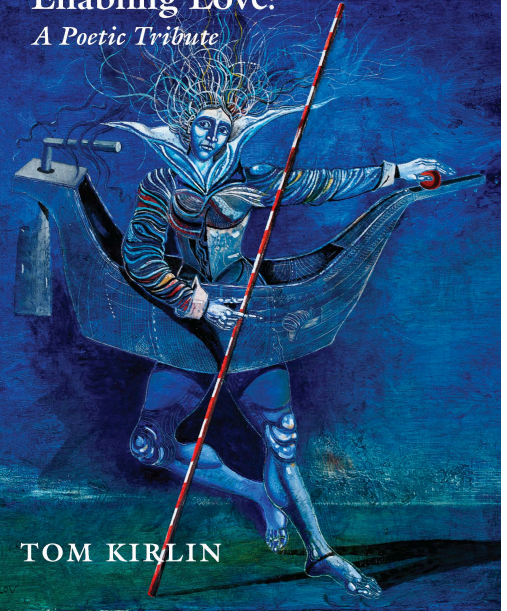
Meredith was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award and the LA Times Book Award, all of which came after the challenges of a major stroke, and his work has received many additional American and international awards. In 1996, he was accorded Bulgarian citizenship by President Zhelev for the bridge he created between our two countries. "If Poetry were landscape, Meredith would be a National Park," William Matthews once said of Meredith's poetry.



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Enabling Love: A Poetic Tribute



Winner of the 2019
William Meredith Award in Poetry

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MEREDITH POEMS

FROM EFFORT AT SPEECH

Love Letter from an Impossible Land

June: Dutch Harbor

To Charles Shain

In June, which is still June here, but once removed
From other Junes, chill beardless high-voiced cousin season,
The turf slides grow to an emerald green.
There between the white-and-black of the snow and ash,
Between the weak blue of the rare sky
Or the milkwhite languid gestures of the fog,
And the all-the-time wicked terminal sea,
There, there, like patches of green neon,
See it is June with the turf slides.

Where the snow streams crease the fields darkly
The rite of flowers is observed, and because it is a new land
There is no great regard to precedent:
Violets the size of pansies, the huge anemone,
Sea-wishing lupine that totters to the brink;
Others are: wild geranium, flag, cranberry, a kind of buttercup.

In the morning sandpipers stumble on the steel mats,
Sparrows sing on the gun, faraway eagles are like eagles.

On the map it says, The Entire Aleutian Chain Is a Bird Sanctuary,
And below, Military Reservation: This Airspace To Be Flown Over
Only by Authority of the Secretary of the Navy.

Fly just above the always-gripping sea
That bitches at the bitter rock the mountains throw to it,
Fly there with the permission—subject always to revoke—
Of the proper authorities,
Under milkwhite weagving limbs of the fog,
Past the hurriedly erected monuments to you,
Past the black and past the very green

But for your car, jeweled and appointed all for no delight,
But for the strips that scar the islands that you need,
But for your business, you could make a myth.
Though you are drawn by a thousand remarkable horses
On fat silver wings with a factor of safety of four,
And are sutured with steel below and behind and before,
And can know with your fingers the slightest unbalance of forces,
Your mission is smaller than Siegfried's, lighter than Tristan's,
And there is about it a certain undignified haste.
Even with flaps there is a safe minimum;
Below that the bottom is likely to drop out.
Some of the soldiers pressed flowers in June, indicating faith;
The one who knew all about birds spun in that month.

It is hard to keep your mind on war, with all that green

New Poems (1958–83) from *Effort At Speech*

His Students

In the warm classroom, they give off heat. **I**t is winter, the lights
are on, the pipes knock. We are studying their youth. **I** talk.

I don't have a doctorate, but I
know The old way things were
done and why. Formerly I too
was young. I sweat.

I've always believed in manners, and to this day
I will defend them. They are a small part of the truth.

I have become fond of this class. Dressed and coiffed
and intellectually equipped like so many Kaspar Hausers,*
they struggle into the Nürnberg of my Tuesdays,
taxing my powers of invention. Now they are asking
personal questions which do not bear
on youth, which have nothing to do with the subject,
youth. There's an atmosphere of guarded trust
in the room and I don't want to appear pedantic,
but after all, I am the instructor,
they sought me out. Or did I seek them out?
As they ask nosy, characteristic questions
I realize how interested I am in them
as young men and women, in their personal lives.

You can't study youth apart from the world
it has made, personally, out of the damndest junk.
Nor are they as guileless as they pretend,
all raising their hands at once when **I** ask
who would like to explain age? Whoever **I** call on
will say something that sounds like his last respects.

I study them hard, but they will barely consent to leaf
through me, or their stereotype for me.

I wonder if **I** will ever be read again
after the present generation of teachers retires?

So **I** read excerpts to them. **I** read a passage about an old war.

It is curiously lacking in violence (**I** shy
away from holocaust, just as they are obsessed with it),
but what **I** read is true and they are impressed.

How much better it sounds when **I** read it!

Perhaps it isn't really there on the page?
merely a trick of reading, a gift for explanation?

Meantime before the bell **I** remember to
summarize. (They won't do these things for themselves—
their notebooks are graffiti, though **I** still
ask that they be passed in at intervals.)

Meantime, before the bell I remember to summarize

(They won't do these things for themselves --

Their notebooks are graffiti, though I still

ask that they be passed in at intervals.)

