



The Three Marriages: Reimagining Work, Self and Relationship

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Drawing from his own experience and the lives of some of the world's great writers and poets, David Whyte brings compelling insights to our three most important commitments—to another, to our work, and to ourselves—to frame a complete picture of a satisfying life.

David Whyte knows there are three crucial relationships, or marriages, in our lives: the marriage or partnership with a significant other, the commitment we have to our work, and the vows, spoken or unspoken, we make to an inner, constantly developing self. In *The Three Marriages*, the bestselling author, poet, and speaker argues that it is not possible to sacrifice one relationship for the others without causing deep psychological damage. Too often, he says, we fracture our lives and split our energies foolishly, so that one or more of these marriages is sacrificed and may wither and die, in the process impoverishing them all. Whyte looks to a different way of seeing and connecting these relationships and prompts us to examine each marriage with a fierce but affectionate eye as he shows us the importance of cherishing all three equally.

Drawing from his own struggles to achieve this goal as well as exploring the lives of some of the world's great writers and activists—from Dante to Joan of Arc, from Austen to Dickinson—Whyte reveals that our core commitments are irrevocably connected. Only by understanding the simultaneously robust and delicate nature of the three marriages and the stages of their maturation, he maintains, can we create a real portrait of what makes us tick and a real sense of finding a place in the world.

In prose that's at once lyrical and inviting, Whyte investigates captivating ideas for bringing a deeper satisfaction to our lives, one that goes beyond our previously held ideas of balance.

The Three Marriages: Reimagining Work, Self and Relationship Details

Date : Published January 22nd 2009 by Riverhead Hardcover (first published January 1st 2009)

ISBN : 9781594488603

Author : David Whyte

Format : Hardcover 352 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Philosophy, Poetry, Psychology, Self Help, Relationships

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From Reader Review *The Three Marriages: Reimagining Work, Self and Relationship* for online ebook

Anthony Cheng says

Needed an editor to put this book in a logical structure i.e. work, marriage, and self. Instead, it jumps around haphazardly, using a mishmash of poems, personal anecdotes, and stories about historical figures to make its points. I kid you not, there is a four page break in the middle of the book to list Robert Louis Stevenson's bibliography. Despite the oddness, the central thesis ('the three marriages') is spot on and there are good insights throughout, if you can sift through the prose to find them.

Barbara says

It's not often that I give a book 5 stars. Usually it's something I read very quickly and can't put down. This book was different. I really wanted to take my time and take in what was written. Whyte, who is one of my favorite poets, uses the examples of the lives of Jane Austen, Robert Louis Stevenson, Pema Chodron and others to explore the Three Marriages of relationship, vocation and self and asks us to be vulnerable enough to have "courageous conversations" about these three areas of our lives.

Stephanie says

I was introduced to David Whyte as a guest on several podcasts I follow. He is a wonderful speaker and a consistently excellent interviewee. I have saved these podcast episodes for repeat listens in the future. I love the excerpts he posts on Facebook from his poetry and from his most recent book on the hidden meanings of everyday words. Given all this, and that the topics this book addresses are at the forefront of my heart and mind right now, I expected to like this book a lot more than I did.

David Whyte is a poet who uses language in a subtle way, focusing on its emotional and aesthetic qualities. This gives his poetry impact, but seems to have the opposite effect in his prose; his points become lost under so much verbal wool. I found myself re-reading sentences and paragraphs multiple times in order to take anything away from them. I couldn't seem to stop my mind from wandering even as I read a paragraph for the second time. This inability to focus was strange, as I was so keen for insight on these subjects. That keenness, and the payoff of my efforts as I found gems I passed over the first time, kept me reading instead of giving up.

That there is much here that was good, and that it is such a task to find it, points to how this book could have been improved with more vigorous editing. Its 350 pages could have easily been brought down to 200 without losing any of the 'meat' of the text. Points that were made in 10 sentences could have been made in 2 or 3. Anecdotes that took 10 pages to tell could have been told in 1 without losing what was valuable or poignant about them.

