

[TO]
THE
LAST
[BE]
HUMAN

JORIE GRAHAM

WINNER OF THE PULITZER PRIZE

INTRODUCTION BY ROBERT MACFARLANE

[To] The Last [Be] Human

JORIE GRAHAM



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This e-book edition was created through a special grant provided by the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation.

For Samantha Lorraine Almanza

Contents

Title Page

Note to Reader

TO THE LAST BE HUMAN

introduction by Robert Macfarlane

SEA CHANGE

I

SEA CHANGE

EMBODIES

THIS

GUANTÁNAMO

UNDERWORLD

FUTURES

II

LATER IN LIFE

JUST BEFORE

LOAN

SUMMER SOLSTICE

FULL FATHOM

THE VIOLINIST AT THE WINDOW, 1918

III

NEARING DAWN

DAY OFF

POSITIVE FEEDBACK LOOP

BELIEF SYSTEM

ROOT END

UNDATED LULLABY

NO LONG WAY ROUND

PLACE

I

SUNDOWN

CAGNES SUR MER 1950

MOTHER AND CHILD

(THE ROAD AT THE EDGE OF THE FIELD)

UNTITLED

THE BIRD ON MY RAILING

II

END

ON THE VIRTUE OF THE DEAD TREE

DIALOGUE (OF THE IMAGINATION'S FEAR)

EMPLOYMENT

TREADMILL

III

OF INNER EXPERIENCE

TORN SCORE

THE SURE PLACE

ALTHOUGH

IV

THE BIRD THAT BEGINS IT

LULL

WAKING

THE FUTURE OF BELIEF

EARTH

V

LAPSE

MESSAGE FROM ARMAGH CATHEDRAL 2011

FAST

I
ASHES
HONEYCOMB
DEEP WATER TRAWLING
SELF PORTRAIT AT THREE DEGREES
SHROUD
from THE ENMESHMENTS
WE
FAST

II
READING TO MY FATHER
THE POST HUMAN
THE MEDIUM
VIGIL
WITH MOTHER IN THE KITCHEN
DEMENTIA

III
TO TELL OF BODIES CHANGED TO DIFFERENT
FORMS
SELF PORTRAIT: MAY I TOUCH YOU
INCARNATION
FROM INSIDE THE MRI
PRYING
CRYO

IV
DOUBLE HELIX
THE MASK NOW

MOTHER'S HANDS DRAWING ME

RUNAWAY

I
ALL
TREE
I'M READING YOUR MIND
MY SKIN IS
WHEN OVERFULL OF PAIN I
OVERHEARD IN THE HERD

II
[TO] THE LAST [BE] HUMAN
FROM THE TRANSIENCE
PRAYER FOUND UNDER FLOORBOARD
CARNATION/RE-IN
BECOMING OTHER
THAW
EXCHANGE

III
SAM'S DREAM
SAM'S STANDING
WHEREAS I HAD NOT YET IN THIS LIFE SEEN
RAIL
I WON'T LIVE LONG
SCARCELY THERE
UN-

IV
THE HIDDENNESS OF THE WORLD
RUNAWAY
IT CANNOT BE

WHOM ARE YOU
SIRI U
IN THE NEST®
THE WAKE OFF THE FERRY
POEM

About the Author
Books by Jorie Graham
Acknowledgments
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Special Thanks

TO THE LAST BE HUMAN

The earliest of the poems in this tetralogy were written at 373 parts per million of atmospheric CO₂, and the most recent at 414 parts per million; that is to say, in the old calendar, 2002 and 2020 respectively. The body of work gathered here stands as an extraordinary lyric record of those eighteen calamitous years: a glittering, teeming Anthropocene journal, written from within the New Climatic Regime (as Bruno Latour names the present), rife with hope and raw with loss, lush and sparse, hard to parse and hugely powerful to experience.

Recently, Graham said that she has begun to imagine her poetry “as something that might be dug up from rubble in the future,” a message sent forward to “whatever or whomever comes next,” part of “a huge amalgam of leftover signals held together by chance.” This image of her poems existing as future relics, close-read by distant beings, recalls to me the research field of “nuclear semiotics” which flourished in the US in the early 1990s. In those years, as the issue of the long-term burial of mid- and high-level nuclear waste pressed with increasing urgency, the question emerged as to how to warn future generations of the great and durable radioactive danger that would lie below-ground. The US Department of Energy commissioned a “Human Interference Task Force” to devise a marker system which would deter intrusion for at least 10,000 years at the deep repositories for nuclear waste then under construction at Yucca Mountain in

Nevada and Carlsbad in New Mexico. Among the proposals developed by the Task Force (none has yet been implemented) were “passive institutional controls” such as concrete pillars with jutting spikes; pictograms and petroglyphs conveying horror; and information chambers built of granite and reinforced concrete, carrying engraved warnings in numerous languages.

Graham’s poems are likewise turned to face our planet’s deep-time future, and their shadows are also cast by the long light of the will-have-been. But they are made of more durable materials than granite and concrete, they are very far from passive, and their tasks are of record as well as of warning: to preserve what it has felt like to be a human in these accelerated years when “the future / takes shape / too quickly,” when we are entering “a time / beyond belief.” They *know*, these poems, and what they tell is precise to their form. How they swarm, beautifully and bee-like! They settle upon surfaces of time and place and seethe there, their long lines susurrating together as tens of thousands of wings do, intensely, intricately. Sometimes they are made of ragged, hurting, hurtling, and body-fleeing language; other times they celebrate the sheer, shocking, heart-stopping gift of the given world, seeing light, tree, sea, skin, and star as a “whirling robe humming with firstness,” there to “greet you if you eye-up.” I have found myself speaking some of these poems aloud in order the better to enter them: sounding their humming, their murmuration, in the Earth’s air as well as the mind’s ear. I know not to mistake the pleasures of this poetry for presentist consolation, though; the situation has moved far beyond that: “Wind would be nice but / it’s only us shaking.”

The titles and tones of the four collections tell a story in their (ecological) succession. *Sea Change*: richness and strangeness; a phase-shift happening; quickening and deadness; the need, the obligation, to keep eyes open, pearl-less. *Place*: at once verb and

noun; to locate what is lost and to reach sure footing, to ground a thing well; to find one's place but also to be put in it. *Fast*: swift but so too stuck; fleet and fixed; steadfast but also bedfast and cragfast, unable to move up or down, on or back; caught in the torrent; made fast (secure), but thus also beyond adaptation or adjustment. And *Runaway*: a fugitive, a juggernaut; unfindable, unstoppable; faster than fast; also an order—flee! Get gone!

The subjects—though that is not quite the right word for what is contained here, what happens here—of the four collections also shift across their courses, mapping and tracking life and lives as they radiate, pulsate, and tangle. The tetralogy as a whole restlessly pries at the same ancient ethical question in its modern context: *What has it been given us to do when we have been given a life to live?*

Sea Change (2008) was written when Graham was resident in Normandy, where she experienced the *canicule* (heatwave) of 2003, the hottest summer on record in Europe since at least 1540. Rivers dried to their beds, crops failed, whole woodlands perished. France alone recorded nearly 15,000 deaths, Europe as a whole around 70,000. For two months, the continent glimpsed a future that—two decades on—the “temperate zones” already inhabit near-permanently: one of wildfires, brutal heat and drought, charred air, humans and creatures gasping for breath. I think of this collection as a meteorological journal, written at the point it became no longer possible to separate weather from climate. Many of the poems begin quietly, almost classically, with the calm field-note placements I associate first with T'ang and Sung dynasty verse: “Waning moon”; “After great rain.” “Summer solstice”; “Nearing dawn”; “Midwinter. Dead of.” From the first pages, though, nature is out of joint, displaced. A “new wind” blows: “Un- / natural says the news. Also the body says it.” A new tune plays: “We have other plans / for your summer is the tune. Also your winter.” Parts of these poems—with

their long weaving lines, sending the shuttle back and back again across the loom of the page—almost yearn for the luxury of a lapse into nowness, the absolution of the utter instant. But this is understood to be an abrogation of responsibility; the lyric cannot love itself into evaporation in the time of “The Great Dying.” And so on the poems rush, faster and faster, tracing both damage and the “indrift of us / into us,” barely a full stop present, but instead an ice-slide of dashes and ampersands. I tried to read “Futures” aloud, but I ran out of breath.

Place (2012) seems to fall between storms, in an uneasy lull that is both an aftermath and a prequel. Time in its pools is briefly more available here, allowing a sinking into the dreamlife not only of “the vast network of blooded things,” but also of vine, stone, grass, grain, hedgerow, bloodless but still animate. These inquiries can feel ceremonial and medieval (“On the Virtue of the Dead Tree”), recalling Aquinas and Julian of Norwich, and above all Hildegard of Bingen’s lush and nourishing meditations upon *viriditas*: greenness, growth towards truth. Always, though, these slower poems are pressed by what is imminent, “a slicing in which even the / blade is / audible.” An endnote to the original collection identifies the double-margin arrangement used by most of the poems (one left justified to the edge of the page, one left justified almost to its center) as a means of bringing the reader to “feel the vertiginous double-position in which we find ourselves, constantly looking back just as we are forced to try to see ahead.” Form, here, is forged by crisis. In the summer in which I wrote this foreword to Graham’s tetralogy, a heat-dome settled over the Pacific Northwest, destructive wildfires burned from Arctic Canada to Lake Tahoe, flash floods devastated Tennessee, and Hurricane Ida collapsed the power grid in New Orleans and drowned people in their New York basements. All of this in North America alone, in three months. Yet still power-wielders refuse to recognize that “apocalypse” is not an indefinitely deferrable singularity but an

always-somewhere-present experience, unevenly distributed across the contour-lines of existing inequalities.

Fast (2017) opens in apparent stasis—“Manacled to a whelm.”—but within seconds is off on its headlong rush (“everything transitioning—unfolding—emptying”) that will hardly pause for the collection’s duration. Long poems here are set rigorously to the left-hand margin, hard justified for the hard-to-justify: “trawling-nets bycatch poison ghostfishing.” New forces and harrowings emerge: cancer, the death of a father, the decline of a mother, and all are set within the webwork of the wider illnesses—the new maladies of the soul, as Kristeva named them. Online surveillance and data-harvesting, the Syrian war, ecological devastation on land and at sea: “We are in systemicide.” But don’t cry(o): do something! New non-human voices speak through these lyrics, become strange attractors around which the language spins: the ocean floor, chatbots, the singing magnetic field of an MRI scanner. Mass surveillance, mass infection, mass injustice. A new punctuation mark appears here, too: the arrow, an em-dash tipped with an angle bracket. These arrows leave the reader trapped in a flow-diagram, compelled causally ever-onwards at speed, at weapon-point: this leads to that leads to this, burning off nuance, hastening us remorselessly into an end time that will be a surrender. Struggling against this piercing and disempowering teleology, though, are the out-of-time energies of love and compassion. A poem about Graham’s dying father, “The Mask Now,” contains one of the most affecting lines I know in the modern elegy. “He was a settler in that flesh, that I could see. / Not far from breaking camp.”

A beautiful becalmedness starts the still-point poem that opens *Runaway* (2020): “After the rain stops you can hear the rained-on.” What I take to be the chief task of the poems here is declared early: “trying to make sense of the normal, turn it to life, more life.” I hear

an echo of Prior Walter's rallying cry in *Angels in America*: "still bless me anyway. I want more life." Kushner's masterpiece arose out of the AIDS epidemic, Graham's was published in the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Both share urgings against immiseration and extinction, towards love, kindness, and the kin-making powers of true empathy. We must be "unafraid to live in the raw wind," writes Kushner, and a "raw wind" blows through all four of Graham's volumes too, stirring soul, shivering skin, keeping us awake. The wind's enemy is the depletion of life's diversity, because in that diversity lies the vital replenishing possibilities of sympoesis, the epigenetic making-with that is the engine of life on Earth. Reduce the totality of life's forms, and future creation is itself constrained: "I won't live long / enough to see any of the new / dreams the hundreds of new kinds of suffering and weeds birds animals shouldering their / demise without possibility of re- / generation."