I summarize as impartially as I know how,

the essential differences, touched on this hour

between youth and its opposite, age.

Kaspar Hauser: 1812?–33, mysterious German foundling. He appeared in Nuremberg in 1828 in a state of semi-idiotcy, and giving an incoherent account of his past, which he said he had spent in a dark prison hole.

Journal Entry (With the Udalls, June 1968)

The moon came up late, because the sandstone bluff across the river rises perhaps 50 degrees from where I'd set my sleeping bag. First the cliff behind me took moonlight, then I sat up to watch the canyon wall running NE above us take color. The reds emerged in the light of the full moon, the way I have occasionally seen autumn sumac and maple tell color by moonlight, or I suppose roses must do: I can't recall roses by moonlight though I must have seen them.

Finally toward the top of the bluff the glow became brighter and at last, only 30 or 40 feet below the top, the moon put out a bright edge, making the dark edge of the bluff dance on the retina. How many million times has this night of the planet's tilt occurred before there was a viewer from this crevice in the sand?

Later I woke and walked across the brilliant sand, past sleepers, to the edge of the bright rapids. Once there was a meteorite in the western notch where the Dipper was going away, lip-first. Then the moon was eaten by the opposite bluff, the one we slept under, having described a low southern arc, like the winter sun's. In the full moon, on my sleeping bag, I had been able to see to write with this pen a little tetrameter sonnet.

In the Canyon

Under the massive cliffs which the moon,
miser of color, gives color to,
on moon-colored sand at the end of June
hearing the rapids we've hurtled through,
seeing at the base of the talus strand
off the further shore, the whitewater crest
in the frenzy of running water stands,
and Scorpio follows the Dipper west.

The troubles of cities do not recede
from the mind. Rather, they nag like guilt,
as sometimes when I drink and feed,
in my delicate gluttony I've felt
the spectral hunger of Asia bite
my gut and whet my appetite.

English Accounts

I. Trelawny's Dream

Edward John Trelawny, who is imagined to speak the following lines in his late middle age, survived his friend Shelley by almost sixty years, and lies beside him in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome. He seems to have met no man

or woman in a long life whom he could marvel at and love as he did Shelley. Trelawny had intended to convoy the poet and Edward Williams (and a cabin boy, Charles Vivian) when they sailed the Ariel out of Leghorn into the storm that drowned them, but Lord Byron's yacht, which he was commanding, was detained at the last minute by port authorities. He cremated the remains of his friends, and recovered the little boat, which appeared to have been run down by a larger vessel, though the violent squall into which the Ariel disappeared would have been enough to founder the keel-heavy boat which Trelawny himself had unwisely designed for the novice Shelley.—W. M.

The dark illumination of a storm
and water-noise, chuckling along the hull
as the craft runs tight before it.

Sometimes Shelley's laughter wakes me here,
here, unafraid, as he was the day he dove
into water for the first time, a wooded pool
on the Arno, and lay like a conger eel
on the bottom—'where truth lies,' he said—
until I hauled him up.

But oftener the dream insists on all
insists on retelling all.

Ned Williams is the first

to see the peril of the squall. His shout
to lower sail scares the deck boy wide-eyed
and cuts off

Shelley's watery merriment.

The big wind strokes the catboat like a kitten.

Riding the slate-gray hillocks, she is dragged
by the jib Ned Williams leaves to keep her head.

The kitten knows the wind is a madman's hand
and the bay a madman's lap.

As she scuds helpless, only the cockney boy

Charles Vivian and I, a dreamer and a child,

see the felucca loom abeam. Her wet lateen

ballooning in the squall, she cuts across

wind and seas in a wild tack, she is on us.

The beaked prow wrenches the little cabin
from the deck, tosses the poet slowly to the air—

he pockets his book, he waves to me and smiles—

then to his opposite element,

light going into darkness, gold into lead.

The felucca veers and passes, a glimpse of a face

sly with horror on her deck. I watch our brave

sailor boy stifle his cry of knowledge

as the boat takes fatal water, then Ned's stricken face, scanning the
basalt waves
for what will never be seen again except in dreams.

All this was a long time ago, **I** remember.

None of them was drowned except me
whom a commotion of years washes over.

They hail me from the dream, they call an old man
to come aboard, these youths on an azure bay.

The waters may keep the dead, as the earth may,
and fire and air. But dream is my element.

Though **I** am still a strong swimmer

I can feel this channel widen as **I** swim.

II. Trelawny at Sompting, 1879

Sometimes I dream about those two cauldrons—
the one at Port Louis wherein **I** placed
the ruby-spangled Arab with my heart.

After the oil and camphor and ambergris,
the dark smoke rose and **I** sprang forward,
falling on the sand so near the fire
my hands were burned; and the one **I** had forged
at Leghorn, the iron machine for Ned and Shelley.
Shelley's brain seethed and bubbled but the heart
would not burn—a bright flame stroked and stroked it,
occasioned by a liquid still flowing from it,
and **I** took it in my hand to examine
it, after shrinking it in sea water, yet
it was still so hot as to burn my hand badly.
The day before, Ned Williams' handkerchief,
whole silk beside his exhumed carrion,
made Byron say, 'The entrails of a worm
hold together longer than the potters' clay
of which man is made.' During the burning,
he swam far out to sea.

If I told Miss Taylor now
to leave the tea things and go gather faggots

and set them under my tub, **I** could rejoin them,
Zela, Arabian bird, and restless Shelley.