It's these long, often digressive anecdotes that most trouble the book. Not only do they not require the number of pages given to them, they are often problematic in and of themselves. Even as a straight woman, I rarely recognized myself in Whyte's words about women in relationships with men; Whyte is prone to

gender essentialism and a tone that often comes across as patronizing. I say this as someone who is far from the PC police when it comes to books. I've happily read and gotten a lot out of books that were more aggressively sexist than this one, but that was because the messages of those books were not dependent on an author's or character's views on gender. That is not the case with this book, which is less relevant to a female reader who doesn't see herself in Whyte's words.

It's all the more strange that Whyte singles out Jane Austen and Pema Chodron as examples of strong, independent women whose journeys reflect the principles of the marriages to work and self, while describing the woman's role in courtship and marriage as essentially passive and reactive. As interesting as the story of Robert Louis Stevenson and Fanny Osbourne is, it struck me as almost intentionally antiquated, an expression of nostalgia for a world in which men were the adventurers and women were the objects to be won from their adventuring.

It's clear Whyte proud of his own sense of himself as an adventurer, given the personal stories he chooses to share in the book. Would it have taken away from his sense of himself to acknowledge that such an approach to life is not the exclusive province of men? With just a few words, Whyte could have issued a disclaimer that the reader should take Stevenson as a universal example; instead, he doubles down on portraying Stevenson's adventurous spirit as essentially masculine, and Osbourne's passive reaction to his overtures as essentially feminine.

Even more than this gender essentialism in his chapters on the first marriage, I was troubled by the way he portrayed his experiences in Tibet in his chapters on the third marriage. He treats the people he encountered in Tibet as little more than props. Not only do they get flattened into symbols for the sake of the story Whyte wants to tell, they are stereotyped symbols that reflect an old-fashioned orientalism. Again, this would have been more forgivable for me as a reader if it didn't directly challenge the truths I was supposed to glean from these tales.

All of that said, I did come away from reading this book with new insights that will likely inform my future journeys. Many of these came on with something of a slow burn. There is an upside to the subtlety of Whyte's style, which is that something that didn't necessarily jump out as I was reading it would often show up later in my thoughts, the full import of which would hit me only then.

The most significant points I took away from this book were the following:

-Happiness and fulfillment come from the extent to which we have taken seriously not only the vows we have made to our partners, but the vows we have made to our work and to our spiritual paths. These marriages are "non-negotiable" and we are called to give of ourselves fully to all three of them. To the extent we neglect or sideline any one of them (which we often do in the attempt to improve the quality of one of the others), the negative effects show up in all three.

-While it is part of the journey of life to look back and see the follies of your youthful idealism, the right conclusion to draw is not that idealism is simply foolishness. Any new marriage requires that you begin with a certain amount of idealism if you are to pursue it wholeheartedly. It is only through sticking it out through this initial folly and inevitable disillusionment that you come to a true, settled, fulfilling commitment.

This is an especially relevant point for me at a time in my life when I am finding my 'true marriage' with work after having pursued a first career that ended in 'divorce.' It's hard for me to sincerely believe in big dreams any more, and I realize I must find out how to do so again in order to get past the fear and inertia that holds me back. I get the sense there is a way to do this without having to become like I was as a young fool,

and that this is something I can only discover for myself.

-The true path that is worthy of your pursuit reveals itself in the extent to which it obliterates the self that first came to it. A marriage is not a happy addition to a life, like an extension you add to the comfortable house you've already built, but an alchemical vessel in which you are reduced, dissolved, and reformed. The extent to which you refuse "to live in the world / with its harsh need / to change you," is the extent to which you will not grow. And by refusing to grow, by consenting only to that which allows you to hold on to your ideas about yourself and your sense of control over your life, you ultimately find yourself stagnant and unhappy.

-Finding yourself stuck and afraid, not knowing how to move forward on the path that you know is meant for you, does not mean you will be forever stuck. All that is required is that you keep coming back to it and trying to learn why you cannot do it.