"Emergence" is the term given in biology, systems theory, and beyond for the properties or behaviors of an entity that its parts do not on their own possess. Graham's poetry is strongly emergent, its effects irreducible to the sum or difference of its components. It shoals, schools, flocks, builds, folds. It has *life*. To read these four twenty-first-century books together in a single volume is to experience vastly complex patterns forming and reforming in mind, eye, and ear. These poems sing within themselves, between one another, and across collections, and the song that joins them all is uttered simply in the first lines of the last poem of the last book:

The earth said
remember me.
The earth said
don't let go,

said it one day

when I was
accidentally
listening

—Robert Macfarlane, September 2021

SEA CHANGE

I

SEA CHANGE

One day: stronger wind than anyone expected. Stronger than
ever before in the recording
of such. Un-
natural says the news. Also the body says it. Which part of the body—I look
down, can
feel it, yes, don't know
where. Also submerging us,
making of the fields, the trees, a cast of
characters in an
unnegotiable
drama, ordained, iron-gloom of low light, everything at once undoing
itself. Also *sustained*, as in a hatred of
a thought, or a vanity that comes upon one
out of
nowhere & makes
one feel the mischief in faithfulness to an
idea. Everything unpreventable and excited
like
mornings in the unknown future. Who shall repair this now. And how the future
takes shape
too quickly. The permanent is ebbing. Is
leaving
nothing in the way of
trails, they are blown over, grasses shoot up, life disturbing life, & it

fussing all over us, like a confinement
gone
insane, blurring the feeling of
the state of
being. Which did exist just yesterday, calm
and

true. Like the right to

privacy—how strange a feeling, here, the
right—

consider your affliction says the
wind, do not plead ignorance, & farther
and farther

away leaks the

past, much farther than it used to go, beating against the shutters I

have now fastened again, the huge mis-
understanding round me now so
still in

the center of this room, listening—oh,

these are not split decisions, everything
is in agreement, we set out willingly, &
also knew to

play by rules, & if I say to you now
let's go

somewhere the thought won't outlast

the minute, here it is now, carrying its
North

Atlantic windfall, hissing Consider
the body of the ocean which rises every
instant into

me, & its
ancient e-

vaporation, & how it delivers itself
to me, how the world is our law, this indrifting of us
into us, a chorusing in us of elements, &
how the
intermingling of us lacks in-
telligence, makes
reverberation, syllables untranscribable, in-clingings, & how wonder is also what
pours from us when, in the
coiling, at the very bottom of
the food
chain, sprung
from undercurrents, warming by 1 degree, the in-
dispensable
plankton is forced north now, & yet farther north,
spawning too late for the cod larvae hatch,
such
that the hatch will not survive, nor the
species in the end, in the the right-now
forever un-
interruptible slowing of the
gulf
stream, so that I, speaking in this wind today, out loud in it, to no one, am
suddenly
aware
of having written my poems, I feel it in
my useless
hands, palms in my lap, & in my listening, & also the memory of a season *at its*
full, into which is spattered like a
silly cry this in-
cessant leaf-glittering, shadow-mad, all
over

the lightshafts, the walls, the bent back
ranks of trees
all stippled with these slivers of
light like
breaking grins—infinities of them—wriggling along the walls, over the
grasses—mouths
reaching into
other mouths—sucking out all the
air—huge breaths passing to and fro between the unkind blurrings—& quicken
me further says this new wind, &
according to thy
judgment, &
I am inclining my heart towards the end,
I cannot fail, this Saturday, early pm,
hurling myself,
wiry furies riding my many backs, against your foundations and your
best young
tree, which you have come outside to stake again, & the loose stones in the sill.

EMBODIES

Deep autumn & the mistake occurs, the plum tree blossoms, twelve
blossoms on three different
branches, which for us, personally, means none this coming spring or perhaps
none on
just those branches on which
just now
lands, suddenly, a gray-gold migratory bird—still here?—crisping,
multiplying the wrong
air, shifting branches with small
hops, then stilling—very still—breathing into this oxygen which also pockets
my
looking hard, just
that, takes it in, also my
thinking which I try to seal off,
my humanity, I was not a mistake is what my humanity thinks, I cannot
go somewhere
else than this body, the afterwards of each of these instants is just
another instant, breathe, breathe,
my cells reach out, I multiply on the face of
the earth, on the
mud—I can see my prints on the sweet bluish mud—where I was just
standing and reaching to see if
those really were blossoms, I thought perhaps paper

from wind, & the sadness in
me is that of forced parting, as when I loved a personal
love, which now seems unthinkable, & I
look at
the gate, how open it is,
in it the very fact of God as
invention seems to sit, fast, as in its saddle, so comfortable—& where
does the road out of it
go—& are those torn wires hanging from the limbs—& the voice I heard once
after I passed
what I thought was a sleeping
man, the curse muttered out, & the cage after they have let
the creatures
out, they are elsewhere, in one of the other rings, the ring with the empty cage is
gleaming, the cage is
to be looked at, grieving, for nothing, your pilgrimage ends here,
we are islands, we
should beget nothing &
what am I to do with my imagination—& the person in me trembles—& there is
still
innocence, it is starting up somewhere
even now, and the strange swelling of the so-called Milky Way, and the sound of
the
wings of the bird as it lifts off
suddenly, & how it is going somewhere precise, & that precision, & how I no
longer
can say for sure that it
knows nothing, flaming, razory, the feathered serpent I saw as a child, of stone,
&
how it stares back at me
from the height of its pyramid, & the blood flowing from the sacrifice, & the

oracles

dragging hooks through the hearts in
order to say
what is coming, what is true, & all the blood, millennia, drained to stave off
the future, stave off,
& *the armies on the far plains*, the gleam off their armor now in this bird's
eye, as it flies towards me
then over, & the sound of the thousands of men assembled at
all cost now
the sound of the bird lifting, thick, rustling where it flies over—only see, it is
a hawk after all, I had not seen
clearly, it has gone to hunt in the next field, & the chlorophyll is
coursing, & the sun is
sucked in, & the chief priest walks away now where what remains of
the body is left
as is customary for the local birds.

THIS

Full moon, & the empty tree's branches—correction—the tree's
branches,
expose and recover it, suddenly, letting it drift and rise a bit then
swathing it again,
treating it like it was stuff, no treasure up there growing more
bluish and ablaze,
as the wind trussles the wide tall limbs in-
telligently
in its nervous ceaselessness—of this minute, of that minute—
All the light there is
playing these limbs like strings until
you can
hear the
icy offering of winter which is wind in trees blocking and
revealing moon & it's
cold &
in the house someone is
sending instructions. Someone thinks death can be
fixed.
Inside it is magic, footprints are never made
visible. The moon slicks along this human
coming and
going with no prints to it. The moon

all over the
idea that this “all”
could be (and no one would mind) a
game. Noise, priests, provinces, zip codes
coil up out of the grasses
towards it. Groups
seize power. Honor exists. Just punishment exists. The sound of
servants not being
set free. Being told it is postponed again. Hope as it
exists in them
now. Those that were once living how they are not
here in this
moonlight, & how there are things one feels instantly
ashamed about in it, & also, looking at it,
the feeling of a mother tongue in the mouth—& how you can, looking away,
make those trees lean, silvered, against
the idea of the universal—really lean—their tips trying to
scratch at it—
Until it sizzles in one: how one could once give birth, that’s what the shine
says, and that distant countries
don’t exist, enemies do, and as for the great mantle of
individuality (gleaming) &
innocence & fortune—look up: the torturer yawns waiting for his day to be
done—he leans against
the trees for a rest, the implement shines, he looks up.

GUANTÁNAMO

Waning moon. Rising now. Creak, it goes. Deep
over the exhausted continents. I wonder says
my
fullness. Nobody nobody says the room in
which I
lie very still in the
darkness watching. Your heart says the moon, waning & rising further. Where is
it. Your
keep, your eyes your trigger
finger your spine your reasoning—also
better to
refuse touch,
keep distance, let the blood run out of you and the white stars gnaw you, & the
thorn
which is so white outside in the field,
& the sand which is sheetening on the long beach, the soldiers readying, the up-
glance
swift when the key words, of prayer, before
capture, are
uttered, a shiver which has no hate but is not love, is neutral, yes, un-
blooded, as where for instance a bud near
where
a hand is unlocking a
security-catch calls

out, & it is an instance of the nobody-there, & the sound of water darkens, & the
wind

moves the grasses, & without
a cry the cold flows like a watchdog's
eyes, the watchdog keeping his eye out for difference—only difference—& acts
being

committed in your name, & your captives
arriving
at *your* detention center, there, in your
eyes, the lockup, deep in your pupil, the softening-up, you paying all your
attention

out, your eyes, your cell, your keep, your
hold,
after all it is yours, yes, what you have taken in, grasp it, grasp
this, there is no law, you are not open to
prosecution, look all you'd like, it will squirm for you, there, in this rising light,
protected

from consequence, making you a
ghost, without a cry, without a cry the
evening turning to night, words it seemed were everything and then
the legal team will declare them exempt,
exemptions for the lakewater drying, for the murder of the seas, for the slaves in
their

waters, not of our species, exemption named
go forth, mix blood, fill your register, take of flesh, set fire, posit equator,
conceal

origin, say you are all forgiven, say these are
only
counter-resistant coercive interrogation techniques, as in give me your
name, give it, I will take it, I will re-
classify it, I will withhold you from you, just like that, for a little while, it won't
hurt

much, think of a garden, take your mind off
things, think sea, wind, thunder, root, think tree that will hold you
up, imagine it holding you
up, choose to be who you are, quick choose it, that will help. The moon is colder
than you think. It is full of nothing like
this stillness of ours. We are trying not to be noticed. We are in stillness as if it
were an

other life we could slip into. In our skins
we dazzle with nonexistence. It is a trick of course but sometimes it works. If it
doesn't we will be found, we will be made to
scream and crawl. We will long to be forgiven. It doesn't matter for what, there
are no

facts. Moon, who will write
the final poem? Your veil is flying, its uselessness makes us feel there is
still time, it is about two now,
you are asking me to lose myself.

In this overflowing of my eye,
I do.

UNDERWORLD

After great rain. Gradually you are revealing yourself to me. The lesson carves
a tunnel through
an occupied territory. Great beaches come into existence, are laved for centuries,
small
play where the castles are
built, the water carried up for moats, the buckets lost at the end of the exciting
day, then even the dunes go under, it takes a
long while but then
they are gone
altogether, ocean takes the place, as today where the overpass revealed the fields
gone
under &, just at the surface of the water, the
long
miles of barbed wire, twice-there, the ones below (of water) trembling, the
fence-posts'
small fixed pupils staring up
every fifty feet
at the sky, glittering, their replicas shivering, the spines of grasses gnawed-at by
the sick
human eye, when will we open them
again our eyes, this must all be from the world of shut eyes, one's temples feel
the cold, maybe one is
inside a seashell, one is what
another force

is hearing—how lovely, we are being handed over to an other force, listen, put
this to your ear—the last river we know
loses its

form, widens, as if a foot were lifted from the dancefloor but not put down again,
ever,

so that it's not a
dance-step, no, more like an amputation where the step just disappears, midair,
although

also the rest of the body is
missing, beware of your past, there is a fiery apple in the orchard, the coal in the
under-

ground is bursting with
sunlight, inquire no further it says,
it wishes it were a root, a bulb, a closed fist—look how it fills
with meaning when

opened—then when extended—let us not

go there—broken, broken—no to the
imagination of some great
murmuring through the soil as through the
souls of
all men—

silent agreement which is actually the true soil—but there it is now going under
—nothing

will grow in it—the footsteps are washed
away which might have
attempted kindness or cultivation or a walk over the earth to
undertake

curiosity—that was our true gift to creation: curiosity—how we would
dream eyes closed in fog all through the
storm, then open up to aftermath, run out to see—& then of course too much, too
much—too much wanting to know—sorry I
did not mean to

raise my voice—I will turn
no further—you are making yourself punishable says the flood—I will
drink it, I will, my God gave
it me says the evaporation sluicing the invisible surfaces,
in which clouds are being
said, right into the shuddering of time, its so-called passing—each land
had its time for being
born, each date a cage shrinking—until the creature has ribs that bend-in and a
skull that is
forced
into its heart, & the rain is falling chattering pearling completely turning-in,
turning, lost,
& all the words that might have held it, it
now
flows through,
& the rim of the meaning crumbles—& it is the new world you wanted—& it is
beginning
its life now.

FUTURES

Midwinter. Dead of. I own you says my mind. Own what, own
whom. I look up. Own the looking at us
say the cuttlefish branchings, lichen-black, moist. Also
the seeing, which wants to feel more than it
sees.