III. In the Protestant Cemetery

How did their lives go out from those deaths,
Keats' at the foot of the Spanish Steps, Shelley's
in the wild wave, accepted on the beach at Leghorn
frail heroes, riding for sixty years the dreams
of Severn and Trelawny. How did their lives survive?

Who does not envy the young dead? Every year
the odds increase against accomplishment.
There is a thinning out, a dilution. The old
are in desperate trouble. These did not lose their models.

The great old man Severn was painting in Rome
when Trelawny in Sussex wrote to Clare, 'I have
an icy cold bath every morning and then go out
with my shirtsleeves tucked up and work in the garden.'
When they left that century it grew old.

Middle-aged people raised a subscription

to lay the old painter next to his young friend.
The adventurer followed, having lately written
a letter to Rome: 'In the year 1822 **I** purchased
a piece of land from the then Custodian—
I believe your father—under the pyramid
of Caius Cestius. I deposited the ashes
of my Friend Shelley in the one tomb
and the other I left for my ashes.....

We are parodies of boys and girls and we're aging.
After thirty who can think of himself except
as foully wronged, only the satiric overtones vary.
Judging ourselves harshly for natural losses,
we throw ourselves with less and less confidence
on the charity of our youth. We need good examples,
we need these two old men here under the cypresses.

ETCHINGS BY STOIMEN STOILOV
TO ILLUSTRATE ECHOES





Стогодишен юбилей на Уилям Мередит

За духовното наследство на големия американски поет Уилям Мередит спорят два века - XX век и първото десетилетие на XXI век. Неговата поезия и идеали доказват своята жизненост и в наши дни.

Роден е в Ню Йорк на 9 януари 1919 г. в прогресивно семейство. Един от неговите предци е бил министър на финансите и републиканец по времето на Абрахам Линкълн и портретът му е бил отпечатан върху американските банкноти. В бурните следвоенни години и разразилата се депресия баща му споделя идеите на социализма.

У. Мередит следва английски език и литература в едно от най-старите и престижни висши учебни заведения на САЩ -

Принстънския университет в Ню Джърси. Дипломната му работа е върху творчеството на класика на американската поезия Робърт Фрост.

В миналото Принстънския университет са завършили двама американски президенти - Джеймс Медисън и Удру Уилсън.

След емигрирането си в САЩ в годините на надигашия се фашизъм в Европа до края на живота си в Институт към Университета по проблемите на ядрената енергия работи Алберт Айнщайн. Тук следва и най-яркият представител на „изгубеното поколение“ след Първата световна война белетристът Скот Фицджералд.

След дипломирането си У.Мерedit работи първоначално като разпространител на вестник „Ню Йорк Таймс“, в който впоследствие е репортер и води рубрика за театър, опера и литература.

Уилям Мерedit като пилот от Американските ВМС на Тихоокеанския фронт по време на Втората световна война.

След влизането на САЩ във Втората световна война, младият Мерedit се записва доброволец в армията. Изпратен е като пилот на изстребител на американски самолетonosач в района на Алеутските острови в Тихия океан.

Още от студентските години пише поезия и от фронта, изпраща голям цикъл стихове за участие в Конкурс на Йейлския университет за млади поети. Директорът на Конгресната библиотека видният поет Арчибалд Маклийш е силно впечатлен от поезията на талантливия боен пилот, в която се чувства барутният дим от сраженията и решителната битка срещу японския милитаризъм и фашизма. Той пише възторжен предговор към първата поетична книга на Уилям Мерedit „Писма от една невъзможна земя“, излязла през 1944 г.

След войната той се занимава с преподавателска дейност с изключение на годините на Корейската война. От 1946 г. е поет-резидент в Принстънския университет. Има внушителен стаж в редица университети: Принстънския, Хавайския, Карнеги-Мелън, Американския университет в Благоевград, в Мидълбери колеж, в Летните творчески семинари в Бред Лоаф. Три десетилетия чете лекции в Кънектикътския колеж в гр. Ню Лондън, където има и свой дом. Почетен доктор е на Университета Карнеги-Мелън, на Принстънския университет, на Американския университет в Благоевград, на Кънектикътския колеж.

От 1976 до 1980 г. е Поет-лауреат на САЩ, консултант по поезия на Конгресната библиотека. Бил е секретар на Националната Академия за изкуство и литература и канцлер на Академията на американските поети в Ню Йорк. Лауреат е на наградата „Карл Сандбърг“ /1979 г./, наградата на в-к „Лос Анджелис Таймс“ /1987

Бe представена и експозиция с книги на издателство „Поетс Чойс“. В последвалия рецитал участваха Питър Мейнке, Елисавета Ричи, вдовицата на Андрю Орки, Грейс Кавалиери, У.М.Ривера, Лаура Брилоуски и Барбара Голдбърг.

Снимка от вечерта на 16 септември 2018 г. в Посолството на България във Вашингтон.

Показан бе филм за живота и творчеството на У.Мередит.

Редица събития посветени на 100 годишнината на У. Мередит ще бъдат организирани през юбилейната година.

Днес, разглеждайки творчеството и дейността на Уилям Мередит от висотата на 100-годишния му юбилей, не можем да не се съгласим с думите на американския поет и литературен критик Едуард Хърш: „Мередит отправя щедър поглед към наши общочовешки свят. Той не прикрива трагичното, непредсказуемостта и безкрайните трудности, които срещаме. В неговата поезия резонира отговорността за такива старомодни понятия като чест, морал, оптимизъм, достойнство и човешко щастие.“

Присъедини се към магистърските програми в УниБИТ!