My favorite anecdote in the book is one that illustrates this point: the story of Rilke's spiritual apprenticeship to Rodin, and what happened when he followed Rodin's advice to go to the zoo. What Rilke saw and felt as he watched a panther pacing in his cage led him to write one of his first great poems and to break through the depression that kept him from realizing his calling to be a poet. Whyte's examination of Rilke's journey of transformation made me think of Zen teacher John Daido Looi's instruction to "be the barrier." When you become the bars, they no longer have the power to hold you.

In the end, I'm glad to have read this book and would read it again in order to take away what I did from it. But I can't say I particularly enjoyed reading it or that I took away from it as much as I hoped and expected I would. To be fair to David Whyte, some of this may be due to how many spiritual books of a similar nature I read during my 20s; perhaps my attention wandered as much as it did because I repeatedly had the feeling I'd read this before. I am probably not the ideal reader of this book and can imagine readers for whom this book would have a much greater impact. Still, if you only have time for one book of Mr. Whyte's, I would recommend a book of his poetry over this one.

David Glasgow says

Near the beginning of this volume, David Whyte reflects on the paradox of being "serious" about something in one's life:

[N]o serious writer ever thinks about *English composition*, and if he did it would mean he had temporarily lost his mind or his way as a writer. *English composition* is for those looking from the outside in. *English composition* is to real writing as Sunday school is to Moses before the burning bush. (Kindle locations 131-133).

That opening metaphor established, Whyte then gets "serious" about an individual's relationships to her spouse, her work, and her self. And while there is much Sunday School in these pages, there are also enough glimpses of the burning bush—several selections of Whyte's own poetry among these—to make it a poignant, worthwhile read for anyone who's ever found himself struggling to "balance" the various rings of the circus our lives often become.

At times Whyte's reliance upon the biographies of a few historical figures feels forced and constricting. Jane Austen and Robert Louis Stevenson do indeed seem to have led fascinating lives, but Whyte could have spared the rod a bit on those particular horses without weakening the support their examples give his thesis.

And, as is often the case with introspective ("self-help" is too trite a term for a book this thoughtful) texts, the concluding pages of *The Three Marriages*, rather than finding a stable landing place, seem to waft up into vague nothingness like the smoke from a yak-butter candle. (It's an image Whyte finds powerful, as you'll learn, based upon his life experiences.)

But then, the point of the book is not to tell us what the three marriages "should" look like in our lives, but rather to emphasize the importance of the many-faceted conversations suggested by the polyamorous metaphor he establishes: "I" to spouse, "I" to work, "I" to self, of course; but also the "marriage of marriages"—the relationships of spouse, work, and self to each other. These are important conversations—vital, in fact, if we are to become individuals with integrity—and Whyte has learned these lessons through trial and (disconcertingly familiar) error:

What is heart-breaking and difficult about this inner self that flirted, enticed, spent time with and eventually committed to a person or a career is that it is not a stationary entity; an immovable foundation; it moves and changes and surprises us as much as anything in the outer world to which it wants to commit. (394-394)

Whyte is not offering an "answer," in other words. He is offering questions, and encouragement to learn to love those questions.

Parts of this volume spoke to me more powerfully than others, and at times I found myself skimming ahead looking for another point of intimacy with the text. But I suspect another reader—one who inhabits a different body, or the one I will become a decade, a year, or even a week from now—would find power in some of those sections I skimmed through. *The Three Marriages* is a thoughtful, passionate book, and it may be that, like life, it's impossible to appreciate fully the first time around.

Sean Goh says

A big part of the trouble I was now in, had come, as it often does, in the form of a wonderful compliment.

I rely on a general day-to-day inquiry that comes to fruition by talking out loud in front of an audience. I always feel the invitation made by attentive, listening ears makes the talk as much as any individual giving the speech.

The interesting thing about wristwatches as objects of desire is that when advertised for sale, they are always worn in situations of extreme timelessness—climbing a rock face, flying a plane, sitting with your son—as if by their purchase we will be absolved of time and no longer besieged by its swift, uncaring passage.