Also, in the glance, the feeling of owning, accordioning out and up,
seafanning,
& there is cloud on blue ground up there, & wind which the eye loves so deeply
it
would spill itself out and liquefy
to pay for it—
& the push of owning is thrilling, is spring before it
is—is that swelling—is the imagined
fragrance as one
bends, before the thing is close enough—wide-
eyed leaning—although none of this can
make you
happy—
because, looking up, the sky makes you hear it, you know why we have come it
blues, you know the trouble at the heart,
blue, blue, what
pandemonium, blur of spears roots cries leaves master & slave, the crop
destroyed,
water everywhere not

drinkable, & radioactive waste in it, &
human bodily

waste, & what,

says the eye-thinking heart, is the last color
seen, the last word

heard—someone left behind, then no behind—

is there a skin of the I own which can be
scoured from inside the
glance—no,
cannot—& always
someone walking by whistling a
little tune, that's

life he says, smiling, there, that was life—& the heart branches with its
wild arteries—I own my self, I own my
leaving—the falcon watching from the tree—I shall torch the crop that no one
else

have it whispers the air—

& someone's swinging from a rope, his rope—the eye
throbbing—day a noose looking for a neck
—

the fire spidery but fast—& the idea of

friends, what was that, & the day, in winter,
your lower back
started acting up again, & they pluck out the
eyes at the end for
food, & don't forget
the meeting at 6, your child's teacher
wishes to speak to you

about his future, & if there is no food and the rain is everywhere switching-on as
expected,

& you try to think of music and the blue of
Giotto,

& if they have to eat the arms he will feel no pain at least, & there is a
sequence in which feeding takes
place—the body is owned by the hungry—one is waiting
one's turn—one wants to own one's
turn—and standing there,
don't do it now but you might remember kisses—how you kissed his arm in the
sun

and
tasted the sun, & this is your
address now, your home address—& the strings are cut no one
looks up any longer
—or out—no—&
one day a swan appeared out of nowhere on the drying river,
it
was sick, but it floated, and the eye felt the pain of rising to take it in—I own
you

said the old feeling, I want
to begin counting
again, I will count what is mine, it is moving quickly now, I will begin this
message “I”—I feel the
smile, put my hand up to be sure, yes on my lips—the yes—I touch it again, I
begin counting, I say *one* to the swan, *one*,
do not be angry with me o my god, I have begun the action of beauty again, on
the burning river I have started the
catalogue,
your world,

I your speck tremble remembering money, its dry touch, sweet strange
smell, it's a long time, the smell of it like
lily of the valley
sometimes, and pondwater, and how

and drink.

one could bend down close to it

II

LATER IN LIFE

Summer heat, the first early morning

of it. How it lowers the pitch of the
cry—human—cast up

as two words by the worker street-level

positioning the long beam on
the chain as he calls up to the one handling the pulley on
the seventh floor. One
call. They hear each other!

Perfectly! As the dry heat, the filled-out leaves, thicken the surround, the
warming

asphalt, & the lull in growth
occurs, & in it the single birdcries now and
again
are placed, &

all makes a round from which sound is sturdied-up without dissipation or
dilation,

bamboo-crisp, &
up it goes up like a thing
tossed without warp of weight or evidence of
overcome

gravity, as if space were thinned by summer now to a non-interference. Up it
goes, the

cry, all the
way up, audible and unchanging, so the man

need

not even raise his voice to be heard,

the dry warm air free to let it pass without
loss of
any of itself along
its way ...

I step out and suddenly notice this: summer arrives, has arrived, is arriving.

Birds grow

less than leaves although they cheep, dip,
arc. A call

across the tall fence from an invisible neighbor to his child is heard

right down to the secret mood in it the child
also hears. One hears in the silence that follows the great
desire for approval
and love

which summer holds aloft, all damp leached from it, like a thing floating out on
a frail but

perfect twig-end. Light seeming to darken in
it yet
glow. *Please* it says. But not with the eager
need of

Spring! Come what may says summer. Smack in the middle I will stand and
breathe. The

future is a superfluity I do not
taste, no, there is no numbering

here, it is a gorgeous swelling, no emotion, as in this love is no emotion, no, also
no

memory—we have it all, now, & all
there ever was is

us, now, that man holding the beam by the right end and saying go on his
ground from

which the word and the
cantilevered metal
rise, there is no mistake, the right minute falls harmlessly, intimate,
overcrowded,
without pro-
venance—perhaps bursting with nostalgia
but
ripening so fast without growing at
all, & what
is the structure of freedom but this, & grace, & the politics of time—look south,
look
north—yes—east west compile hope
synthesize
exceed look look again hold fast attach speculate drift drift recognize forget—
terrible
gush—gash—of
form of
outwardness, & it is your right to be so entertained, & if you are starting to
feel it is hunger this
gorgeousness, feel the heat fluctuate & say
my
name is day, of day, in day, I want nothing
to
come back, not ever, & these words are mine, there is no angel to
wrestle, there is no inter-
mediary, there is something I must
tell you, you do not need existence, these words, praise be, they can for now be
said. That is summer. Hear them.

JUST BEFORE

At some point in the day, as such, there was a pool. Of
stillness. One bent to brush one's hair, and,
lifting
again, there it was, the
opening—one glanced away from a mirror, and there, before one's glance
reached the
street, it was, dilation and breath—a name
called out
in another's yard—a breeze from
where—the log collapsing inward of a
sudden into its
hearth—it burning further, feathery—you
hear it but you don't
look up—yet there it
bloomed—an un-
learning—all byway no birthpain—dew—sand falling onto sand—a threat
from which you shall have
no reprieve—then the
reprieve—Some felt it was freedom, or a split-second of unearthliness—but no,
it was far from un-
earthly, it was full of
earth, at first casually full, for some
millennia, then
desperately full—of earth—of copper mines and thick under-leaf-vein sucking in
of

light, and isinglass, and dusty heat—wood-
rings
bloating their tree-cells with more
life—and grass and weed and tree intermingling in the
undersoil—& the
earth's whole body round
filled with
uninterrupted continents of
burrowing—& earthwide miles of
tunneling by the
mole, bark beetle, snail, spider, worm—& ants making their cross-
nationstate cloths of
soil, & planetwide the
chewing of insect upon leaf—fish-mouth on
krill,
the spinning of
coral, sponge, cocoon—this is what entered the pool of stopped thought—a
chain suspended in
the air of which
one link
for just an instant
turned to thought, then time, then heavy
time, then
suddenly
air—a link of air!—& there was no standing army anywhere,
& the sleeping bodies in the doorways in all
the cities of
what was then just
planet earth
were lifted up out of their sleeping
bags, & they walked

away, & the sensation of empire blew off
the link
like pollen—just like that—off it went—into thin air—& the athletes running
their
games in Delphi entered that zone in the
long oval of the arena where you run in
shadow, where the killer crowd becomes
one sizzling hiss, where,
coming round that curve the slowness
happens, & it all goes
inaudible, & the fatigue the urgent sprint
the lust
makes the you
fantastically alone, & the bees thrum the hillsides, & all the blood that has been
wasted—all of it—gathers into deep
coherent veins in the
earth
and calls itself
history—& we make it make
sense—
& we are asked to call it
good.

LOAN

Rain. And aftermath. Untouchable. The gutters cough and rage, & listening
without
hearing we flinch, soul grins to rain
though we ourselves don't know that grin—
& oozings down treetrunks, liquefying,
as if the flanks were clay—& also smoke
when rain lets up,
sudden-heat steam, dif-
ferential, sound of churchbells coming out
of
nowhere, I hate you someone cries out where the door has slammed, smell of the
light where it pools on sidewalks, smell of
soil, of the five-century oak emptying suddenly, curbspill, fly-off of
small
cheeping birds—so what are we doing says
the path,
&, we want to know where everything's
going, runneling, & what's
really dead here and what's only changing,
really, lift
up the stone, pull back the leaves, loam, sod,
dirt, ah
so wet, wait till it dries a bit, evaporation and the wings of it slapping about—
all this *taking* which is not *our* taking—

puddles &
how I go to them, to make them trouble me—
water holding sky and time—
cracks in the asphalt where there is
leak, where air is forced out, goes
to, flows down, follows cracks, makes cracks—the
shine
up here all leafdrip, blossomdrip, chain-
link's minuscule cascading from wisteria
cup to cup to
soil where the water's just for a moment
milky, bony, but no
it is just water, do you remember it, the faucet flared like a glare of
open speech, a cry, you could say what you
pleased, you could turn it
off, then on again—at will—and how it fell, teeming, too much, all over your
hands, much as you please—from where
you are now
try to
feel it—what
was it this thick/thin blurry coil
flowing into the sink, while someone next to you, washing,
recommended rerouting
the bloodflow round the heart, the surgeon a
good one, &
we considered the
odds, how the body was always changing under the stress, & get outdoors he
said,
take up some golf, might help with sundays
anyway, & all the while
the water running over our clean hands, like that, in front of the mirror, still

alive,
someone who had been getting pretty good
at
his job—lifeblood—as in grammar
gliding along in its sentence but still grammar—
such must be our reward was what we never
thought then,
& through the intersection the extra, the
smell of loam, its
overfullness—unable to take any more in—yet feasting—& all of it going
nowhere—&
jump in the shower—just like that—
unearth yourself, god-on-us—whose passion was—nothing—no—
that was the
point—no—
it is given—
as in the richness of a rich man, & succulence holding its waters in tight, &
mirage where there is desperate thirst, &
salt, & the day which comes when there are to be no more harvests from now on,
irrigation returns only as history, a thing
made of text,
& yet, listen,
there was
rain, then the swift interval before evaporation, & the stillness
of brimming, & the
wet rainbowing where oil from exhaust picks up light, sheds glow, then
echoes in the drains where
deep inside the
drops fall individually, plink,
& the places where birds
interject, & the coming-on of heat, & the girl looking sideways carrying the

large

bouquet of blue hydrangeas, shaking the
water off, &

the wondering if this is it, or are we in for another round, a glance up, a quick
step

over the puddle

carrying speedy clouds,

birdcall now confident again, heat drying, suddenly no evidence of its having
been wet—but no, you

didn't even notice it—it rained.

SUMMER SOLSTICE

Here it is now, emergent, as if an eagerness, a desire to say there this is
done this is
concluded I have given all I have the store
is full the
crop is
in the counsel has decided the head and shoulders of the invisible have been re-
configured sewn back together melded—
the extra
seconds of light like
hearing steps come running towards me, then here you
are, you came all this
distance,
you could call it matrimony it is not an illusion it can be calculated to the last
position,
consider no further think no longer all
art of
persuasion ends here, the head has been put back on the body, it stands before us
entire—it has been proven—all the pieces
have
been found—the broken thing for an instant entire—oh strange
addition and sum, here is no other further
step
to be taken, we have arrived, all the rest now a falling
back—but not yet not now now is all now

and
here—the end of the day will not end—will stay with us
this fraction longer—
the hands of it all extending—
& where they would have turned away they
wait,
there is nothing for now after this we shall wait,
shall wait that it reach us, this inch of
finishing,
in what do you believe it leans out to suggest, slant,
as if to mend it the rip, the longest day of
this one year,
not early and not late, un-
earned, unearnable—accruing to nothing, also to no one—how many more will I
see—no—wrong question—old question—
how
strange that it be in
truth not now
conceivable, not as a thing-as-such, the personal death of
an I—& the extra millisecond adds itself to
this day,
& learns, it too, to interline the cheek of light
given to the widening face
that stares at us holds us excels at
being—stands, dwells, purrs, allows—what can we say to it—standing in it—
quickly it arrives at full, no, not quickly, it
arrives, at fullest, then there it is, the
brim, where the fullness
stocks, pools, feeds, in-
dwells, is a
yes, I look up, I see your face through the window looking up,

see you bend to the
horizon-line,
do not myself look out at it, no, look at you,
at the long life of having-looked as a way of
believing
now in your
thinking
face, & how natural the passage of time, and death, had felt to us, & how you
cannot
comprehend the thing you are meant
to be looking
for
now, & you are weighing something, you are out under the sky
trying to feel
the
future, there it is now in your almost
invisible
squinting to the visible, & how I feel your heart beat slowly out there in the
garden
as we both see the
dove
in the
youngest acacia,
& how it is making its nest again this year, how it chose the second ranking
offshoot
again, how the young tree strains at the stake in the wind, & within,
the still head of the mother sitting as if all
time
came down to
this, the ringed neck, the
mate's call from the

roof, & how we both know not to move—me inside at the window, deep
summer, dusk,

you in the line of sight of the
bird, & also

of the hawk changing sides of the field as
usual,

& the swallows riding the lowest currents, reddish, seeking their feed.