Снимки: Личен архив на сем. Евгения и Красин Химирски и Посолство на България в САЩ

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Hundred Years Anniversary of William Meredith, by Krassin Himmirski,
Translation through CHROME. Appeared first at the following link:

<https://e-lit.info/index.php/lit-teory/1720-2019-02-10-05-51-42>

For the spiritual heritage of the great American poet William Meredith argue two centuries - the XX century and the first decade of the 21st century. His poetry and ideals prove their vitality in our day.

Born in New York on January 9, 1919, in a progressive family. One of his ancestors was Minister of Finance and Republican at the time of Abraham Lincoln and his portrait was printed on American banknotes. In the turbulent post-war years and the depressed depression, his father shares the ideas of socialism.

W. Meredith follows English language and literature in one of the oldest and most prestigious universities in the United States, Princeton University, New Jersey. His diploma work is on the work of American poetry classic Robert Frost.

In the past, Princeton University has completed two American presidents - James Madison and Udru Wilson. After his emigration to the United States in the midst of rising fascism in Europe, Albert Einstein worked at the University of Nuclear Energy Institute until the end of his life. Here follows the most prominent representative of the "lost generation" after World War I, the fiction writer Scott Fitzgerald.

After graduating, W. Meredith initially worked as a distributor of the New York Times newspaper, where he was subsequently a reporter and conductor for theater, opera and literature.



William Meredith as a pilot from the US Navy on the Pacific Front during the Second World War.

After the United States entered the Second World War, the young Meredith enrolled a volunteer in the army. He was sent as a pilot at a US aircraft carrier in the Pacific region of the Aleutian Islands.

From the student years he wrote poetry and from the front he sent a large cycle of poems to participate in the Yale University Young Poets Competition. The director of the Library of Congress, prominent poet Archibald McLeish is very impressed with the poetry of the talented combat pilot, featuring gunpowder from the fighting and the decisive battle against Japanese militarism and fascism. He writes an enthusiastic preface to William Meredith's First Poem Book "Letters from an Impossible Land," which came out in 1944.

After the war, he was engaged in lecturing, except in the years of the Korean War. Since 1946, he has been a resident at Princeton University. He has an impressive work experience at a number of universities: the Ringtons, the Hawaiian, Carnegie-Mellon, the American University in Blagoevgrad, the Middelbury College, the Summer Creative Workshops in Bred Loaf. He spent three decades reading lectures at the Connecticut College in New London where he also had his own home. Honorary Doctor is at Carnegie-Mellon University, Princeton University, the American University in Blagoevgrad, Connecticut College.

From 1976 to 1980, he was a poet-laureate of the United States, a poetry consultant at the Library of Congress. He was secretary of the National Academy of Art and Literature and Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets in New York.

He is the winner of the Carl Sandberg Award (1979), the Los Angeles Times Award (1987), the Pulitzer Prize for his poetic book "The Likely Balance" (1988), the Guggenheim Foundation Prize ; He was awarded the Harriet Monroe Medal and the Special Prize and Medal for his overall literary work from

The Culture and Tourism Commission of Connecticut (2007).

He publishes the books: "Ships and Other Figures", "Treshare Cruise", "Winter Poems", "Earth Walk", "Hezard, the Artist", "Optimistic Mood", "Speech Strongness".



Meredith translated from French and published the verses of Guillaume Apolliner. As editor, he published the anthology "The Little Irish Poets".

In 1976 I went to a mandate as a Cultural Attaché of the Bulgarian Embassy in Washington. The Library of Congress, one of the richest libraries in the world, was the second "job" for me after my daily duties and my weekends. The tradition of the library is to present world literatures and authors. In the same year, William Meredith took up the position of the Poet, a laureate of the United States, a poetry consultant at the Library of Congress. I attended all the dinners organized in the library and it was natural to meet the manager.



Meeting of William Meredith, US Poet Laureate and Poetry Consultant at the Congress Library in Washington with the Cultural Attaché of the Bulgarian Embassy Krasin Himirski

He introduced me to the library's leadership, and introduced me to a number of his predecessors in this post. Between us, a sincere, perennial friendship has begun, which has continued for the rest of his life. We met regularly both in the library and at home, we traveled to very interesting meetings with famous American writers and cultural figures.

I personally offered W.Meredith to participate in the US committee headed by Senator Fulbright (from a hundred prominent figures of American culture and the arts) to celebrate the 1300th anniversary of the Bulgarian state in the United States. The celebration took place at the highest level in the Dambarton Oaks Museum building, where the United Nations was founded.

В качеството ми на Културен аташе и Шарже д'афер на Посолството ни в САЩ годините от 1976 г. до 1981 г. са свързани с редица съвместни инициативи мои и на Мередит, много близко приятелство и незабравими спомени.