Poets have never used the word balance, for good reason. First of all, it is too obvious and therefore untrustworthy; it is also a deadly boring concept and seems to speak as much to being stuck and immovable, as much as to harmony. There is also the sense of unbalancing that must take place in order to push a person into a new and larger set of circumstances.

This sense of belonging and not belonging is lived out by most people through three principal dynamics: first, through relationship to other people and other living things (particularly and very personally, to one other living, breathing person in relationship or marriage); second, through work; and third, through an understanding of what it means to be themselves, discrete individuals alive and seemingly separate from everyone and everything else.

These are the three marriages, of Work, Self and Other.

This book looks at the dynamics common to all three marriages: first the recognition of what an individual wants, then a pursuit, then the hope to circumvent the difficult but necessary disappointments, and ultimately, in the face of that disappointment, the full recommitment to the vows we have made in each of the three areas, spoken or unspoken.

The understanding of this book is that in the deeper, unspoken realms of the human psyche, work and life are not separate things and therefore cannot be balanced against each other except to create further trouble.

Work, like marriage, is a place you can lose yourself more easily perhaps than finding yourself. It is a place full of powerful undercurrents, a place to find our selves, but also, a place to drown, losing all sense of our own voice, our own contribution and conversation.

Work is a constant conversation. It is the back-and-forth between what I think is me and what I think is not me; it is the edge between what the world needs of me and what I need of the world. Like the person to whom I am committed in a relationship, it is constantly changing and surprising me by its demands and needs but also by where it leads me, how much it teaches me, and especially, by how much tact, patience and maturity it demands of me.

In the silences that accompany a strong internal relationship with the self we see not only the truth of our present circumstances and a way forward but we also realize how short our stay is on this earth. Life waits for us in this internal marriage, but death waits for us also.

In effect, both partners must suffer a kind of logical self-impairment to make the commitment. A marriage is creatively destructive of both partners' cherished notions of themselves. Despite the initial hopes of perfection, what one partner wants will not occur; what the other partner wants will not occur. Both are left with the actual marriage: a radically new conversation that is built on the razed foundations of their former identities.

Falling in love comes through an illogical but real glimpse of a future possible perfection. The passion and ecstasy of that experience of perfection act as a kind of indelible foundation in the memory that gives the couple a ground on which to build and shelter through all the future troubles that lie ahead of them.

There seems to be a constant visiting dynamic in all stages of life where it appears that we get only the girl, the guy, the work, the job, the sense of self, or a participation in wider creation that we actually feel we are worthy of. If we don't feel we deserve it, then, like a spendthrift heiress, throwing her patrimony to the winds, we do our best to sabotage and give away what we feel we did not deserve in the first place. Making ourselves equal to the invitation offered by life often begins early on by walking out in the world, the head literally or metaphorically, held high, looking and listening, cultivating a beautiful kind of youthful self-belief in our own senses.

The sense that a moment is ours all ready for the taking is a powerful arbiter of success, whether it is an audience with the king of France or an interview in high office in downtown Seattle. Confidence and self-belief are contagious; they are not a matter of pure arrogance or overweening egotism, they are the sense of being part of a greater story others have not yet discovered and giving off an almost physical sense of invitation to join that story, that disarms and then changes potential enemies into allies.

A real work cannot be balanced with a marriage in a strategic way, a little bit on that side, a little bit on the other; it can only be put in conversation with that marriage, as an equal partner. All the strategies for making

them work together will come from understanding that central conversation.

There is a dark core to be found in all human behavior when love, care, shelter or a sense of self are withdrawn unwillingly from us and we then try to recover them through fair means or foul. But this is different from saying that human beings are necessarily born to be ruled by that shadow.

The instinctive rejection of the doctrine of inherited sin by a young man or woman is sane, necessary and self-protective.

