

Meditation in L

L is for letter. Not the first nor last letter, but first to come to mind, first at hand, and when signed to the deaf it is itself, L, elle, she. Already we are listening for what will follow, lead on by labials lingering in the mouth like merlot. Life is in our mouth like wine and all the fullness of language, the pure longing to say something, L tells us, L lets us say, L bids us listen. Elegant and eloquent, the belle L, soon we are intimate although we have said nothing but L. Well said, L is a prelude to much of what we want more of, more luck in this life, this love, and it is no accident that M, the letter of much, more, and my follows L, the letter of longing. More merlot, and we begin to loosen the limbs of words and relax into language, to lapse into letters, to look at them with our mouths the way children look at the world. Oral and aural. All the languid, liquid pleasure a single letter will give, if we let it, L will contain.

Hard and stylish K followed by soft L, rolling on into M and N, but stay a little with one letter and it will yield itself, herself, this L "The light foot hears you and the brightness begins," Pindar is translated and here is a line L might take for its own. L is the light foot of the alphabet, literally and figuratively. And it is an easy letter to write not like M or W which were a struggle on the wide lines of the Big Chief tablet. A tall line and a short line, half a ladder, half a rectangle, although when I was six I knew the shape but not the word for rectangle, the way I knew the alphabet but not what else these symbols could mean as they rode in a continuous stream of printing and cursive above the blackboard. The letters are cryptic and potent, like fractions, like the long honey hair of girls named Annette. My own hair stuck out short and boyish, mocking the girl in me, even as girlhood curled and pearled around Annette in the front row. It was hard to believe in the girl when my mother kept my hair pixied and my clothes were ugly, or if not ugly, not pretty. All I wanted in first grade was to have long hair. L is the longing and easiness with which one's heart's desire is possessed by another: the long, tawny perfection of Annette's hair.

I have long hair now. I have had long hair since I was fourteen and I went to have my picture taken for my military ID card and the clerk said, "The girl with the long, blonde hair," pointing to me. It was official: I had long hair at age fourteen. But it was too late. And lateness and longing go hand in hand. Because what we long for we

long for in the present, with the single-mindedness of the six-year-old writing rows of lower case L's, one after another marching into infinity, like the number one if it is printed, or an endless loop of longing and lateness if it is cursive. We begin the loop of longing at the bottom, it rises up, turns on itself and descends to the pale blue line of the Big Chief tablet. Sometimes the loop wavers and widens and is ugly, like one's hair. We clutch the fat pencil tighter and try to make the loops obey but the loop, like what we long for, is both easy and unattainable with mere will. I will it. I will do it. I will have it. No longing there, the loop and the long hair already seem to be a fact. The double L at the end of will gives a force and echo to our desire in the future, until L becomes the projection of tongue, line, and sound, the glider of the alphabet floating in a haze of possibility.

Folding their hands together, smooth, clerical hands, without a drop of longing or lust or will within them, the L's are lying to us, but carefully, earnestly. Live and let live, the L's trip along this platitude and lighten it, give it a gay and easy resolution. The L can be lightweight and fickle, mere filigree, and yet many large and impossible words begin with L — life, love, law, liberty, loyalty, loneliness, longing. Their weight cannot be said, only felt. But words are like lilies, beautiful, rare hybrids or common as the heat and roadside abandonment of the day lily. Like the lilies of the field, the L toils not, neither does it spin — it flourishes. L is the oil of the alphabet, anointing and flavoring words by turn, crude or olive, malevolent or indolent, spilling over or lapsing into syllables until all words are equal beginning, ending, or linked with L. From lullaby to hellhole, L is a mole whose stealthy infiltration of milk and killer proves it has no allegiance. Sly and blushing L, proverbial, adverbial L, able to -ly and lie alike. The alphabet is amoral and sibylline and the L is no exception. But if the aura of L is beloved, beginning or ending or sustaining the names of those we love, then we say these names over and over again, give them to our children, and the letter L becomes a safeguard against all the evil spelling can do.

Easy to write and easy to say, the L is fluid when spoken, trilled in laughter, yelled in anger, the heart in the mouth, calling, "Stella! Stella!" We want the stars and have been shouting up at them for whole lifetimes. L, elle, she, of course L is feminine, for all the masculine appearance of the printed L, all erection and purpose, the cursive L tells the truth. Listen, the loops and flourish seem to say, listen, lean a little closer. The words begin to lick the lobes of our ear, and language, the great seducer, begins to lull us. We are floating on the syllables of L. Common and exotic lilies nod above our head as we slip below the words, stilled in a room with the shutters closed against the splintering sun of midafternoon, where we lie in the cool dimness listening for the heat ticking in the trees and the slow buzz and hum of life.

L doesn't last, although it lingers, the way the golden light lingers in late afternoon, gilding and saturating all the colors. We want to hold on to L, but even as we say it we release it into the air and dreams

around us, hoping that what we let go will return, in an infinite recursive loop, as we keep forming the small and gentle loops of L on the line, believing longing alone will give us what we love in the future, if not the present. Only later, it is too late, and between longing and having is the half-life of desire and the half-life of life herself. Until so much of what we want is like the silent L in half, a vestige of an older spelling, an older way of saying, until we forget what we want, and settle for the silent letters amid the words, half remembering the dream that lulled us to sleep in the heat and silence of the everyday. What lies in the heart of the day lily that we become lost looking into yellow, trying to recall something, something stilled and invisible and palpable — what else, what else is there? And we feel it welling up in our mouth, but cannot say and swallow hard, almost remembering.

[Diane Comer](#)

[jubilat](#)

Number Eight

Spring/Summer 2004



Recommend
this Poem



Printer
Friendly



Previously
on PD

© 2004 by jubilat

All rights reserved.

Reproduced by *Poetry Daily* with permission.

REMEMBER TO SUPPORT POETRY DAILY'S GENEROUS SPONSORS...

[Sponsor PD!](#)



[HOME](#) | [Today's Poem](#) | [Poetry Daily - The Book!](#) | [News, Reviews & Special Features](#) | [Archive](#) | [Bookstore](#)
[Free Email Newsletter](#) | [Sponsor PD!](#) | [Support PD!](#) | [Friends of PD](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [About PD](#)

POETRY
DAILY

[Copyright](#) © 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004 The Daily Poetry Association