FULL FATHOM

& sea swell, hiss of incomprehensible flat: distance: blue long-fingered ocean
and its

nothing else: nothing in the above visible
except

water: water and

always the white self-destroying bloom of wavebreak &, upclose

roil, &

here, on what's left of land,

ticking of stays against empty flagpoles, low tide, free day, nothing

being

memorialized here today—memories float,
yes,

over the place but not memories any of us now among the living

possess—open your

hands—let go the scrap metal with the laughter—let go the

upstairs neighbor you did not

protect—they took him

away—let go how frightened you knew he
was all

along while you went on with your

day—your day overflowing with time and

place—they came and got him—there are manners for every kind of

event—he stopped reading and looked up

when they came in—didn't anyone tell you

you would never feel at home—that there is a form of slavery in everything—
and when was it

in your admittedly short
life you

were permitted to believe that this lasted

forever—remove your hands
from your pockets—take out that laundry list, that receipt for
everything you
pawned last night—decide whom to blame

—

stick to your
story—exclude expectation of heavenly

reward—exclude
the milk of

human kindness—poisoned from the start—yes—who ever expected *that*
to be the mistake—with all the murderers and miracle workers—the hovering
spidery

fairy tales—kites, angels, missiles, yellow
stars—clouds—those were houses that are his eyes—those were lives that
are his

eyes—those are families, those are privacies, those are details—those are
reparation

agreements, summary
judgments, those are multiplications
on the face of the earth that are—those are the forests, the coal seams, the
carbon sinks that are his—

as they turn into carbon sources—his—
and the festering wounds that are—and the granary that burned—and the quick
blow

administered to make it
painless, so-

called—his eyes his yes his blows his seed's
first

insertion into this our only soil—

& the flower, the cut

flower in my

bouquet here

made this morning from the walk we took, aimless, as if free,

where you asked me to

marry you, & the loaf of

barley, millet and wheat I was able,

as a matter of course, to bring to the table,
fresh-

baked,

in life.

THE VIOLINIST AT THE WINDOW, 1918

(after Matisse)

Here he is again, so thin, unbent, one would say captive—did winter ever leave
—no one

has climbed the hill north of town in longer than one can remember—something
hasn't

been fully loaded—life is blameless—he is a stem—& what here is cyclic, we
would so

need to know

about now—& if there is

a top to this—a summit, the highest note, a
destination—

here he is now, again, standing at the window, ready to

look out if asked to

by his

time,

ready to take up again if he

must, here where the war to end all wars has
come

to an end—for a while—to take up whatever
it is

the spirit

must take up, & what is the melody of

that, the sustained one note of obligatory

hope, taken in, like a virus,

before the body grows accustomed to it and
it
becomes
natural again—yes breathe it in,
the interlude,
the lull in the
killing—up
the heart is asked to go, up—
open these heavy shutters now, the hidden order of a belief system
trickles to the fore,
it insists you draw closer to
the railing—lean out—
time stands out there as if mature, blooming, big as day—& is this not an
emaciated
sky, & how
thin is this
sensation of time, do you
not feel it, the no in the heart—no, do not make me believe
again, too much has died, do not make me
open this
all up
again—crouching in
shadow, my head totally
empty—you can see
the whole sky pass through this head of mine, the mind is hatched and scored by
clouds
and weather—what is weather—when it's
all gone we'll
buy more,
heaven conserve us is the song, & lakes full of leaping
fish, & ages that shall not end, dew-

drenched, sun-
drenched, price-
less—leave us alone, loose and undone,
everything
and nothing slipping through—no, I cannot be reached, I cannot be duped again
says

my head standing now in the
opened-up window, while history starts up
again, &
is that flute music in the
distance, is that an answering machine—call and response—& is that ringing in
my ears

the furrows of earth
full of men and their parts, & blood as it
sinks into
loam, into the page of statistics, & the streets out there, shall we really
be made to lay them out again, & my
plagiarized
humanity, whom
shall I now imitate to re-
become
before the next catastrophe—the law of falling bodies applies but we shall not
use

it—the law of lateness—
even our loved ones don't know if we're living—
but I pick it up again, the
violin, it is
still here
in my left hand, it has been tied to me all this long time—I shall hold it, my
one burden, I shall hear the difference
between up

and
down, & up we shall bring the bow now up
&
down, & find
the note, sustained, fixed, this is what hope forced upon oneself by one's self
sounds
like—this high note trembling—it is a
good sound, it is an
ugly sound, my hand is doing this, my mind cannot
open—cloud against sky, the freeing of my
self
from myself, the note is that, I am standing in
my window, my species is ill, the
end of the world can be imagined, minutes run away like the pattering of feet in
summer
down the long hall then out—oh be happy,
&
clouds roil, & they hide the slaughterhouse, they loof as if this were
not
perpetual exile—we go closer—the hands at the end of this body
feel in their palms
the great
desire—look—the instrument is raised—
& this will be a time again in which to *make*—a time of use-
lessness—the imagined human
paradise.

III

NEARING DAWN

Sunbreak. The sky opens its magazine. If you look hard
it is a process of falling
and squinting—& you are in-
terrupted again and again by change, & crouchings out there
where you are told each second you
are only visiting, & the secret
whitening adds up to no
meaning, no, not for you, wherever the loosening muscle of the night
startles-open the hundreds of
thousands of voice-boxes, into which
your listening moves like an aging dancer still trying to glide—there is time for
everything, everything, is there not—
though the balance is
difficult, is coming un-
done, & something strays farther from love than we ever imagined, from the
long and
orderly sentence which was a life to us, the
dry
leaves on
the fields
through which the new shoots glow
now also glowing, wet curled tips pointing
in any
direction—

as if the idea of a right one were a terrible forgetting—as one feels upon
waking—when the dream is cutting loose, is
going
back in the other
direction, deep inside, behind, no, just back—&
one is left looking out—& it is
breaking open further—what are you to do—how let it fully in—the wideness of
it
is staggering—you have to have more arms
eyes a
thing deeper than laughter furrows more
capacious than hate forgiveness remembrance forgetfulness history silence
precision miracle—more
furrows are needed the field
cannot be crossed this way the
wide shine coming towards you standing in
the open window now, a dam breaking, reeking rich with the end of
winter, fantastic weight of loam coming into
the
soul, the door behind you
shut, the
great sands behind there, the pharaohs, the millennia of carefully prepared and
buried
bodies, the ceremony and the weeping for
them, all
back there, lamentations, libations, earth full of bodies everywhere, our bodies,
some still full of incense, & the sweet burnt
offerings, & the still-rising festival out-
cryings—& we will
inherit
from it all

nothing—& our ships will still go,

after the ritual killing to make the wind
listen,

out to sea as if they were going to a new place,

forgetting they must come home yet again
ashamed

no matter where they have been—& always the new brides setting forth—

& always these ancient veils of theirs falling
from the sky

all over us,

& my arms rising from my sides now as if in dictation, & them opening out from
me,

& me now smelling the ravens the blackbirds the small heat of the rot in this
largest

cage—bars of light crisping its boundaries

—

& look

there is no cover, you cannot reach

it, ever, nor the scent of last night's rain, nor the chainsaw raised to take the first
of the

far trees

down, nor the creek's tongued surface, nor
the minnow

turned by the bottom of the current—here
is an arm outstretched, then here

is rightful day and the arm still there, outstretched, at the edge of a world—
tyrants

imagined by the bearer of the arm, winds
listened for,

corpses easily placed anywhere the
mind wishes—inbox, outbox—machines
that do not tire in the

distance—barbed wire taking daysheen on—marking the end of the field—the
barbs like a

lineup drinking itself

crazy—the wire

where it is turned round the post standing in
for

mental distress—the posts as they start down the next field sorting his from
mine, his from the

other's—until you know, following,

following, all the way to the edge and then turning again, then again, to the
far fields, to the

height of the light—you know

you have no destiny, no, you have a wild
unstoppable

rumor for a soul, you

look all the way to the end of

your gaze, why did you marry, why did you
stop to listen,

where are your fingerprints, the mud out there hurrying to

the white wood gate, its ruts, the ants in it,
your

imagination of your naked foot placed

there, the thought that in that there

is all you have & that you have

no rightful way

to live—

DAY OFF

from the cadaver beginning to show through the skin of the day. The future
without

days. Without days of it?

in it? I try to—just for a second—feel

that shape. What weeds-up out of nowhere as you look away for

good. So that you have to imagine

whatever's growing there growing forever. You shall not be back to look

again. The last glance like a footprint before
the

thing it was

takes flight. Disturbing nothing, though,

as it is

nothing. Air moving aside air. That breeze. How is this possible, yet it

must be. Otherwise it cannot be said that
this

existed. Or that we did, today. Always breathing-in this pre-life, exhaling this
post.

Something goes away, something comes

back. But through you. Leaving no trail but self. As trails go not much of

one. But patiently

you travel it. Your self. You hardly disturb anything actually, isn't it strange. For
all

the fuss of *being* how little

you disturb. Also like

a seam, this trail. Something is being
repaired. No? Yes. Push *save*. Write your name again to register. It is some
bride, this flesh barely hanging
on, of minutes, of minutiae, of whatever it is
raising now
up through day's skin as a glance, a toss of hand, in con-
versation, as, growing in-
creasingly unburied now, one can begin to
see
the speechless toil, there under day's department, under the texture of
keeping-on-
doing-it, whatever it is that has variation in it, that swallows clip, that the
trellis of minutes holds letting clouds slip
through if you
look up—it seems we are
fresh out of ideas—the pre-war life disappeared, just like that, don't look back
you'll
get stiff-necked—there is exhaust in the air
in its
place—the wilderness (try to think of it) does nothing but point to here, how we
got here, says it can't stay
a minute longer
but that we
will have to—& day
something I am feeling lean on my shoulders now, & how
free it is, this day, how it seems to bend its
long neck
over me and try to peer at me, right here, right into my face—how it is so
worried in
its hollowing-out over me—night in it
starting to

trickle down, & the sensation of punishment though still far away, horns in the
distance, & how this was a schooling, &
plain

truths which shine out like night-bugs in evening, no one can catch them as
they blink

and waft, & that summer will be here
soon, which is normal, which we notice is normal, & will our fear matter to
anything is a thing we

wonder, & before you know it
we are ready to begin thinking about something else,

while behind us it is approaching at
last the day of
days, where all you have named is finally shunted aside, the whole material
man-

ifestation of so-called definitions, imagine
that, the path of least resistance wherein I grab onto the immaterial and christen
it

thus and thus &
something over our shoulders says it is good, yes, go on, go on, and we did.

POSITIVE FEEDBACK LOOP

(June 2007)

I am listening in this silence that precedes. Forget

everything, start listening. Tipping point,
flash

point,

convective chimneys in the seas bounded by Greenland. Once there was thunder
and also

salvos at the four corners of the horizon,
that was

war.

In Hell they empty your hands of sand, they tell you to refill them with dust and
try

to hold in mind the North Atlantic Deep
Water

which also contains

contributions from the Labrador Sea and entrainment of other water masses, try
to hold a

complete collapse, in the North Atlantic
Drift, in the

thermohaline circulation, this

will happen,

fish are starving to death in the Great Barrier Reef, the new Age of Extinctions is

now

says the silence-that-precedes—you know
not what

you
are entering, a time
beyond belief. Who is one when one calls
oneself
one? An orchestra dies down. We have
other plans
for your summer is the tune. Also your
winter. Maybe the locks at Isigny
will hold, I will go look at
them
tomorrow. I will learn everything there is of this my spouse the future, here in
my
earth my parents' house, the garden of
the continuing to think
about them, there is nothing else *in fact* but the
past, count the days count the cities you
have
visited, also what comes to keep you awake, also dew while you finally sleep—
can you ever
enter the strange thing, the name that is
yours, that
“is” you—
the place where the dead put their arms around you, & you can just taste it the
bitterness, & you would speak for your kind
but
they will laugh at you—both the naming and the kind—also thin air will laugh
that's what
it's doing look—
feather, invisible bog,
positive feedback loops—& the chimneys again, & how it is the ray of sun is
taken in

in freedom, & was there another way for
this host
our guest,
we who began as hands, magic of fingers, laying our thresholds stone upon
stone,
stretched skins between life and death,
always smoke rising to propitiate the star that might turn black, quick give back
to it
before it kills you, speed your thought to it,
till your feet themselves are
weary not just your
heart—the
skins, the flesh, the heat, the soil, the grain, the sound of each birdcall heard over
the
millennia, autumn's maneuverings into winter, splinters of dream-filled times,
beauty
that pierces, yes, always we were
vulnerable to
beauty, why should it be
otherwise—time and its wonders as it passes and things grow, & the rippings of
death
heal, & the blossoms come which one can
just for a
minute longer
look at, take in, & the mind
finds itself uncertain again, it calls, something hangs up on it, just like that, you
hear
the receiver go down, power and its end,
something else smiling elsewhere on
another world,
us in The Great Dying again, the time in which life on earth is all but wiped out

again—we must be patient—we must wait
—it is a
lovely evening, a bit of food a bit of drink—
we
shall walk
out onto the porch and the evening shall come on around us, unconcealed,
blinking, abundant, as if catching sight of
us,
everything in and out under the eaves, even the grass seeming to push up into
this our
world as if out of
homesickness for it,
gleaming.