Youthful innocence is, in effect, a way of paying a deep kind of attention to the world; a van Gogh-like courage, looking out at a potential canvas others have lost the ability to see. To lose your innocence is to rob yourself of a particular pair of eyes and a profoundly attentive set of ears. Coming to our original sin later allows us to find out how subtle that notion of sin actually is and how much the notion of original sin has been a very original way to control others rather than a way to understand our own awkward ways. To fall in love with a deeper sense of self, we must start with the ground we stand on in youth: our own half-grown hopes for the world.

Passionate love seems by its very nature to be a loss of context; it also seems to involve a necessary and helpless inability to save the one who is driven by it from what clearly lies ahead. It is in effect a form of unilateral disarmament. Part of its very nature seems to be an unconscious drive toward vulnerability. It may be that we must put aside the powers of self-preservation and negotiation that are necessary to preserve life on the surface in order to follow the hidden nonnegotiable conversation, which will reorder, and reimagine us, preparing us for the possible marriage to which our falling in love leads.

Logic, by necessity, has nothing to do with energy needed for the initial pursuit.

Her pursuit is more collaborative, with others and with the evidence; his, more often undertaken alone, the goal not discussed with others but more often willfully hidden from them.

Her pursuit is ultimately a pursuit of the sincerity in the man's pursuit, to see if it is real. A woman can be convinced by the persistence of a pursuit if it does not constitute harassment. A man tends to find any pursuing woman whom he didn't like from the first a form of harassment itself.

The interesting thing about a work life is that it is very much like a workday. Most of the hard work is done by simply turning up, facing the task at hand and moving forward, inch by inch, foot by foot, until we look around, admittedly after a much greater time than we expected, but surprised to see it has all been done. Like a good workday, a good work life must be accomplished in the midst of all other competing demands.

I looked down at the blank white paper, which lay on the table like a challenge in itself, asking me to lay out the dynamic exactly, as if putting questions into my mouth. At this stage it is so easy to want to turn away from our own faculties of attention and turn something else on, anything but your own voice or the very necessary task that awaits you beneath the household chores. This invitation to the depths, this challenge to get below the surface, is a dynamic that faces not just the writer but all people who really want to know what is eating at them, what is asking to be addressed, what lies beneath the surface busyness.

In my early teens, I had looked around at the strange world of adults and saw with a kind of horror that almost all of them seemed to be preoccupied with the details of life in such a way that they had lost sight of the greater picture. Adults seemed to have forgotten basic elemental and joyful relationships with clouds or horizons or grass that seemed necessary to be a full participant in the creation I saw around me. This form of false maturity, this slow forgetting, was late in coming to me but I had fallen for it at last and it was now beginning to smother me.

By what steps had I forgotten the promise I had made as a child not to fall into a false form of maturity, which is actually a form of nonparticipation, of not seeing, not hearing and not imagining?

An interesting phenomenon with beginner climbers is that they absolutely want to put their foot on a hold in such a way and at such an angle that it is bound to slide off. It is as if it is so self-evident that they are in a dangerous position that they are going to prove it to the world. They lean into the cliff so that their fearful, perspiring face is scraping up against the rock. They try to get as close to the rock face as possible with the whole length of their body. This naturally puts their feet at a downward angle; this naturally makes their feet slide off. They will cling even more desperately, and repeatedly slide their foot off the hold, looking at you with some satisfaction to show that once again they have demonstrated that it is impossible for it to stay there.

Patient and compassionate requests; spoken in a very low, very calm voice: to lean out, to bring their feet more at ninety degrees to the rock, to not cling so, are met with incomprehension and a look that says they know exactly what their body wants to do and they are doing it. In many ways their clinging creates a false kind of intimacy with the cliff that leads to immobility. By clinging they lose a real sense of contact and real purchase with the rock. You could call their clinging a kind of self-indulgence; it is not like Rilke's sense of real purchase with the prison bars, where the bars become a usable hold, but more a time-honored and fearful "Look at poor me," which is wonderful to experience as long as we are not looking to get out of the situation on the cliff face.

Good poets, like good rock climbers, look not for clinging but for real purchase. People who are serious about pursuing their vocation look for purchase, not for a map of the future or a guided way up the cliff. They try not to cling too closely to what seems to bar their way, but look for where the present point of contact actually resides. No matter what it looks like.

