

# table of contents

note	1
my feminine ways	3
friendship, order	17
ryman	45
acknowledgments	85



## note

this book consists of three talk poems pieces composed in the manner of david antin and lineated according to the logic he and his wife eleanor developed on the production of his first talk poem in southern california circa 1970 the first was done solo in my office in germantown new york in the fall or rather very late summer of 2020 and began as i suppose all things must as an experiment an answer to the question antin had caused me to ask which was what happens if i try not to pour myself into a pen but turn away and talk

the second poem began as a semi-public performance on zoom in an apartment near mass moca later in the fall of 2020 during a residency there before a group of friends and family whom i had invited via email with a transcript of a talked invitation maybe alarmingly all were kind asked me questions afterward put high fives in the chat and dave complimented my mustache

the third and final talk arrived after a long acquaintance or not long but courtship really of and with the work of robert ryman a painter whose ideas i came across in the moma then dug around and i found a recorded interview of his the slow oddness of which enthralled me

that talk was conducted in two parts the first while walking through a cemetery in ithaca new york the second pacing in a room in a businessperson's hotel in albany

where i also did pushups in my little hallway by the bathroom kept putting on and taking off my socks and ate granola out of a paper bowl



my feminine ways

was it for this that one                      the fairest of all rivers loved      to blend his  
murmurs with my nurse's song      and from his alder shades and rocky falls      and  
from his fords and shallows sent a voice              that flowed along my dreams?

for this didst thou      o derwent traveling over the green plains              near my "sweet  
birthplace"                      didst thou beauteous stream              make ceaseless music  
through the night and day              which with its steady cadence tempering      our  
human waywardness composed my thoughts      to more than infant softness      giving  
me      among the fretful dwellings of mankind      a knowledge a dim earnest of the calm  
            which nature breathes among the fields and groves?

beloved derwent fairest of all streams              was it for this that i a four years' child  
a naked boy among thy silent pools              made one long bathing of a summer's day  
basked in the sun or plunged into thy streams      alternate all a summer's day or coursed  
over the sandy fields and dashed the flowers              of yellow grunsel or when crag  
and hill              the woods and distant skiddaw's lofty height              were bronzed with  
a deep radiance stood alone              a naked savage in the thunder shower?

it's very hard to read the prelude              i have tried for many years to read it straight  
through and i can't              so i read small portions of it              and then i give up  
for a little while              there are many reasons why i have been interrupted

sometimes i read some portion and i'm afraid i'm afraid for example of my own mind because a thought intrudes on my reading and i want to pay attention but i can't completely pay attention and so i want to clear my mind of the thought that keeps me from attending with all my faculties to the poem in front of me the argument and i push it away and yet through paradoxical effort it returns and so i push again even harder and it returns once again more powerful

and so for many years this would keep me from reading not only the prelude i realize but so many things and yet i continued to read them and it was because they mattered so much to me that i mourned even while reading them the half comprehension of which i was capable because my mind was also playing ping pong with this thought or that one and as soon as one was somehow extinguished or ignored another would take its place

sometimes i would begin to read the prelude and would become worried about my own writing worried that somehow it had disappeared that i had no good accounting of the things i'd done the magnetic disk on which the writing was saved would be erased the cloud into which i had uploaded the writing would disappear as already it was gone and so i worried too that i had accomplished so little by the age of thirty three i had written one book of which wordsworth was part but only a small part and indeed only a vanishing portion of the prelude had been my preoccupation and yet i didn't know how to write it i didn't know how to put it down and so that was a worry that came to my mind as i was reading the prelude or not reading the prelude and another problem was that i felt i hadn't quite understood what he

was saying                      was this an important portion of the text    which portions were most important                      the famous                      when he's skating                      when he's sitting high up looking for his father's horse and learns later that in fact his father has died though not in the way he had expected                      this reminds me of waiting for my mother to return home                      in the car    i would look up in the sky and see an airplane and the movement of the airplane                      the angle by which it would cut across the moon    visible in the sky in the afternoon in late summer    would dictate whether she would arrive safe at home or not    and the anguish i would feel at her not being home replaced by the anguish i felt when she did arrive                      and i realized that the fear was for naught                      but i could not control it                      it is very difficult to be afraid of one's mind                      and yet for so long i have been

and the other fact is i have read the prelude                      so much of it but do not remember it or cannot reproduce it entirely                      and so with great anguish i worry if really i've understood it                      what would it mean to go back over and over it                      to commit it to memory                      to see the intricate patterns                      "life carries intricate patterns"    to somehow produce them and                      stabilize them in my own mind                      and so i felt i hadn't read the prelude because i hadn't written it

when we were away i read raymond carver                      another writer whom i'd read before                      (important to state that i'd read carver before)    i had read what we talk about when we talk about love in high school                      and i followed on publication of the library of america volume the debate about gordon lish's editorial interventions into the text                      i was afraid i was lying to others when i said i had read raymond carver because i had read the carver into which lish had intervened                      while we were away



i read the carver of the first volume                      will you please be quiet please?  
and periodically i would stop too because i felt i hadn't internalized it all      i worried  
whether i should be reading carver                      his limitations should be obvious and  
yet i felt his fictions to be without limit      i put myself in his mind      i went where his  
mind went      when i was young      i wanted so desperately to live in the world i thought  
carver had lived in                      but which was part of the fictions he'd made      but which  
also was true i knew for example that the way we communicate now is different      that to  
some extent in a very limited way people today are      or some people                      more  
liberated than they were in the seventies and eighties                      but that the frequency of  
communication      the flattening between parts of this world now      means that some of  
the anonymities and the anomies of carver's world as he produced it      are no longer  
possible                      i grieved this loss

i grieved it as i read him as a young man                      and in my early to mid thirties      the  
same age as so many of the protagonists in these stories      the same age as the  
author himself on writing them      i grieved too that i could not be anonymous in this  
way                      i did not have also the work to save me                      the work which was the  
buffer between for his characters      the disappointment of their lives as they had turned  
out                      of intimate partners and children                      and work itself                      which as i have read  
the critics say                      he both makes a fetish of and dismisses for the sake of the  
real work which is leisure                      the work of writing                      that i have only leisure  
when reading carver                      only leisure when reading carver earlier      when i  
should have been doing my own work                      which was my studies                      and  
the difficulty in separating my studies from the work i should be doing now                      which  
is my teaching

carver himself was a good student i read this about carver in the chronology section the chronologies of the library of america volumes are the most important parts of the texts they are not simply the paratexts they are not the factual backbone they are something new i believe the editors produce them they are compiled notationally they do something the texts can never do which is they give you the interstices their point is the continuities and the interstices whereas the point of blocks of carver is the occlusion and the leaving out and so i found for example how many of the stories in will you please be quiet please? were stories from his life which you might have known in reading them or surmised but to see it reproduced there as a kind of dream index at the back of the volume is to know the transmutation he has wrought on them that was his art the slight displacement from the woman to whom he was married maryann and whom he abused his children rarely mentioned and i believe left behind and the changes of scene in the stories that were the changes of scene in his own working life so desperate supported as critics have attested by maryann as many writer men were then including justice on whom i wrote my dissertation this was the "reality" really the dispensation of the time as indeed i am buoyed by my partner who also writes and whose creative life sits next to mine

during the talk sometimes it is hard to breathe i remember getting in arguments at school arguments about breath and poetry i think of the poets whose works i have had difficulty reading not because i am reading them poorly but just reading them charles olson at olean we were talking about him sara and christopher