



Learning Human: Selected Poems

Les Murray

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A bighearted selection from the inimitable Australian poet's diverse ten-book body of work

Les Murray is one of the great poets of the English language, past, present, and future. *Learning Human* contains the poems he considers his best: 137 poems written since 1965, presented here in roughly chronological order, and including a dozen poems published for the first time in this book.

Murray has distinguished between what he calls the "NarrowSpeak" of ordinary affairs, of money and social position, of interest and calculation, and the "Wholespeak" of life in its fullness, of real religion, and of poetry.

Poetry, he proposes, is the most human of activities, partaking of reason, the dream, and the dance all at once -- "the whole simultaneous gamut of reasoning, envisioning, feeling, and vibrating we go through when we are really taken up with some matter, and out of which we may act on it. We are not just thinking about whatever it may be, but savouring it and experiencing it and wrestling with it in the ghostly sympathy of our muscles. We are alive at full stretch towards it." He explains: "Poetry models the fullness of life, and also gives its objects presence. Like prayer, it pulls all the motions of our life and being into a concentrated true attentiveness to which God might speak."

The poems gathered here give us a poet who is altogether alive and at full stretch toward experience. *Learning Human*, an ideal introduction to Les Murray's poetry, suggests the variety, the intensity, and the generosity of this great poet's work so far.

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