Because for those who are really lost, their life depends on paying real attention. If you think you know where you are, you stop looking.

Success can be the greatest barrier to stopping, to quiet, to opening up the radically different form of conversation that is necessary for understanding this larger sense of the self. Our very success can be the cause of a greater anxiety for further preservation of our success.

The fact is, human beings have worried, no matter when or where in history they have lived—whether they have a job or not, whether they inhabit the top of the building or the bottom, whether they are married or single or even whether they have a great deal of money or none at all. The ability to grow an ulcer and worry is so human that it is strange to think that hardly any other portion of creation indulges in the activity with the depth and sophistication with which we do. If we do see the marks of anxiety in another creature, as I did recently in a dog waiting for its owner to return home, we remark on it and begin to say the animal in question is almost human.

But no animal has taken anxiety to the grand heights that we have. Our highly evolved ability to worry and become anxious may have conferred us with survival advantages but it also gave us the ability to sit beneath a magnificent sky and not see a single star, to sit by ourselves and not have an inkling of who that self is, to spend most of a life providing for a family while neglecting to spend the time with them that is an expression of the love that all the providing is supposed to represent. Anxiety about our world, about ourselves; our constant need to compare and contrast ourselves with others, our constant attempt to identify exactly where on the map we find ourselves, divides us from creation as surely as any serpent proffering an apple. Perhaps our development of a sustained ability for mental and emotional worry was the very apple into which we gladly bit, defending ourselves consciously against creation while at the same time expelling ourselves from the garden where we felt unconsciously at home.

Stopping is not passive; stopping allows us to look at the world as if we have seen it for the first time. Stopping stops us from keeping things alive beyond their appointed time. Stopping makes us realize everything is going to disappear, including ourselves, and enables us to stop trying to act as if we were immortal.

We want to write the script of their meeting that way because there is some deep form of recognition that Stevenson's sincerity is worthy of acceptance or belief. All paths to authenticity lead through the doors of humiliation, and we are impressed by this wild Scotsman's ability to put the taste of absolute, nose-in-the-turf, single-malt humiliation in our mouths. It is this taste of adventured groundedness, this willingness to sacrifice everything for the glimpsed possibility, that is so deeply satisfying about Stevenson.

one of the other core competencies of human beings, beside constantly worrying, is giving unasked-for advice to others,

SINGLE NOTE OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND SUPPORT TO MARRIAGE; WRITTEN IN THE NEXT CENTURY BY SOMEONE NEVER ALLOWED TO ENTER THAT STATE BECAUSE HE WAS GAY: Like everything which is not the involuntary result of fleeting emotion but the creation of time and will, any marriage, happy or unhappy, is infinitely more interesting than any romance, however passionate.
W. H. AUDEN

Stevenson asks us not to rage against our fate but to look at the tidal flow of events surrounding us with a keen eye. Only those who put more energy into self-pity than into paying attention are truly marooned.

We weep to have what we most fear to lose. All the most precious things in a human life are the very things to which we find it most difficult to make ourselves vulnerable and open. To feel a joy in life is also to know it is fleeting and will pass beyond our grasp. Best, then, not to make ourselves vulnerable in the first place, to protect ourselves by looking for neither the consummation of our hopes nor their raw disappointment. Best to be just a provider to a daughter so as not to feel later, as she grows away, as Shakespeare said again, in Hamlet, "the pangs of disprized love." Best not to look life's possible losses full in the face. Best to live in a bland middle that knows nothing of either.

Vanity and pride are different things, though the words are often used synonymously. A person may be proud without being vain. Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us.

To be so bent on marriage—to pursue a man merely for the sake of situation—is a sort of thing that shocks me; I cannot understand it. Poverty is a great evil, but to a woman of education and feeling it ought not, it cannot be the greatest.