BELIEF SYSTEM

As a species

we dreamed. We used to
dream. We did not know for sure about
the other species. By *the mind* we meant
the human mind. Open and oozing with
inwardness. Thinking was the habitation of
a
trembling colony, a fairy tale—of waiting, love—of
the capacity for
postponement—we shall put that
off the majesty of the mind
said, in the newspapers, walking among the
blessed,
out in the only
lifetime anyone had—in that space—then in the space
of what one meant by one's
offspring's
space. The future. How could it be performed by the mind became the
question—how, this sensation called
tomorrow and
tomorrow? Did you look down at
your hands just now? The dead gods
are still being
killed. They don't appear in

“appearance.” They turn the page for
us. The score does not acknowledge
the turner of
pages. And always the
absent thing, there, up ahead, like a highway ripped open and left hanging in the
void—only listen—there is no void, no, it is
still
material, which is most terrifying, is still expanse, only without you in it, or
anything else
in it—the last word you said before
you screamed
still on your tongue, like a taste, your broad warm tongue out of which existence
as we
know it was
made. The waves hit the rocks. The sensation of duty dissolves. The rule of
order—of love—of
what? Don’t look at me now I’m not
ready. It’s a sur-
prise, I want you to be
surprised. The heartbeat on its little wheels. Your given days its chariot. The
rendez-
vous awaiting. Nothing
to be done about
that! Also
the poking about in the ashes which was human
curiosity—always the shadow of what the
yes
which springs from a mind
sparks—of what filled the mind when the
yes was
felt—also human the

ownership of such
sad hands,
now still slicing everything, so carefully—the lemon is opening, the letter, the
glance, the
century, the sky, the forest—oh—the
monster, the
valley and the next-on
valley, also the
army, look, what an idea, an army—the long-gone stars making their zodiac—the
severed
fingers and the dirt they're tossed onto,
the moon, sliced, the forum, sliced—still those few pillars and the written voice
—here it
comes now the jesus, the body full of its
organs,
the parts of the stoning, each part—bone,
sinew—
each stone—till she's
gone, she's clothes on the
ground with brothers and uncles around—& the space where the blood flows
sliced open
there—& the circle of god, the circle of justice—the red eye at the center, the
crowd dispersing,
& the halo of arms still hovering
where each
let fly its stone.

ROOT END

The desire to imagine

the future.

Walking in the dark through a house you
know by

heart. Calm. Knowing no one will be

out there.

Amazing

how you can move among

the underworld's

furniture—

the walls glide by, the desks, here a mirror sends back an almost unseeable

blink—a faraway lighthouse,

moonlessness—a planet going

out—here a

knotting of yet greater dark suggests

a door—a hollow feeling is a stair—the
difference between

up and down a differential—so slight—of
temperature

and shift of provenance of

void—the side of your face

reads it—as if one could almost overhear laughter “down” there, birdcall “up”
there—

although this is only an

analogy for different
silences—oh—
the mind knows our place so
deeply well—you could run through it—without fear—even in this total dark—
this is what

the mind says in you: accelerate!—it is your
place, you be-
long, you know it by
heart, place—
not imaginable, nor under-
stood, where death is still an in-
dividual thing, & in the dark outside only the garden, & in each plant at core a
thing

by
heart, & *after all these years* the heart says to itself each
beat, & look, if you make yourself think of
it,
the roads out there will branch and branch
then
vanish,
fanning out, flat, thinning away like root-ends, everywhere going only forward
—&

so far from any so-called
city on the
hill, this city of dis-
appearance, root-ends then nothing, thinnest
trailings of
all, forgiveness says the dark, smell
me breathe me in I am your inheritance forgive it,
dusk is already crushed tight and cannot be
looked into

anymore, the glance between hunter and prey is choked off, under the big tent
the

numbered rows grew
numberless long
ago, admittance is
free, as in you have

no choice, we are trying to block out the sound of drums in the distance, blessed
be his

name says someone far in front at the
mike, & seats numbered 1 through 6 billion
are
reserved, &
the story of the parted lovers, the one from
the prior order,

will begin soon, you will see through the dark to it as it will

light itself
of its own accord,

also moonlight, what can filter through of it—&

look hard for where they rise and act, look
hard to see

what action was—fine strength—it turns
one inside out—

what is this growing inside of me, using me
—such that the

wind can no longer blow through me—such that the dream in me grows cellular,
then

muscular, my eyes red, my birth a thing I
convey
beautifully

down this spiral staircase

made of words, made of

nothing but words—

UNDATED LULLABY

I go out and there she is still of course sitting on the nest, dead-center in-
visible in our flowing big-
headed
still young and staked acacia, crown an almost
perfect
circle, dark greens blurring now
in this high wind, wrestling it, compliant too—billion-mouthed transformer of
sun and the carbon molecule—
& you have to stand still and
look in to see her,
there where the wind splits open the head, slashes the branches, & you see her,
& her head does not even turn or
tuck—
heart, jewel, bloom, star—not on any rung as we are on rungs—I can't help but
look,
wind-slicings keep
revealing her, felt-still, absorbent of
light, sound, gaze, idea—I have seen everything bought and sold I think—
the human heart is a
refugee—is standing here always in
its open
market, shouting out prices, in-
audible prices, & wares keep on arriving, & the voices get higher—

what are you worth the map of the world is
shrieking, any moment of you, what is it

worth, time breaks over you and you
remain, more of you, more of you,
asking your questions, ravishing the visible with your inquiry, and hungry, why
are you

so hungry, you have already been
fed, close your
mouth, close your neck, close your hands chest mind, close them—& your eyes,
close them—make arrangements to hold
yourself together, that will be needed, make
of your

compassion a
crisper instrument, you will need its blade, you will need
bitterness, stand here all you like looking in,
you

will need to learn
to live in this prison
of blood and breath,
& the breeze passes by so generously, & the
air

has the whole earth in its mind and it thinks it, thinks it, & in the corner of your
cell

look carefully, you are of the ones who
worship

cruelty—looking in to her nest, the bloom which is your heart opens with
kindness,

you can feel it flow through you as your eyes take her

in—strange sweetness this—high note—
held—

but it is in your hands you must look

for the feeling of what is human,
and in your palms feel
what the tall clouds on the horizon oar-in to you—what will forever replace
stillness of mind—
look out for them their armada is not aware of your air-conditioned
office—swimmingly the thunderheads
arrive &
when
is the last time you cried out loud, & who are those there
still shuffling through their files,
trying to card-out what to shred
in time, &
are you still giving out character references, to
whom, & the tickets, who paid for them this
time—your
voice, was it raised too high for the
circumstance—were you too
visible,
did you make sufficient progress, is the address still in your pocket, who paid,
who left
the tip, the garden, the
love, the thirst—oh who
was so hungry they ate of the heaven, they ate the piece of it, they ripped its
seam—look the stitching is coming
undone—moon, river-in-the-
distance, stars above the tree, wind dying down—why are you
still here—the end of evening has *come*
and gone—crammed to its full with the whole garden and its creatures—why
are you still here, your eyes like mouths—
shut them now—&

tuck in your pleasure, tuck it in,
move on into the deeper water, your kind
await you, sprawling in their camps,
longing to be recognized,
& the harsh priest the cold does his nightly round,
& the huge flower of reason blooms,
blooms,
& somebody has a newspaper, not today's, no, but some day's,
and if you can find a corner,
you can pick it up—ignoring the squint-eyed girl, the sensation of
falling, the general theory of
relativity, the nest of
meaning—you can sit in your exile
and, to the tune of the latest song, the recording of what was at some moment the
song
of the moment, the *it* song, the thing
you couldn't
miss—it was everywhere—everyone was singing it—you can find your
mind
and in the firelight
catch up on that distant moment's news.

NO LONG WAY ROUND

Evening. Not quite. High winds again.

I have time, my time, as you also do, there,
feel

it. And a heart, my heart, as you do,
remember it. Also am sure of some things, there are errands, this was a voyage,
one

has an ordained part to play. ... This will
turn out to be
not true

but is operative here for me this evening as the dusk settles. One has to believe
furthermore in the voyage of others. The
dark

gathers. It is advancing but there is no
progress. It is advancing with its bellyful of minutes. It seems to chew as it
darkens. There was, in such a time, in
addition,

an obligation to what we called telling

the truth. We
liked

the feeling

of it—truth—whatever we meant by it—I
can still

feel it in my gaze, tonight, long after it is gone, that finding of all the fine
discriminations,

the edges, purse holding the goods, snap
shut, there,
you got it, there, it is yours it is true—hold onto it as
light thins
holding the lavender in its heart, firm, slow,
beginning to
hide it, to steal it, to pretend it never had
existence. At the window, I stand spell-
bound. Your excellency the evening, I begin. What is this trickiness. I am
passing
through your checkpoint to a nation that is
disappearing, is disappearance. My high-ceilinged room (I look
up) is only going to survive
invisibility
for the while longer we
have the means
to keep it. I look at the pools of light in it. The carpet shining-up its weave—
burgundy, gold, aqua, black. It is an emergency actually, this waking and doing
and
cleaning-up afterwards, & then sleep again, & then up you go, the whole 15,000
years of
the inter-
glacial period, & the orders & the getting
done &
the getting back in time & the turning it back on, & did you remember, did you
pass, did
you lose the address again, didn't the machine spit it up, did you follow the
machine—
yes, yes, did, & the
wall behind it
pronounced the large bush then took it

back. I can almost summon it. Like changing a tense. I peer back through this
time to

that one. You will not believe it
when the time

comes. Also how we mourned our dead—had

ample earth, took time, opened it, closed
it—“our earth, our
dead” we called
them, & lived

bereavement, & had strict understandings of defeat and victory.... Evening,

what are the betrayals that are left,
and whose? I ask now

as the sensation of what is coming places its shoulders on the whole horizon, I
see it

though it is headless, intent
fuzzy, possible outcomes

unimaginable. You have your imagination, says the evening. It is all you have

left, but its neck is open, the throat is

cut, you have not forgotten how to sing, or to want

to sing. It is
strange but you still
need to tell

your story—how you met, the coat one wore, the shadow of which war, and how
it lifted,

and how peace began again
for that part of

the planet, & the first Spring after your war, & how “life” began again, what

normal was—thousands of times
you want to say this—normal—holding
another’s

hand—& the poplars when you saw how much they had grown while you were

away—
the height of them! & the paper lantern you
were
given to hold—the lightness of it, of its
fire, how it lit the room—it was your room—you were alone in it and free to
sleep

without worry and to
dream—winter outside and the embroidered tablecloth—fruit and water—you
didn't
even wonder where was the tree that gave such fruit, you lay in blankets as if
they were
non-existent, heat was a given, the rain coming down hard now, what a nice
sound—you
could ruminate, the mind traveled back in those days, at ease, it recalled the
evening's

con-

versation, the light that fell on x's face, how
he
turned when a certain person entered the room—you saw him turn—saw shyness
then
jealousy enter his eyes as he looked away—and did he see you see him—and the
em-
broided linen handkerchief you saw a frightened woman in the subway slide
from her
pocket, use and replace—then sleep was near—somewhere you were a child and
then this
now, nightfall and ease, hospitality—

there are sounds the planet will always
make, even
if there is no one to hear them.

PLACE

I

SUNDOWN

(St. Laurent Sur Mer, June 5, 2009)

Sometimes the day

light winces

behind you and it is

a great treasure in this case today a man on

a horse in calm full

gallop on Omaha over my

left shoulder coming on

fast but

calm not audible to me at all until I turned back my

head for no

reason as if what lies behind

one had whispered

what can I do for you today and I had just

turned to

answer and the answer to my

answer flooded from the front with the late sun he/they

were driving into—gleaming—

wet chest and upraised knees and

light-struck hooves and thrust-out even breathing of the great

beast—from just behind me,

passing me—the rider looking straight

ahead and yet

smiling without looking at me as I smiled as we
both smiled for the young
animal, my feet in the
breaking wave-edge, his hooves returning, as they begin to pass
by,
to the edge of the furling
break, each tossed-up flake of
ocean offered into the reddish
luminosity—sparks—as they made their way,
boring through to clear out
life, a place where no one
again is suddenly
killed—regardless of the “cause”—no one—just this
galloping forward with
force through the low waves, seagulls
scattering all round, their
screeching and mewing rising like more bits of red foam, the
horse’s hooves now suddenly
louder as it goes
by and its prints on
wet sand deep and immediately filled by thousands of
sandfleas thrilled to the
declivities in succession in the newly
released beach—just
at the right
moment for some
microscopic life to rise up through these
cups in the hard upslant
retreating ocean is
revealing, sandfleas finding them just as light does,

carving them out with
shadow, and glow on each
ridge, and
water oozing up through the innermost cut of the
hoofsteps,
and when I shut my eyes now I am not like a blind person
walking towards the lowering sun,
the water loud at my right,
but like a seeing person
with her eyes shut
putting her feet down
one at a time
on the earth.