His love for Bulgaria began after he became acquainted with the work of Nikola Vaptsarov. In 1979, the WBS invited William Meredith to take part in celebrating the 70th anniversary of our poet-revolutionary. In his speech at the celebration he made a bold analogy between two great artists of Bulgaria and America. "Your Vaptsarov and our Walt Whitman are intimate lyrical singers. But their songs are not just for comfort. They require us constant vigilance and assertion of freedom. "And it is even more emphasized by speaking of the latest history of our countries:" During the Second World War, many Americans were killed by the same tyranny against which he fought the verses and give your life to Vaptsarov. " Meredith translates verses of Nikola Vaptsarov, which includes in his edited and published anthology "Bulgarian Poets" including the creativity of our 24 creators. In addition, translators are John Updike, Maxin Kumin and Richard Wilbur. Publishing House "Orpheus" publishes the collections with poems by Meredith "The Shadow Observers" and "Partial Descriptions". Elka Nyagolova has translated Meredith's poems in the outspoken book "The White Island".



At the invitation of the Congress Library with the support of Meredith in 1980, a representative group of Bulgarian poets was present in the USA: Georgi Dzagarov, Lyubomir Levchev, Vladimir Golev, Bozhidar Bozhilov and Lachezar Elenkov with translator Vladimir Filipov. Our creators were accepted by the head of the House of Representatives at the US Congress. He also met with the cultural community of the American capital at the home of the poet and translator Elisaveta Richie.

In addition to the Library of Congress, a recital was also held at Pittsburgh at the University of Pennsylvania. In New York, the delegation was accepted by the leadership of the Academy of American Poets and visited the United Nations.

The active contacts with the Library of Congress continued in the following years with visits and recitals to Bulgarian artists. Blaga Dimitrova made an independent recital. Interviews with Bulgarian writers Yordan Radichkov, Bozhidar Bozhilov, Nadya Kehlibareva, Zdravko Popov, Petko Bratanov, Nino Nikolov were interviewed and included in the newly created fund for the life of world artists.



In this fund, I also recorded myself by performing my own poems and interview before leaving for Bulgaria at the end of my term. Upon return, I released the poetry book "Washington recitation" with the disc - record in the Library of Congress.

/ 5-1 The Poetry Book "Washington Recite" /

For merit in popularizing Bulgarian literature and developing cultural ties with the United States, William Meredith and Richard Hartness received honorary Bulgarian citizenship under President J. Zhelev's Decree.

After returning from Bulgaria, William Meredith invited me to his annual lecture at Connecticut College. An exhibition of graphics presented to him by Stoimen Stoilov, translations of his poems in Bulgarian and the winning medal of the International Vaptsar Prize was opened in the salons of the college. The same medal Meredith wore as a medal later on.

Since then, William Meredith and his companion, poet Richard Hartness, came to Bulgaria every year. They participated in several of the Sofia International Writing Meetings and in the celebrations for the 1300th Anniversary of the Bulgarian State.

In 1983, Meredith suffered a severe stroke and lost his speech. After spending a year with us together with R. Hartais, rehabilitation and meeting with Baba Vanga, he partially recovered his speech and began to recite his poems again.

We traveled all over Bulgaria: Sandanski, Melnik, Blagoevgrad, Rila Monastery, Vratsa, Bourgas, Varna,

Kavarna, Albena and others.



Our many meetings are unforgettable in my home on 11 Graf Ignatiev Street in Sofia, my home in the villages of Varbitsa, Vratsa and organized joint recitals and presentations throughout the country.

W. Meridet, R. Hartness, I and Stalin Himirski in my home, Varbitsa.

Bulgaria-American Foundation for the Development of Arts was established in Bulgaria with President William Meredith and Executive Director of My Honor.

There was an idea to build a foundation complex. We held talks with the then Mayor of Kavarna Tsonko Tsonev and with a number of representatives of municipalities such as Varna and Vratsa.

Unfortunately, this idea was not realized due to Meredith's death.

William Meredith died on May 30, 2007 in New Landon.

After his death, his home in Ancasville on the banks of the River Thames was declared a cultural monument and seat of the newly established William Meredith Foundation with President R. Hartais. The Foundation has been active. Annually he hands a poetry award to William Meredith, and his books are included in the plans of the Foundation's Publishing House. This prestigious award was awarded to prominent artists Andrew Orkney, Gray Jakobik, Peter Maine, James Bale. The award "William Meredith" was received in 2013 by Lyubomir Levchev for his poem "The Horse with Green Wings".

The International Plainner, organized by my wife and me, dedicated to the 130th anniversary of the Bulgarian Liberation from Ottoman rule, was attended by our poet Richard Chartais and Meredith's sculptor and close friend Nancy Frankel. The cities of Sofia, Dolni Lozen, Plovdiv, Batak, Chirpan,

Richard Hartays during the 20-day Pleven dedicated to the 130th anniversary of the Bulgarian Liberation from Ottoman rule.

Stara Zagora, Gurkovo, Kazanlak, Shipka, Pleven, Etropole, Pravets, Cherven Bryag, Svishtov, Bansko. During the festival, recitals with poems of Meredith and Chartais were organized in my translation. In the closing exhibition at the Gallery of the National Art Gallery in Sofia was presented the work of N. Frenkel. One of the most significant works of Richard Hartness on a Bulgarian subject is his poem "Plenter" inspired by Batak's visit during his 2009 participation in Bulgarian, Russian, Israeli and American artists dedicated to the 130- the anniversary of the liberation of Bulgaria from Turkish slavery.

Our relationship with Richard and Nancy continues to this day.



Richard and Nancy during one of their visits to Bulgaria

On September 20, 2013, we organized a presentation of Richard Hartness at the Bogoridi Gallery in Burgas.