The sense of absolute entrapment we all have experienced when we commit to something to which we cannot ultimately belong, and realize from that moment on time will begin inexorably to slide right by us. The consequences of a wrong marriage are understood in our literature, our mythologies and our personal biographies to be enormous. It is not only the entrapment of being with the wrong person, but the sense of another possible parallel life slipping away while we are occupied with a person and a life we know is not good for us.

One of the more restful achievements of having found the right partner in life is that we suddenly realize how much effort has previously gone into all the searching. Finding a mate takes enormous amounts of physical and emotional energy—dressing, comings and goings, and endless drama—which is why it can be so

difficult to look again in midlife if we lose that happiness and must seek anew.

It is hard for human beings to pay attention to anything other than the minutiae of their own physical world, to lift themselves from everyday concerns they have brought with them from one end of the earth to the other.

We do not often admit how much the shape of our face can be an invitation to others or a warning to keep away. Our face influences our future by what it invites or disinvents. The way we face the future actually creates our future as much as our individual actions along the way.

Many of the motifs human beings have described over the centuries looking for a closer engagement with the self are compressed into those hours: curiosity, followed by puzzlement, followed by apprehension and darkness, followed by insight and revelation. Followed, I might say, by an even more difficult task of sustaining the insight and revelation.

The understanding that we are not the be-all and end-all for our partners, nor should we be, helps us to grant ourselves and the other person freedom now rather than later. In giving away the personal conceit of wanting to be the entire source of their happiness, we give them away generously in the process. In the great Murphy's Law of Relationship, we then find that we have more of them present; actually enjoying our company, that they volunteer to stay with us exactly because we have tried, against a natural selfish undertow, to give them a sense of choice.

I have a good Irish friend who always says, when I have a troubled question about marriage and relationship, "Go against yourself."

There is no real conversation without vulnerability, and many times the only way of showing vulnerability at the beginning is through developing, as a couple, a robust sense of humor. The more sober, life-changing assessments can come later, when we have become used to looking underlying dynamics in the eye.

The real gift and the crux of our difficulty is our constant and entirely natural experience of vulnerability. Trying to live without feeling vulnerable means we do not understand the fierce nature of the reality we inhabit. In closing off our vulnerability, we close off the authentic exchanges that tell us we are actually having a real conversation. Vulnerability is the door through which we walk into self-understanding and compassion for others. Being enlightened does not mean we assume supernatural powers or find a perfection that exalts us above the daily losses other human beings are subject to; enlightenment means we have accepted thoroughly our transience, our vulnerability and our imperfections and live just as robustly with them as without them.

Jen says

I read this slowly because it fostered a lot of self-reflection along the way. Whyte's notion of work-life balance as an unnecessary competition between two -- or three -- relationships (work, 'marriage' -- to a partner or a community or a cause -- and one's self) rings true. It was somewhat revelatory for me to reframe that concept as a conversation between three important parts of who I am, rather than a see-saw with work on the one side and 'life' on the other.

antoanela safca says

I just finished this book and I almost feel like starting it again. I even underlined whole passages, which I never do on any books. I don't think David Whyte is for everyone, I didn't warm up to him immediately either. He can wonder quite a bit, jumps from story to story, I found myself reading some paragraphs twice. And then I'd find myself almost hit over the head with some mindblowing obvious truth that has been wondering my mind too, but his clear, simple and vulnerable voice has made me vibrate in recognition. He shares a bit of his personal experiences too, and you do get a lot more of the storyteller David Whyte than in his book *Consolations*.

Rachel Ann Brickner says

I was recently introduced to David Whyte's poetry and fell in love with a few of his poems. Shortly after that, this book was gifted to me. It's a great read. I pretty much dog-eared the whole thing. I would recommend this book to anyone in the midst of a self, relationship, career/calling crisis or period of questioning. His story plus the literary and historical context he provides for his thesis about "the three marriages" is fascinating, often funny, and just really enjoyable to read. I'm particularly grateful for the new lens it's given me to think about the idea of self.

