

The River of Bees

By W. S. Merwin

In a dream I returned to the river of bees
Five orange trees by the bridge and
Beside two mills my house
Into whose courtyard a blindman followed
The goats and stood singing
Of what was older

Soon it will be fifteen years

He was old he will have fallen into his eyes

I took my eyes
A long way to the calendars
Room after room asking how shall I live

One of the ends is made of streets
One man processions carry through it
Empty bottles their
Image of hope
It was offered to me by name

Once once and once
In the same city I was born
Asking what shall I say

He will have fallen into his mouth
Men think they are better than grass

I return to his voice rising like a forkful of hay

He was old he is not real nothing is real
Nor the noise of death drawing water

We are the echo of the future

On the door it says what to do to survive
But we were not born to survive
Only to live

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Source: *The Second Four Books of Poems* (Copper Canyon Press, 1993)



A prolific poet and translator, W.S. Merwin's style changed over the years from traditional to free form. He won the Yale Series of Younger Poets Prize for his first book, *A Mask for Janus*, published in 1952, and the Pulitzer Prize for his 1970 collection *The Carrier of Ladders*. A prolific writer, he was the author of over 50 books of poetry, prose, and translations. Merwin lived in Hawaii for the last 40 years of his life; he was a devoted environmentalist and many of his poems take up ecological themes. He was appointed Poet Laureate of the United States in 2010. He died in 2019.

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