Richard Hartness, poetess Rosa Boyanova and me.

Over the years, we have come to see them coming to Bulgaria. Some are also related to future joint plans.



On the way from Bourgas to Sofia.

In 2016, in fulfillment of W. Meredith's pre-death wish, part of the poet of the American poet was brought to his second home in Bulgaria and scattered by R. Hartais around the Rila Monastery.

On September 16, 2018, the Bulgarian Embassy in Washington DC was held jointly with the William Meredith Foundation evening dedicated to the upcoming centenary of an American poet. The Ambassador Tihomir Stoychev spoke at the evening and read the greeting sent by me. Richard Chartais and the cultural attache Tatiana Karadjova read Meredith's poems in my translation. Also exhibited with books by Poets Choise Publishing House. Peter Menge, Elizabeth Ritchie, the widow of Andrew Orksey, Grace Cavalieri, WM Riveira, Laura Brillowsky and Barbara Goldberg took part in the recipe.



Photo from the evening of 16 September 2018 at the Embassy of Bulgaria in Washington.

It was a film about W.Meredith's life and work.

A series of events dedicated to W. Meredith's 100th anniversary will be organized during the anniversary year.

Today, looking at William Meredith's creativity and activity from the height of his 100th anniversary, we can not disagree with the words of American poet and literary critic Edward Hursh: "Meredith looks generous to our world. It does not conceal the tragic, unpredictable and endless difficulties we encounter. His poetry resonates with responsibility for such old-fashioned concepts as honor, morality, optimism, dignity and human happiness.

A Tribute

By Richard Harteis

Ten years ago, on May 30th, William Meredith died. “Now he belongs to the ages,” it was said of Lincoln and later Kennedy when he died, – Kennedy would have been a 100 years old this year, and William will have his centenary in 2019. William didn’t die for his country, but he lived and died for poetry. Though he is not the global icon Kennedy became, William’s life and art continue to reverberate in American culture, indeed, the world, like circles spiraling out toward the shore when a stone is dropped into the center of a lake. The Irish writer Jack Harte has said, “William was one of America's greatest poets, but also a wonderful human being.” In Bulgaria he received the country’s highest honors. He has left his mark in visits to many cities around the world from New Delhi, and Paris, to St. Petersburg, Sarajevo and Athens. But he is the quintessentially American poet, a "nutmegger" whose spirit flourished in his native New England, and whose work ascertained the universal through the particularity of the American tribe he loved so dearly.

William served as a naval aviator in WWII and the Korean Conflict--*n* “I’d respect you for that if for nothing else,” Robert Frost told him once when William described the thirty--*nt*wo night landings he made on an aircraft carrier during the war. Years later, William and Stewart Udall talked the old man into reading at Kennedy’s inauguration in what became an iconic moment for poetry in the US. More than anything, Meredith wished to be useful in the culture, he was not an ivory tower poet. And when he served as US Poet Laureate, one of his highest priorities was to involve the African American community in programs at the Library of Congress and work with high school teachers to help bring this art form to their students.

His was an extraordinary life. Poet, pilot, arborist (his home in Connecticut counted twelve sorts of beeches, grafted trees, and a secret formal garden with hemlock and boxwood hedges, Dogwoods and Umbrella Pines.) Poetry, trees and students were the three legs of the pedestal on which his life rested. He was a beloved teacher at Connecticut College for nearly four decades, was never happier than when balling and moving trees with his partner at the nursery, or perusing perhaps 30 drafts of a given poem – he enjoyed revisions, knew that it was in the

re--nwriting that the writing occurred. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award and the LA Times Book Award, all of which came after the challenges of a major stroke, and his work has received many additional American and international awards. He was Chancellor and Director of the Academy of American Poetry and received numerous honorary doctorates. In 1996, he was accorded Bulgarian citizenship by President Zhelu Zhelev for the bridge he created between our two countries.

Too often, when the great ones die, they simply fall off the planet, a lifetime of achievement and wisdom lost. But the foundation named for him tries to carry on his legacy in American culture through educational programs and the publication of an annual poetry prize in his name. On the centennial anniversary of his birth in 2019, it plans a series of important readings and poetry events throughout the year. It will establish a translation prize in honor of William's translator and friend, Valentin Krustev to join the Meredith Award in poetry, now in its sixth year. It also plans to publish a memorial calendar for 2019 featuring archival photos from the Mystic Seaport with William's poems superimposed on the images. The foundation recently established an auxiliary press to publish books of poetry and prose: POETS--nCHOICE.COM. These projects to be funded by a campaign benefitting the foundation's work:

<https://www.gofundme.com/WilliamMeredithCentennial>

For many, William Meredith is a model of courage, civility, and creative artistry. It is our hope that friends and lovers of poetry will join in celebrating this remarkable man in the coming months. A short poem by Meredith perhaps summarizes his philosophy best:

A Major Work

Poems are hard to read

Pictures are hard to see

Music is hard to hear

And people are hard to love.

But whether from brute need

Or diving energy.

At last, mind eye and ear

And the great sloth heart will move.