CAGNES SUR MER 1950

I am the only one who ever lived who remembers
my mother's voice in the particular shadow
cast by the skyfilled Roman archway
which darkens the stones on the down-sloping street
up which she has now come again suddenly.
How the archway and the voice and the shadow
seize the small triangle of my soul
violently, as in a silent film where the accompaniment
becomes a mad body
for the spirit's skipping images—abandoned homeland—miracle from which
we come back out alive. So here from there again I,
read it off the book of time,
my only time, as if in there is a fatal mistake of which
I cannot find the nature—or shape—or origin—I
pick up the infant and place it back again
to where I am a small reservoir of blood, twelve pounds of bone and
sinew and other matters—already condemned to this one soul—
which we are told weighs less than a feather, or as much
as four ounces when grown—as if I could travel, I back up
those arteries, up the precious liquid, across the field of methods, agonies,
astonishments—may I not squander the astonishments—
may I not mistakenly kill brother, sister—I
will sit once again so boldly at my beginning,

dark spot where one story does not yet become another,
and words, which have not yet come to me, will not yet try to tell
where each thing emerges, where it is heading,
and where the flow of tendency will shine
on its fast way downhill. And it will seem to me
that all this is legend,
one of those in which there is no way to look back
and yet you do, you pay for it, yes, but you do....
It was a hilltop town in the south in summer.
It was before I knew about knowing.
My mind ran everywhere and was completely still at the center.
And that did not feel uncomfortable.
A bird sang, it added itself to the shadow
under the archway.
I think from this distance
that I was happy.
I think from this distance.
I sat. It was before I knew walking.
Only my soul walked everywhere without weight.
Where the road sloped downhill there was disappearance.
Which was exactly what I imagined should happen.
Appearance and disappearance.
In my only life.
When my mother's voice got closer it had a body.
It had arms and they were holding something
that must have been a basket. My mind now
can go round her, come in front, and wrap her
as her arms wrapped that basket.
And it must have been wicker
because I see in the light the many lucent browns, the white tips,

as she steps out of the shadow
in which nothing but her hands and the front of her act of carrying
are visible. And when her body arrives
it is with the many lemons entirely struck, entirely taken, by sunshine,
which the heavy basket is still now carrying,
and her bright fingernails woven into each other,
and her face with its gaze searching for me,
gaze which felt like one of the bright things she was carrying
in front of herself, a new belly.

All I was to invent in this life is there in the wicker basket among the lemons
having come from below the horizon where the sound of the market rises
up into the private air in which she is moving,
where she is still a whole woman, and a willing woman,
and I hear what must be prices and names called out
of flowers and fruit and meat and live animals in small cages,
all from below us, at the bottom of the village, from that part
which is so comfortable to me which is invisible,
and in which everything has to be sold by noon.
I think that was the moment of my being given my name,
where I first heard the voices carrying the prices
as her face broke and its smile appeared bending down towards me
saying *there you are, there you are.*

MOTHER AND CHILD
(THE ROAD AT THE EDGE OF THE FIELD)

The grasses midsummer eve when the stems grow invisible and the
seemingly de-
capitated heads like a flock
that is not in the end departing but is lingering, golden with
buttery flies then also aglow with
orange—gnats
hovering their tiny solar system round—heads
bending this way and that in
unison glowing and not
showing where they
are attached to earth or what path has brought them to their
status; they for whom stasis
when it comes is the huge
inholding of breath by the whole
world as it is seen to be here, horizon to horizon stilling,
down to this corner field of grasses
held, bees all molten
with approach and with-
drawal—though of course there are still stars—albeit now in-
visible—and I look up into the
sky to see
beyond the foaming of

day's end the place where all in fact

is, longed-for or over-
looked altogether by the mind,
human, which can,
if it wishes,
ken them into view

by imagination—there is no invention—or not—as long as it
exists, the mind can
do this—

how many are the years you have

say the grass-pointings
which if I follow them up
and up

make of my eyeing large spidery webtrails into

the galaxy thank
god, and all that outlives
for sure the me in

me—a whirling robe humming with firstness greets you if you eye-up, confess it
—

in letters home you would
tell this whole story but

nothing happened—the world opened its robe

and you
were free to look with
no sense of

excitement, no song, it is so simple, your lungs afloat, your

shears still there in your right
hand, the hedgerow wild beside you and how you can—yes—hear it
course up through its million
stalks—and also, closely

now, the single
skinny stalk—and how it is
true, all *is* being sucked up by the soil into the sky, and the sky
back down into variegation and
forking and fingery
elaboration at the core of prior
elaboration—spotted, in-
candescent—each about to be cast off by the one coming
behind—it too shall
contribute
to the
possible—the world of the world—and the shears
in my right hand grow warm
with the sun they've been hanging in, and I talk to myself, I make
words that follow from other
words, they push from be-
hind—into the hedge like the
hedge but not of it—no—not
ever—slippery against it where it
never knows they are pressing, delirious accents trying to reach in, fit
in—phantoms—as the calls
of the disappeared in the stadiums today are in-
audible, the satellite's announcement
of capture inaudible, the occupation of an
other's body, taken from its
private life its bed its
window its still half-open
fridge, dragged down the stairs with
everyone
screaming—have you visited your

loved ones
recently says the guard as he lets loose the filamentary
shock of electricity through the body to the
heart whose words
will now
cease—what is cruelty—the grasses lean
all one way now under the sway of
difference, which evening's drop of
temperature brings on,
which the guard and the prisoner feel as one,
grassheads like spume on the thin shanks
of stalk—their until-now right there
beneath them—*grass*, I say,
grass, and rip a piece to hold out to you
who stand beneath me not yet speaking—everyone awaits
your first word—and I open your hand
and put the heads inside it and close it and I watch
terror spray from you in
colonies of tiny glances—everywhere but
where
your hand is, and then
stalk I say, *poppy*, *thorn*, *hedgerose*—I am
not screaming because I am
old enough to hang on hang on
but your small heart beating as of two years now hears the
cannibalizing scream in all
my kindness—the mother
stands beside you and she sees you stare at her and put
your arm down and open your
fist and we both see the seeds drop

down onto the asphalt and the ground-breeze drag them

a little distance

to the middle

of the road

then stop. It is summer. It is the solstice. A diamond of energy

holds us. We breathe, and

what we call

the next moment between us,

where I take your empty hand and

we start home,

emptied of attempt and emptied of

survival skill,

is *love*.

UNTITLED

Of the two dogs the car hit, one, two, while we were talking, and thinking about
how to change each
other's

mind, the other people's

survived—dark spot near the front
fender just hair blowing in low wind, a spot
all wind's, then

a stir in the ribs and everything's rising slow-motion up from the tight small
shoulders, the

chest, the
dragging hind end of itself on the dirt
road as if sewing a new strap
back

on, dragging, a long

moment, then the
division occurs and the wide perishing
shrinks and the legs
are four again and
up. Not ours. Ours

is placed by gravity on the far bank, as if an as-yet-unbuilt unimagined house on
the

empty field into which
one peers past mist
wondering how *will* or

concentration or *want* alone will bring the as-yet-not thing into view. What will it take to

build the
thing? The not yet, not anymore, not
again? That. Wouldn't the beautiful field be
best left

alone? unfilled? No. Now the children are folding

over it and sound

is restored and it is the only human

world, something perished on the road, it was its turn, you have your turn says
the road I

stare blankly
at, white dust,
thinking there are words now
that must take the
place of this
creature, and I

am at the point in the road where I, who will have lived, no matter how many
thousands

of years in the future come, if they come,
even if there are no more humans then or they have become unrecognizable, I,
even when no rain will have come down
in the memory of generations

so they think the story of such an element is one of the myths, the empty

myths, I still will have
lived this day and all the preceding ones of
my

person, mine, as I rise now
to the moment when right words
are needed—Dear moon

this morning I woke up, I thought the room for an instant was a blossoming, then

a

burning cell, then a thing
changing its clothes, huge transparent clothes, the ceiling part of the neck, where
is

the head I thought, of the year, this
year, where are the eyes of
the years—the years, can we stay human,
will we slow the end
down, how much, what do we have to
promise, how think our way
from here to
there—and human life survived—and its
world—ah, room, the
words—has it been just

luck, the room now wild with winds of centuries swirling floods tectonic plates
like wide
bones shifting round me—elephants flow through, all gone, volcanoes emerging
and
disappearing just like that, didn't even really get to see them, pestilence, there, it
took its

people, hurricane, there,
it took its—"you're a
martian" I heard the angry child cry out on
the street
below to the other

child, and the door slams, and the only story I know, my head, my century, the
one where
187 million perished in wars, massacre, persecution, famine—all policy-induced
—is the

one out of which
I must find the reason
for the loved still-young creature being carried now onto the family lawn as they

try

everything, and all murmurs shroud hum cry
instruct, and all the

six arms gleam, firm, limp, all over it,
caresses, tentacular

surround of the never-again, rush of blood and words, although look, you out
there

peering in, listening, to see who we were:
here: this was history:

their turn

is all they actually have

flowing in them.

THE BIRD ON MY RAILING

From

the still wet iron of
my fire
escape's top
railing a truth is making this instant on our clock
open with a taut
unchirping un-
breaking note—a perfectly
released vowel traveling
the high branches across the way, between us and the
others, in their
apartments, and fog
lifting for sun before evaporation
begins. Someone
is born
somewhere
now. The
planet
suspends
like a streetlight
at night
in the quiet
galaxy.

Endurance

continues to be the secret of the tilled

ground we make
breath by breath. What
seed dear
lord are we we

think as we toss more of our living out

into the turning and turning,
our personal

dead cast always deeper into

the general dead
no matter how hard you try
to keep your
own your

known own—and gnarled remembering mossier over—

the tenderness a characteristic trait
elicits, the very thing you
hated, rising in you to
make you almost
unable to
speak—

—where *are* you?—the fields beyond the housing tract

still accepting rain
as these asphalted ones we've
sealed

cannot—so yes, look close, this right word on my railing

who knows no hate
no love
you can count on it,

no wrenching strangling guilt, no wish so terrible

one had said
otherwise just once in
time—
between one life and another what is it that
can really
exist—oh
nothing says this
awakeness—and look, you
who might not believe this because
you are not seeing it with your own
eyes: look:
this light
is moving
across that flower on
my sill
at this exact
speed—right now—right here—now it is gone—yet go back up
five lines it is
still there I can't
go back, it's
gone,
but you—
what is it you are
seeing—see it again—a yellow
daisy, the sun
strafing the petals once
across, and the yellow, which could be a god why not,
pulling itself up
out of
shadow—so

silent—
and the patch of sunlight
moves—and each word said in
time after this is
the subtraction we call
life-lived—this gold its center—and beyond it, still on
the rail, this
bird, a
secret gift to
me by the
visible—
of which few in a life are
given—and how
when it opens its
yellow beak in the glint-sun to
let out song
into the cold, it
lets out the note on a plume of
steam,
lets out the
visible heat of its
inwardness
carrying a note—a note in
a mist—a note-
breath, breath-
note—oh
cold spring—the white
plume the size of a
bird rises up with its own
tail,

the directions,

shuts,

not be—

feathering-out in

filled out by the next and the next-on
note, until the whole
shape of the
song is wisped-
up and

the singing
shuts, the form
complete, the breath-bird
free to
rise away into the young day and

II

END

(November 21, 2010)

End of autumn. Deep fog. There are chains in it, and sounds of
hinges. No that was
birds. A bird and a
gate. There are
swingings of the gate that sound like stringed
instruments from
some other
culture. Also a
hammering which is held
in the fog
and held. Or it is continuing to
hammer. I hear the blows.
Each is distant so it seems it should not repeat. It repeats. What is it being
hammered
in. Fog all over the
field. The sounds of
boots
on soil in groups those
thuds but then it is
cattle I

think. The sound of the hinge the swinging
chain it won't
go away. But it is just the farmer at work. He must be putting out
feed. Fog. Play at
freedom now it
says, look, all is
blank. Come to the
front, it is
your stage it
says, the sound of the clinking of links of
chain, I think it is someone making the chain—*that* is the hammering—the thuds
—making
their own chain. But no, it is the gate and the herd is let in again, then
out. I can hear
the mouths eating, dozens maybe hundreds, and the breathing in and out as they
chew. And the
chain. For now I am alive I think into the
hammering
thudding clinking swinging of metal hinge—of hinge—and also think maybe
this is
winter now—first day of. Fog and a not knowing of. Of what. What is inner
experience I think being
shut out. I look. A gate swings again and a
rustling
nearby. All is
nearby and invisible. The clinking a chinking of someone making nails. The
sounds of a crowd
meaning to be silent, all their breathing. Having been told not to move and to be
silent. Then having been told to
move and be
silent. The crowd is in there. All the breaths

they are trying
to hold in, make
inaudible. And scraping as of metal on metal, and dragging as of a heavy thing.

