

## FIVE POEMS



*W. S. Merwin*

### THE COMET MUSEUM

So the feeling comes afterward  
some of it may reach us only  
long afterward when the moment  
itself is beyond reckoning

beyond time beyond memory  
as though it were not moving in  
heaven neither burning farther  
through any past nor ever to  
arrive again in time to be  
when it has gone the senses wake

all through the day they wait for it  
here are pictures that someone took  
of what escaped us at the time  
only now can we remember

### HOME TUNDRA

It may be that the hour is snow  
seeming never to settle not  
even to be cold now slipping  
away from underneath into  
the past from which no sounds  
follow what I hear is the dogs breathing  
ahead of me in the shadow

two of them have already gone  
far on into the dark of closed  
pages out of sight and hearing

two of them are old already  
one cannot hear one cannot see

even in sleep they are running  
drawing me with them on their way  
wrapped in a day I found today  
we know where we are because we  
are together here together  
leaving no footprints in the hour

whatever the diaries say  
nobody ever found the pole

#### DAYLIGHT

It is said that after he was seventy  
Ingres returned to the self-portrait  
he had painted at twenty-four and he  
went on with it from that distance though  
there was no model and in the mirror  
only the empty window and gray sky  
and the light in which his hand was lifted  
a hand which the eyes in the painting would not  
have recognized at first raised in a way  
they would never see whatever he might  
bring to them nor would they ever see him  
as he had come, to be then watching them  
there where he had left them and while he looked  
into them from no distance as he thought  
holding the brush in the day between them

## DOWNSTREAM

Those two for whom two rivers had been named  
how could it be that nobody knew them  
nobody had seen them nobody seemed  
to have anything to say about them  
or maybe even to believe in them  
if I asked who was Juniata who  
was Marietta finding their names on  
the map again feeling my throat tighten  
and a day growing warmer in my chest  
if I heard their names so I knew they were  
secret and I was silent when we traveled  
when we came close to them and caught sight  
of the skin of water under the bending  
trees the curves where they came out of hiding  
and every time always they were different  
always in secret they were beautiful  
they had been waiting for me before I  
heard they were there and they knew everything  
Juniata was older sometimes and  
sometimes a girl a late day in summer  
a longed-for homecoming Marietta  
was a little ahead of me waiting  
and shy about nothing taking my hand  
showing me and what has become of them  
who would believe now what they were like once  
nobody can remember the rivers

THE FENCE

*in memory of Matthew Shepard*

This was what the west was won for  
and this was the way it was won  
but things were not like the old days  
no Indians left to shoot at  
a long time since the last bounties  
on their kind no more wolves to hang  
and stand next to for the picture  
nothing left by the time they had  
their first guns but the little things  
running in front of them maybe a hawk  
for the barn door if they  
were lucky or a coyote  
to string up on the barbed wire fence  
which was what the fences were for  
but they were growing up thinking  
there had to be something better  
it was time to find somebody  
like themselves but different in  
a way they could give a name to  
point at make fun of and frighten  
somebody who would understand  
why it was happening to him  
when he was tied to the barbed wire  
which was what the fence was there for  
and when he was beaten until  
they thought it was time to leave him  
and they drove away growing up