USEFUL LINKS TO MEREDITH'S LIFE AND WORK AND THAT OF THE FOUNDATION

Website:

<http://www.WilliamMeredithFoundation.org>

Governor's Award for Lifetime Achievement:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qugmODl62sA>

Bulgarian National TV account of travel to Rila Monastery in Bulgaria with Meredith's ashes <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ryy2K3WTs9Y>

Meredith Foundation film describing the work of the foundation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nBNMlihMSE> Part one

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLzOOuHyViMMMyQOIBYMr--nr58YS--nDvLvIXy&v=nqT--n mgOOIIs>

Part 2

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=81tV--n5dyc0A&list=PLzOOuHyViMMMyQOIBYMr--nr58YS--n DvLvIXy&index=2>

Part 3

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_thMVLbfWM&list=PLzOOuHyViMMMyQOIBYMr--nr58YS--n DvLvIXy&index=3

- Drunken Boat--nIn depth feature article on Meredith in a fine on--nline literary magazine: <http://www.drunkenboat.com/db7/feature--nmeredith/index.html>

- Connecticut College webpage with full accounting of his life, works, etc. <http://collections.conncoll.edu/meredith/>

William reading his poem, "Crossing Over" circa 1964:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJM8SU--nrRP0>

Meredith page from the Academy of American Poets:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJM8SU-nrRP0>

The Poetry Foundation page on Meredith:

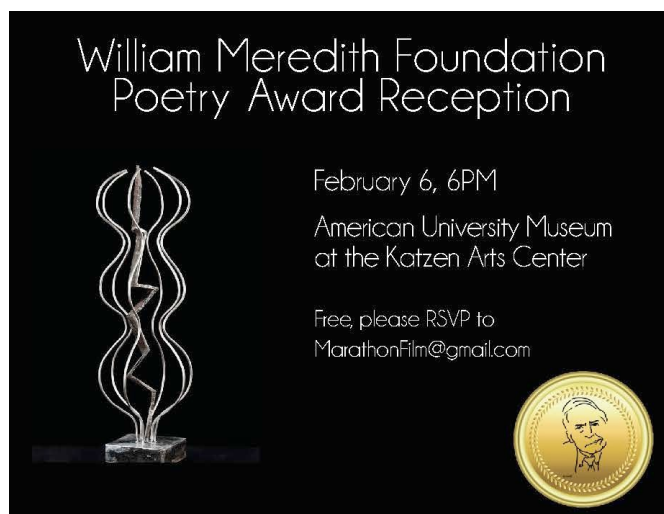
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems--and--poets/poets/detail/william--meredith>

Wikipedia page for Meredith:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Morris_Meredith_Jr.

Auxiliary press established by the foundation for publications: Poets--Choice.co

Photo Gallery



Join the William Meredith Foundation in celebrating its 2019 awardees in conjunction with *Nancy at Ninety: A Retrospective of Form and Color*, an exhibition of work by DC-based sculptor Nancy Frankel. Bulgarian Ambassador Tihomir Stoytchev will present two award-winning publications by the Meredith Foundation with readings by the awardees. Tom Kirlin will receive the 2019 Meredith Award for Poetry, and the Valentin Krustev Award for Translation to renowned DC poet and translator, Barbara Goldberg, for her translations of Israeli poetry. Refreshments will be served. Free and open to all, please RSVP to MarathonFilm@gmail.com.

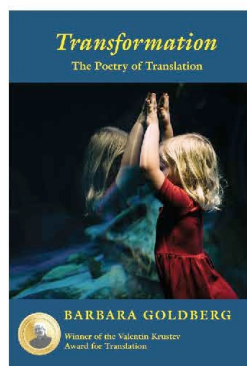
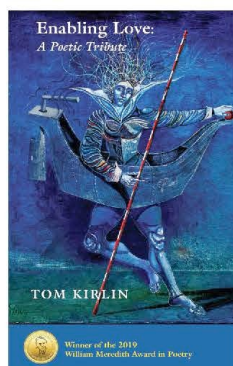


Image: Nancy Frankel, *Impromptu*, 2010. Steel, 33 x 33 x 11 in. Courtesy of the Artist.

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exhibitions and events, please visit us online.



Valentin Krustev with William Meredith at Waterford Beach



Richard Harteis and William at Texas Falls, Bread Loaf



Visiting Lyubomir Levchev at his home in Sofia



Robert Frost and William at Princeton, 1940?



William Meredith, President Zhelu Zhelev, and Richard Harteis receive Bulgarian citizenship



Richard Harteis, William Meredith and blind soothsayer, Baba Vanga



Stoimen Stoilov, Connie Bozhilov, William Meredith in Varna in the late 1970's



Bread Loaf: Michael and Katherine Collier with William Meredith



Archangel Richard and Superman William with Daisy



Visiting in Connemara after a little accident



visiting American Ambassador Tom Foley on the first day of our visit to Ireland.