But it is a field
out there. My neighbor has his herd on it. When I walk away from the
window it's a violin I
hear over the
chewing out of tune torn string but once it
made
music it might still make
music if I become a new way of
listening, in which
above all,
nothing, I know nothing, now there are
moans

out there such as a man accused and tossed away by his fellow beings, an
aloneness, and

listen, it is blank but in it is an
appeal, a ruined one, reduced, listen: in
there this
animal
dying slowly
in eternity its

trap.

ON THE VIRTUE OF THE DEAD TREE

And that you hold the same one hawk each day I pass through my field
up. And that it
may choose its
spot so
freely, from which to scan, and, without more than the wintry beguiling
wingstrokes seeding
the fields of air,
swoop. It feeds. There is no wasteland where the dead oak
lives—my
darling—up-
start vines on its trunk, swirling in ebblight, a desert of gone-silent
cells—where another force is
gleaming—tardy—
waning—summer or winter no longer
truths, no prime, no
year, no day where sun
exists—
just a still-being-here in this small apparently silent multitudinous world of
infinite yearning and
killing and
sprouting—even now at the very start of the season—lengthening, in-
visible in their
cracking open of

pod—and push—like the first time we saw each other you and I—

impatient immediately...

Blackness is the telephone wire—blackness the blissless instant-

communication,

the twittering poverty killing behind and beneath and deep at the core of

each screen, end-

less, someone breaking someone's

fingers—just now—hear their laughter—everyone in their prison—there in their
human

heart which

they cannot

for all the parting of flesh with

cement-sluiced rubber

hose—and even the axe to the heart—reach—the fantasy of independence—es-

cape. It wants them. It wants them to

fly inside it. *Fly* it screams

taser in

hand. Prison is never

going to be

over. Day as it breaks is the principal god, but with the hood on they cannot

know this. Till it is finally sliced open

the

beating heart. Loved

ones shall pay

ransom

for the body of

their child. To this, friend, the hero is the dead tree. Here in my field, mine.

I have forced it. I have paid for it. My money like a wind flowing over it.

Have signed the paperwork and seen my name there. And a cloud

arrives from the East

into it. And the prison
grows too large to see.
And it does not sing, ever,
my silent hawk, always there when I arrive, before it startles, on its chosen
branch. And I think of
the dead-through trunk, the leafless limbs, the loosening of the
deep-drying roots in the
living soil. And I slow myself to extend love to them. To their as-
yet-still-sturdy
rotting, and how they hold
up this gray-blue
poverty of once-sapflowing
limbs, their once everywhere-turning
branchings,
for my small hungry creature to glide from in his silence
over the never-for-an-instant-not-
working
rows of new
wheat. It is
good says my human soul to the crop. I will not listen for
song anymore. I will
listen for how dark comes-on to loosen the cringing wavering
mice from their dens and
how they creep up to the surfaces and out onto the surfaces and
how the surfaces
yield their small gray velvet barely visible in the last glow
to that part of the world
the dead tree sends forth. I have lived I
say to the evening.
I have plenty of anger and am good and dry with late-breaking news. I

am living.

And the iron door of the night creeps and clicks. And the

madness of the day

hangs around restless at the edges of the last visible leaves

with a reddish glow

and moves them with tiny

erratic swiftnesses and

the holy place shuts, baggy with evening, and here it is

finally night

bursting open

with hunt.

DIALOGUE (OF THE IMAGINATION'S FEAR)

All around in

houses near us, the
layoffs,
the windows shine back
sky, it is a
wonder we

can use the word *free* and have it mean anything at all

to us. We stand still. Let the cold wind wrap
round go
into hair in-

between fingers. The *for sale* signs are bent and ripple in
wind. One

had fallen last Fall and snowmelt is re-revealing

it again. Rattle in groundwind. Siding
weakening on
everything. Spring!
Underneath

the bulbs want to clear the sill of
dark and find the
sun. I see
them now

under there, in there, soggy with melt, and loam which is loosening as their skins

rot, to let the whitest tendrils out, out they go snaking everywhere, till the
leaves are blurring, they fur-out, they
exist!—

another's year loan
to time—

and the bud will form in the sleeve of the silky leaf, and they will quietly,
among the slow working pigeons and there where a dog is leaping in almost
complete invisibility, make slim heads,
thicken—I am ill, you know, says the man
walking by,

his dog pulling him, so much joy, and nothing
will make it more or less, the flower,
as alive as it is dead, above which the girl with earphones walks humming, no
one

has warned her yet she is
free, but why, says the
imagination, have you sent me
down here, down among the roots, as they
finally take

hold—it is hard—they wrench, the loam is not easy to open, I cannot say it but
the
smell is hope meeting terrifying regret, I would say do not open again, do not go
up,

stay under here there is
no epoch, we are
in something but it is not “the world,” why
try to make
us feel at
home down
here, take away the poem, take away this
desire that

has you entering this waste dark space, there are not even pockets of time here,
there are no mysteries, there is no laughter and nothing ever dies, the foreclosure

you are standing beside look to it, there is a
woman crying on the second floor as she does not understand what it will be like
to

not have a home now, and how to explain to the children at 3:35 when the bus
drops

them off—

the root is breaking its face open and shoving up to escape

towards

sun—nothing can stop it—though right

now the repo-men have not yet come, the school bus is only just getting loaded
up,

the children pooling squealing some stare out the window. Kiss

the soil as you

pass by. It is coming up to kiss you. Bend down to me, you have placed me here,
look

to me on all fours, drink of the puddle, look hard at the sky in there. It is not sky.
It is

not there. The flame of

sun which will come out just now for a
blinding minute

into your eyes is saving nothing, no one, take your communion, your blood is
full of

barren fields, they are the

future in you you

should learn to feel and

love: there will be no more: no more: not enough to go around: no more around:
no

more: love that.

EMPLOYMENT

Listen the voice is American it would reach you it has wiring in its swan's neck
where it is
always turning
round to see behind itself as it has no past to speak of except some nocturnal
journals written in woods where the fight has just taken place or is about to
take place
for place
the pupils have firelight in them where the man a surveyor or a tracker still has
no idea what
is coming
the wall-to-wall cars on the 405 for the ride home from the cubicle or the corner
office—how big
the difference—or the waiting all day again in line till your number is
called it will be
called which means
exactly nothing as no one will say to you as was promised by all eternity “ah
son, do you
know where you came from, tell me, tell me your story as you have come to this
Station”—no, they
did away with
the stations
and the jobs
the way of

life

and your number, how you hold it, its promise on its paper,
if numbers could breathe each one of these would be an

exhalation, the last breath of something

and then there you have it: stilled: the exactness: the number: your

number. That is why they

can use it. Because it was living

and now is

stilled. The transition from one state to the

other—they

give, you

receive—provides its shape.

A number is always hovering over something beneath it. It is

invisible, but you can feel it. To make a sum

you summon a crowd. A large number is a form

of mob. The larger the number the more

terrifying.

They are getting very large now.

The thing to do right

away

is to start counting, to say it is my

turn, mine to step into

the stream of blood

for the interview,

to say I

can do it, to say I

am not

one, and then say two, three, four and feel

the blood take you in from above, a legion

single file heading out in formation

across a desert that will not count.

TREADMILL

The road keeps accepting us. It wants us to learn “nowhere,” its shiny
emptiness, its smile of wide days, so swollen
with void, it really means it, this is not a vacation, it wants us
to let our skulled-in mind, its channels and
runnels, its
slimy stalked circuits, connecting wildly, it
the road
wants us
right now
to cast it the
mind
from its encasement
forward
to race up ahead and get a feel for what it is, this always-receding, this place in
which

you were to deposit your
question—the
destination!—the mind is meant to want this,
isn't it,
meant to rage to
handle it, to turn it
round, to feel
all its
facets—its fine

accidents—death by water, death by
wearing out—death by surprise—death by marriage—death by having
rummaged
into the past, into the distant past—death by ice-core and prediction—the entrails
are lying on a
thousand years of tabletops—have you not looked into them enough says the
grayish

road, hissing, or maybe
that is my mind, I
entered the poem here,

on line 28, at 6:44 pm, I had been trying to stay outside, I had not wanted to
put my feet here too, but the wind came up, a little achilles-wind, the city itself
took

time off from dying to whisper into my ear we need you, the complaint which
we will

nail once again to the door must be signed by everyone, everyone needs to be
walking

together, everyone must feel the dust underfoot, death by drought, death by
starvation,

death by neglect, death by no cause of death, by unfolding—oh the rose garden
—

dew still on it, the dry fields in each drop held up by the petal—look you can see
the cracks in the soil reflected right there—puritanical dried fields—sincerity at
utmost

in the fissured field—the screen is empty—is full of cracked soil—the soil—
death by transcendent truth—death by banking practice—by blueprint and
mutually

assured destruction—death by deterrent—detergent—derangement—defamation
—de-

regulation—the end of the line—where the tracks just stop and

who is that coming from the woodshed to greet you—the end is always cheerful

says the day hurrying alongside as you splice

through it, as you
feel your astonishing aloneness grow funnily
winged—who are you going to be
someday, who are you going to be when all this clay flowing through you has
finally become
form, and you catch a glimpse of yourself at
daybreak,
there in the shiny broken-faced
surface—
who was awaiting you all day that you hurried so—what was it you were told to
accomplish—death, rimless stare, O, hasn't
enough time
passed by now, can the moving walkway be shut down for the night, but no,
it is told, it is told, the universe
is in your mind as it
expands—and it is October once again
as it must be, the new brightness—
and again gold lays down on them
the tight rolls of hay,
the long rows the cut fields—
which Winter eyes, hidden as it is at the core of everything, and the crows
sharpen
their blade-calls on the morning,
and frost blooms its parallel world,
and the road seems to want to be spooled into your hands, into your mind, fine
yarn you would ravel
back to its place of
origin—
is it true some people are not coming along with us? is it really true there is
a road not taken? and it is October once
again

as it must be, the new brightness, the harvest—the dance—

and your dance partner, be prudent, it
really knows the
steps.

III

OF INNER EXPERIENCE

Eyes shut I sense I am awakening & then I am
awake but
deciding
to keep eyes shut, look at the inside, stay inside, in the long and dark of it,
if it were a garden what would I plant
in it, for now I am
alive I think I feel who among you will tell me
after all this time
the difference & yet again now I am alive & what does that mean lying here eyes
closed first winter morning coming on all
round,
yes, this is the start of winter is what
my body
sensing a new dis-
equilibrium says, hypnotized, trembling with fiction, love, the sensation of time
passing,
& fear of a-
temporality, & *this is*
the play of heaven the mind in-
side this body lying here still
alive for
now
thinks—if you could only see my body and beyond me the three windows in the
room

letting the uninvented
in—and how true *it* is
because of the closed
eyes on my human being lying there in the room glistening with plenitude, all
conquest
gone from the air—you could say here god owns everything, it is a discharge of
duration,
the floor the panes the mirror the single stalk
of
freesia the gilded frame the two lionclaw-footed chairs and the tree-knots
still in
the floors someone laid in 1860, the
wormholes here and there in them from those creatures' work long ago, not long
after the
counter-revolution, the troubles—& the wreck here of consciousness—as long as
the
person's eyes
stay shut—beyond the limits of thought—(&
who am I
then?)(& don't go there says my hand as I need it, my
hand, here in this
writing)—and yet
I am also lying on the bed eyes closed
and keeping them so, god owes us
everything I
think from out here, there is not god I think lying in the non-dark of the mind,
eyes
closed, hearing the crows rustling in
the nearest
trees, the hayfork in the next field—I want to pray says the person behind the
eyes—you

cannot do so I say with these fingers—I want to break the dark with the idea of
God says the

non-sleeping person on her back in the beginning of the 21st century, trying to
hold on to

duration which is slipping, slipping, as she speaks as I write, active translator,
look

I can make a tale of the sinking sun I can
begin

summer again here are its

swallows they have

just returned

look

up—but no, they did not come back after that year, we waited—but here they
are again, do not be

fooled, here, breaking their circles

across the evening air, and there is still sun up near the children's bedtime, we
still say

bedtime, it is a habit, and the bells

ring vespers, or the recording of it, and somewhere there must still be a crafty
animal digging a long tunnel under

this strange hard ground, finding some moisture in there, turning it, grain by
grain,

perhaps there is still

the creature

which when it

was known

was known as

the blind mole

somewhere.

