




WALKING TO  
MARTHA'S VINEYARD


FRANZ WRIGHT

A KNOPF  BOOK



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Poetry

- Tapping the White Cane of Solitude* (1976)  
*The Earth Without You* (1980)  
*8 Poems* (1981)  
*The One Whose Eyes Open When You Close Your Eyes* (1982)  
*Going North in Winter* (1986)  
*Entry in an Unknown Hand* (1989)  
*And Still the Hand Will Sleep in Its Glass Ship* (1991)  
*Midnight Postscript* (1992)  
*The Night World & the Word Night* (1993)  
*Rorschach Test* (1995)  
*Ill Lit: Selected & New Poems* (1998)  
*Knell* (1999)  
*God While Creating the Birds Sees Adam in His Thoughts* (2001)  
*Hell & Other Poems* (2001)  
*The Beforelife* (2001)  
*God's Silence* (2006)  
*Earlier Poems* (2007)

Translations

- Jarmila. Flies: Ten Prose Poems by Erica Pedretti* (1976)  
*The Life of Mary (Poems by Rainer Maria Rilke)* (1981)  
*The Unknown Rilke* (1983)  
*No Siege Is Absolute (Poems by René Char)* (1984)  
*The Unknown Rilke: Expanded Edition* (1991)

WALKING  
TO MARTHA'S VINEYARD

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*Poems by*

FRANZ WRIGHT

*Alfred A. Knopf*  *New York 2008*

—Cathédrale de Chartres, Portail Nord

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*Acknowledgments*

## YEAR ONE

---

I was still standing  
on a northern corner.

Moonlit winter clouds the color of the desperation of wolves.

Proof  
of Your existence? There is nothing  
but.



## ON EARTH

---

Resurrection of the little apple tree outside

my window, leaf-  
light of late  
in the April  
called her eyes, forget  
*forget*—  
but how  
How does one go  
about dying?  
Who on earth  
is going to teach me—  
The world  
is filled with people  
who have never died

# ONE HEART

---

It is late afternoon and I have just returned from the longer version of my walk nobody knows about. For the first time in nearly a month, and everything changed. It is the end of March, once more I have lived. This morning a young woman described what it's like shooting coke with a baby in your arms. The astonishing windy and altering light and clouds and water were, at certain moments, You.

There is only one heart in my body, have mercy on me.

The brown leaves buried all winter creatureless feet running over dead grass beginning to green, the first scentless violet here and there, returned, the first star noticed all at once as one stands staring into the black water.

Thank You for letting me live for a little as one of the sane; thank You for letting me know what this is like. Thank You for letting me look at your frightening blue sky without fear, and your terrible world without terror, and your loveless psychotic and hopelessly lost

with this love

# OCTAVES

---

We were, about as useful as a hammer and nail made of gold

Some woman crying the first thing we heard before our  
birth

No people anymore

Oh prayer of night

Who's going to miss you

## JUNE STORM

---

Voices from the first dark heartshaped green of summer  
leaves, rain;  
birds'.

What are they called.

I'm leaving here, and still don't know.

I'm going there, though,  
where they are—  
I feel this.

Feel that I was there  
before.

I felt this  
as a child, and now  
I know it.

## THE WORD

---

Like a third set of teeth  
or side in a chess match

Thought

and most mysterious  
of all, the  
matter of thought

The mortal mind thinking  
deathless things,  
sineine

See it examining  
black grains of death  
and life—they are the same  
thing—  
in its open hand

Sweet black green-shadowed grains of soil:  
When no one is looking

see it secretly

taste one.

## THE FIRST SUPPER

---

Death, heaven, bread, breath and the sea  
here

to scare me

But I too will be fed by  
the other food  
that I know nothing  
of, the breath  
the death  
the sea of  
it

Day  
when the almond does not  
blossom and the grasshopper drags itself along

But if You can make a star from nothing You can raise me up

# PROMISE

---

Long nights, short years. Forgiving  
silence

When morning comes, and pain—

no one is a stranger, this whole world is your home.

# FATHERS

---

Oh build a special city  
for everyone who wishes

to die, where  
they might help one another out

and never feel ashamed  
maybe make a friend,  
etc.  
You

who created the stars and the sea  
come down, come down

in spirit, fashion  
a new heart

in me, create  
me again—

Homeless in Manhattan  
the winter of your dying

I didn't have a lot of time  
to think about it, trying to stay alive

To me

it was just the next interesting thing you would do— that is how cold it was



---

and how often I walked to the edge of the actual river to join you

## TO JOHN WIENERS:

---

### ELEGY & RESPONSE

The street outside  
the window says  
I don't miss you, and I don't wish you well

Says crocuses  
coaxed out of hiding  
and killed in the snow

Says six o'clock and a billion black birds  
wheeling, and the dusk stars  
wait, and the avalanche waits—

And have you looked at the paper today

Medical research discloses  
that everyone is going to die  
of something

Ulterior avenues, I will not take you

Supernaturally articulate pencil, where the heaven of lost objects are you

Beginning summer now, incredibly close  
clouds like an illustration  
that disturbed you as a child

Appalling and incomprehensible mercy

The seeing see only this world

---

## 1

That glass was it filled with alcohol, water, or light

At ten  
I turned you into a religion

The solitary  
four-foot priest of you, I kept  
the little manger candle  
burning, I  
kept your black half-inch of  
scripture  
in the hiding place

Destroyer  
of the world

That empty

glass

## 2

In which city was it, in fourth or fifth grade, Mother read in the newspaper you'd be  
appearing and dressed me up in suit  
and little tie  
and took me  
I wanted to run to you—who were all these people?—  
I sat alone beaming  
at you who could not meet my eyes, and after

you shyly approached  
and shook my hand

---

3

If I'm walking the streets of a city  
covering every square inch of the continent  
all its lights out  
and empty of people,  
even then  
you are there

If I'm walking the streets  
overwhelmed with this love for the living

I will still be a blizzard at sea

Since you left me at eight I have always been lonely

star-far from the person right next to me, but

closer to me than my bones you

you are there

4

It's 1963 again, the old Minneapolis airport so vast  
to me, and I am running  
after the long flight alone I am running  
into your huge arms—  
Now  
I am forty-five now and I am dreaming

we are together again we are both forty-five  
and I have you all to myself this time, and we are walking  
together we're walking down a glowing-blue tunnel  
we're on time for our flight, I can hardly believe it  
we are traveling somewhere together alone  
God knows where we are going, and who cares  
we're together, walking  
and happily talking  
and laughing, and breathing.

# MEDJUGORJE

---

Highway shrine,  
lighthouse  
of time

in the bleached-  
gold winter  
wheat—

listening in  
another tongue, I

walk there

Come help through  
the long hour  
of our death

## MY PLACE

---

### *for Beth*

Rain land, walnut blossoms raining  
white  
where I walk at sixteen

bright light in the north wind

Still sleeping bees at the grove's heart  
(my heart's) till the sun  
its "wake now"  
kiss, the million  
friendly gold huddlings  
and burrowings of them hearing the shining  
wind  
I hear, my only  
cure for the loneliness I go through:

more.

I believe one day the distance between myself and God will  
disappear.



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