Drinks with Seamus (“the famous”) Heaney in Dublin



Pensive William in the window of Yeats' tower



Dublin Streets



Art opening in New Haven with Curator Johnes Ruta



William on the wing of his plane in WWII



Bob Dole greets William at WWII memorial celebration



Golf anyone? West Palm Beach





Writers' Conference Sandy Taylor in Sofia



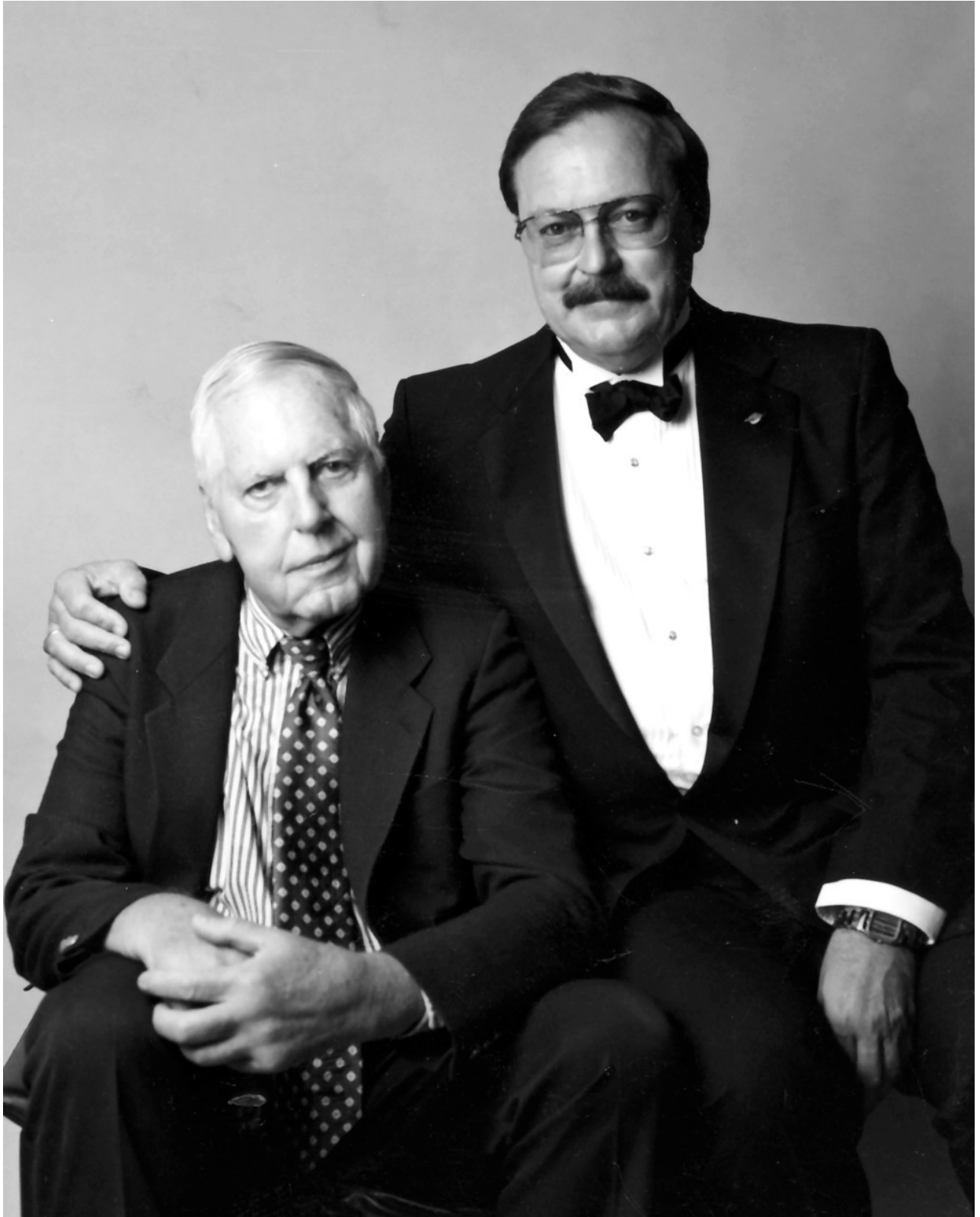
Writers Union House in Varna, Bulgaria



St Patrick's Day in West Palm Beach with Daisy



Actual shot of William in lead plane in WWII



Richard and William in Kensington in Nancy Frankel's studio



Visiting Dave Halliday's farm near the Canadian Border during the funeral weekend celebration of his mother's life, Alice Halliday, expert biologist on the Manhattan project.



Three Santas in their red sleigh



William at Coole Park Ireland



I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavement grey
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

The lake Isle of Innisfree, July 2006



William signing his poem, “Notre Dame de Chartres” in his hotel with the cathedral in the window background.



Happy Birthday William, West Palm Beach



Ed Hirsch and Michael Collier at Bread Loaf



Feeding the swans after a jog along Kitemaug Road



New Years Celebration with Jimmy Merrill at Riverrun



Kolyo Sevov in Varna, “Two Masks Unearthed in Bulgaria”



Lucinen Dimitrov, Nancy Frankel, Richard and Valentin Krustev in Blagoevgrad



Meeting with President Gerogi Parvanov in his office in Sofia





Summer at Svetlana's Beach in Waterford



With Richard Wilbur inaugurating the Butterfly House in Key West



Ludmilla Zhivokova, Minister of Culture in Sofia who opened Bulgaria to the west.
Lyubomir Levchev to William's left in this photo.



Visiting Yeats' tomb in Ireland with Jack Harte

29 Sept 1980

Not Sofia, but rather
Walla Walla

Dear Richie,

Thinking how hard it is when you just get back to work, I write this line in the early morning. Before I go off to a round ofushman English, before our week together in Washington and New York and Vnesoville, to remind us both that we are often, if not quite always, together in one another's consciousness. This is a steady joy and strength to me, and even though you know that very

well, it is a satisfaction to sit in my vast chilly bedroom here in a westernmost state and write it down on a piece of Bulgarian stationery. How interesting our lives are, and how much their significance lies in the pattern we weave between them. I am yours, dear brother.

always

William

Letter from William to Richard, 1980