Brandy says

It's been about 8 months since I started this book, but I've enjoyed slowly picking through it. It came at a perfect time...when I was (and still am) struggling with how to find peace and balance amidst my crazy residency schedule. It gave me a lot of encouragement in understanding that it usually takes a great deal of hard work and sacrifice to become truly competent at something. I've come to view this time in my life as my apprenticeship, my time to give myself to this work in order to become good at what I love to do. At the same time, however, it clearly pointed out that the two other essential aspects in our lives, our relationship with our partner and our relationship with our selves, cannot be ignored and have to be tended to as well. There needs to be a constant conversation between these 3 worlds in order to understand what needs the most focus at a given time. There are a lot of great pearls and quotes in this book, as well as some of his poems, which I have come to love.

Amy Beth says

I thought I would like this--the idea of work, self, and relationships all being at their core about similar concerns is a very interesting idea. I just couldn't get through it. The thing that really turned me off is his description of being creative as some dramatic arc that requires great drops and peaks. I don't believe any more that life is made up of some story of going from rags to riches. It's made up of lots of little moments of putting one foot in front of the other. The process is the life. As Julia Cameron says in *The Artist's Way*, drama belongs on the page and not in your life. Or as Austin Kleon says in *Steal Like an Artist*, "Be boring. (It's the only way to get work done.)"

Also, minor annoyances I have to mention: He said if Jane Austin had gotten married she'd never written her books. This is not necessarily true, and also if marriage had meant no books, she also could have contributed to society in just as meaningful a way. Millions of women have lived anonymous lives that have still collectively impacted our world for good.

Secondly, he said that the male pursuit is generally to make a leap and do something insane. Women stay at home and explore accepting advances by discussing it with their friends. Perhaps true in relationships--men in general don't like to be chased. However, as far as other pursuits, women do this all the time.

Jane says

I enjoyed many of the ideas in this book, and it was novel looking at the negotiation of love, work and self through the lenses of Stevenson, Austin and Dickens, but those examples also got in the way of my being able to think through the issues in today's context.

Gloria says

David Whyte arrived at this theme when he was under great pressure, with minutes to spare, to address a large audience ... and he had no idea what to talk about. He chose to speak from his heart.

Here he examines the three prongs of relationship to another person, relationship to self, and relationship to work. His premise is that all three areas needs to be healthy and in balance in order for life to work optimally. Thoughtful, philosophical and intellectual, these are basically essays as he explores each area one at a time encouraging readers to actively seek the relationships that align us with our values and goals.

Wells Hamilton says

Worth the read, but it meanders a bit more than his other book, "Poetry and the preservation of the soul." I liked it and it gave me much to think about. This is better than pseudo-science self-help; it uses literature and poetry to examine the soul and its relationship with itself, our career calling, and another person. Whyte offers some answers and guidance, but this is more of a story of his own self-examination, and the forces that pulled famous writers to make momentous decisions in their lives. I'm glad to have this on my bookshelf.

Cole Hoover says

A really fantastic book that challenges the ideas of a work life balance being possible, honest or even desirable if it were possible.

The book weaves in and out of stories from the authors life and the lives of interesting people throughout history who struggled and succeeded in creating not a "balance" but a genuine conversation between their work, self and relationship with another.

It's also about the story of our lives and the collective story of mankind that the universe(or whatever you

call it) asks us to participate in.

"How we respond to an invitation can mark or maim us for the rest of our days."- David Whyte

Avoid the maimage, learn how to better know your life and all it's beautiful parts.

Kristopher Muir says

I would add this recent book ["The Three Marriages"] to my list of top 5 books. I recommend you pick it up if you see any value in gaining a deeper understanding that the relationship that you have with yourself, especially in all of its silence and vulnerability, can be as powerful as the relationship that you have with your significant other or the work that drives you. Rather than accept the traditional dichotomy of work-life balance, the author offers an alternative view: "Thinking of work, self and other as three marriages offers the possibility of living them out in a way in which they are not put into competition with one another, where each of the marriages can protect, embolden, and enliven the others and help keep us mutually honest, relevant, authentic and alive."