TORN SCORE

I think this is all somewhere inside myself, the incessant burning of my birth
all shine
lessening as also all low-flame
heat of

love: and places loved: space time and people heightening, burning, then
nothing:

always less
incipience as visible
time shows itself—the
stamens the groves the winds their verdicts the walls and the other walls behind,
also the
petal right now off that red
amaryllis, then stillness, then one awaiting the next thing of each thing, a needle
trembling in a
hand, dust
settling on the apple tree, the last bus out no longer held in memory by anyone
among the living, the last
avenues of
poplars
downed, and the bow raised
just where the violinist inhales and begins to lower it, the lucent string, and in
the audience everything—everything—the lovers the suicides the broken
brothers

the formless the suffocating the painstakingly decent the young-for-eternity the
gods, those with sharpened knives even now in their hearts, those with pennies,
theories, history, simplicity, drink—perpetually—please music begin, the years
are

disappearing, no one will cough, the listening is of a piece—a desperate fabric—
artificial fire, violin, begin, faithful to the one truth, precision, utterly, begin—
who

shut the lights, who burned the scores, broke all the

instruments—I see the pieces on the road—
this world that

was, just minutes ago, the only one that
was—you're in it

now—say yes

out loud—say am I a

personal

wholeness? a congerie of chemical elements? of truths held self-

evident?—how do I see them?—to be alive,
is it

to be

faithful? to be

an arch, a list, a suddenly-right second-thought? a potential? a law that would
like

goodness built

into

its

constitution—a game

of sorts—a

friend—one who rebukes impatience—foundational—unapathetic—attracted to
the

subject of life, all accounts of it, a presence of the human so real you will
believe in me?—

are you still there, where I was looking a minute ago—how long that
minute—the dangers then were
broken law or
lock or
heart—a broken
seal, code, word, train
of
thought—what, we thought, should we be
capable of
to cross
time—to be a good
animal? even
sacrificial?—and then, looking up now, oh,
blurred small all at once dropping
quick deadweight then
winged and
up, then
hopping—float, hover, hover—then
down
to the small
melt-pool, in which the
unbegun budless trees at attention
glitter, and my
attention,
so hungry not to slip out of its
catch, its span—held
breath—hovers—
those could be last fall's leaves piled on dead leaves, thinning, trans-
lucent, but
they are feathers,

look close,
specked,
coming loose from
snow and rushing now, all of them at once now, down, into the branchfilled
glassy

pool of sky to
thrash apart
small cheeping birds, all appetite—

THE SURE PLACE

Outside the window this morning, I reach to it, the newest
extension, here at second story, of the wisteria vine—
the tenth summer's growth,
the August 13th portion of,
the rootball planted when still
the mother of a new child,
one almost tired-looking very silent out-arriving
tendrils—what kind of energy is this in my hands,
this tress of glucose and watery scribbling—something which cannot reach
conclusion, my open palm just under it,
the outermost question being asked me by the world today—
it is weak it is exactly the right weakness—
we have other plans for your life says the world—
wind coming from below with the summery tick in it,
where it rounds and tucks-up from fullness where it allows one to hear
the rattling in the millions of now-drying seedpods
hanging in the trees off the walls under the hedges,
every leaf has other plans for you say the minutes also the seconds also the
tiniest
fractions of whatever atoms make this a hot breezeless day,
in which what regards the soul is what it has given back
(when the sky is torn)(when the seas are poured forth)
the wisteria in my hand: who made it, who made it right,

what does it know of the day of reckoning, is today its day—
I could pull it, my vine, down, I could rip it out—still
no day of reckoning—the day it is said when no soul
can help another—each is alone—the unseen will say do not hoard me—
do not—as I hold its tether in the morning-light slant—
as the horizon does not seem to hoard the unseen—
so also the ideas are not emptied, look I am holding one—
shall we say that this instant is the end of time
where I raise my hand into the advancing morning
where the dawn-cool lifts to let the stillness of midday be seen
here underneath these low-flowing mists
which all the long time are still and waiting
for that one heat that will not change its face,
even when the horsemen ride up and it is time, and the face of the heat
stays, shimmers-stays, and the knives of the day turn blade-out
in the long corridor of noon which comes looking for this tendril—
and I hold it tight to the stone
as I bring the string round it
not to crush the sucrose and glucose in it but still
to hold it back that the as yet unformed blossoms
that would channel up it might channel up it
coming finally to spawn in long grapelike drooping
which the bees next month—what is that—will come to inhabit,
a slowness which is exactly the right slowness,
and I tell you I can feel in it that one crisp thought
which I must find a way to fix
upon this wall, driving a nail in now, and then a length of string,
around which to wrap this new growth, for it to cling to and surpass
so that next week when I look again it will have woven round its few more times
and grown hairy in its clinging and gotten to a new length

which we will be called upon to tie back, new knot, new extension,
to the next-on nail yet further up
on what remains on what's left of this wall.

ALTHOUGH

Nobody there. The vase of cut flowers with which the real is (before us on this page)

permeated—is it a page—look hard—(I try)
—this bouquet

in its

vase—tiger dahlias (red and white), orange freesia (three stalks) (floating out), one

large blue-mauve hydrangea-head, still
wet (this

bending falling heavy with

load) (and yellow
rose)

(wide open head, three just-slitting buds) (also holding drops of rain)

each at

diagonal, urchins in sea-sway, this

from the real, which the real may continue
(who can know

this) to

hold, this

of which

the real is

just now

made—blue-green glazed

vase on the worn wood table—oak with water stains

from where the rain sweeps sideways
in the wind
though today it is dry
reflected in this mirror hung outdoors,
under a roofed
alcove, the field in it also, the trees so still one imagines as one always
did they are almost
sentient,
and beyond that the steeple,
if you were alive you could put your finger
to the spot on the glass
where the village's buildings begin, then glide it over to the front-most
salmon rose,
the one with a blot of rain still on the inner lip, in a world where someone else
could still
hold you, or hold you in mind,
or be coming to get you soon,
or soon
could be there, the "soon," the someone
"else," the instants as they crept upon us, the green beyond the terrace now
also in there—but what
is it that is
in there, in the glass, pocked where the
mercury backing cracks, there yet not
being penetrated by
a human gaze, nobody there,
the distant treetops in the evening sky, not there, though flashing,
pierced full of pinprick holes the sky not
there, the present
being elsewhere, you can almost rub elbows with it, you, not there,

this was the day it happened you say
 down on your knees
 though only in your head
 a head not really anywhere as this is happening
 after the fact
 when nobody is anywhere, not anymore, but
 of so recent
 date, this final absence, that the bouquet—roses, freesia, hydrangea, dahlia—
 oranges and
 pinks and mossy greens—has sun still all soaked up in it, the cells in stalks still
 sucking water up,
 the ends still reaching it to feed,
 cut ends, what someone had cut, had re-
 arranged, seen to the placement of, in such a way
 as the back and front are simultaneously
 visible,
 because of the mirror,
 on this terrace wall,
 so things are coming at you as they leave,
 and leaving from you as they come,
 but there is no one in the glare of day,
 is there still day, one of the days, are there still “ones” of
 things—vases or days—
 you think it is wrong, perhaps, to play this game
 when we are all
 still here,
 then just on time, the dawn, piling itself on all the previous dawns,
 on your head on your back on your shut
 eyes,
 one after the other, each with a number and with only
 that number—

lays itself down,
like a load
delivered, an invisible face adding itself to the huge
crowd of faces,
staring at you,
each one your next day,
it makes no difference if the lightning goes crazy if the wind
accomplishes
everything
it wishes to accomplish and you are
afraid—listen—the dogs bark—but where?—
the irregularity of your breath
next to the next person's
breathing—oh—
we turned away during the parade—
we looked above the heads of the performers
to the
“whole” as we called it,
or to the *idea* it also
was, yes, but
it wanted only to be seen and heard and for you to stand hard
and see the raveling
of the minutes
incarnate
in event—and now, now, all this fidelity
is asked
of you
to the stage-set....
A long period of adjustment must follow.

We must write the history of time.

We must put the children under the tree

again, and in their hearts the wiring, so
green.

We must write the history of appearances
that tomorrow be invested

with today
as casually as the conversation drifting in from the next
room,

hard facts being reported in a calm voice,

the world a place we got use out of,
we must write of the use we got

of it—
the meaning not apparent ever, no matter
what
you later on find of
our thinking—
but the fourth wall so clear
throughout the whole of human time.

How we came to keep living
but to no longer be
inhabitants.

IV

THE BIRD THAT BEGINS IT

In the world-famous night which is already flinging away bits of dark but not
quite yet
there opens
a sound like a
rattle, then a slicing in which even the
blade is
audible, and then again, even though trailing the night-melt, suddenly, again, the
rattle. In the
night of the return of day, of next-on time, of
shape name field
with history flapping
all over it
invisible flags or wings or winds—(*victory* being exactly
what it says,
the end of night)
(it is not right to enter time it mutters as its tatters
come loose)—in the
return I
think *I*
am in this body—
I really only think it—this body lying here is
only my thought,
the flat solution

to the sensation/question
of
who is it that is listening, who is it that is wanting still
to speak to you
out of the vast network
of blooded things,
a huge breath-held, candle-lit, whistling, planet-wide, still blood-flowing,
howling-silent, sentence-driven, last-bridge-pulled-up-behind city of
the human, the expense-
column of place in
place humming.... To have
a body. A borderline
of ethics and reason. Here comes the first light in leaf-shaped coins.
They are still being flung at our feet. We could be Judas no
problem. Could be
the wishing-well. Right
here in my open
mouth. The light can toss its wish right down this spinal
cord,
can tumble in
and buy a wakened self.... What is the job today my being
asks of
light. Please
tell me my job. It cannot be this headless incessant crossing
of threshold, it cannot be
more purchasing of more
good, it cannot be more sleeplessness—the necklaces of
minutes being tossed
over and over my
shoulders. The snake

goes further into the grass as

first light hits.

The clay

in the soil gleams where dew withdraws. Something we don't want

any more of

flourishes as never

before. I

feel the gravity

as I sit up

like a leaf growing from the stalk of the unknown

still lying there behind me where my sleep just was. Daylight

crackles on the sill. Preparation

of day

everywhere

underfoot. Across

the sill, the hero unfolding in the new light, the

girl who would

not bear the

god a

son, the mother who ate her own grown

flesh, the god

who in exchange

for Time gave as many of his children as need be

to the

abyss. It is

day.

The human does not fit in it.

LULL

At the forest's edge, a fox
came out.
It looked at
us. Nobody coming up the hill hungry looking
to take
food. The fox-
eye
trained. Nobody coming up the
hill in the broad
daylight with an
axe for
wood, for water, for the store in the
pantry. I stock
the pantry. I
watch for rain. For too much
rain, too
fast, too
little, too
long. When dryness begins I hear the woods
click. Unusual.
I hear the arid. Un-
usual. My father
is dying of

age, good, that is usual. My valley is,

my touch, my sense, my law, my
soil, my sensation of
my first

person. Now everything is clear. Facts lick their tongue deep
into my ear.

Visiting hour is up. We are curled

on the hook we placed in our brain and down
our throat into our
hearts our inner
organs we
have eaten

the long fishing line of the so-called journey and taken its
fine piercing into

our necks backs hands it comes out our
mouths it re-enters our ears and in it goes
again deep the dream
of ownership

we count up everyone to make sure we are all here
in it
together, the only
share-

holders, the applause-lines make the

tightening line
gleam—the bottom line—how much
did you think you
could *own*—the first tree

we believed was a hook we got it

wrong—the fox is still
standing there it

is staring it is
not scared—there is nothing behind it, beyond it—no value—
the story of Eden:
revision: we are now
breaking into the Garden. It was, for the
interglacial lull,
protected
from
us now we
have broken
in—have emptied all
the limbs the streaming fabric of
light milliseconds leaves the now inaudible
birds whales bees—have
in these days made arrangements to get
compensation—from what
we know not but the court says
we are to be
compensated
for our way of life being
taken from us—fox says
what a rough garment
your brain is
you wear it all over you, fox says
language is a hook you
got caught,
try pulling somewhere on the strings but no
they are all through you,
had you only looked
down, fox says, look down to the

road and keep your listening
up, fox will you not
move on my heart thinks checking the larder the
locks fox
says your greed is not
precise enough.

WAKING

(Ecrammeville, 6 A.M.)

The bells again. You open up your eyes
again. A gap. To be a person—
human and then a woman.

To be one who has had
enough.

Enough of the basement.

Enough of the garden
with its high wall though not high enough with all
the spy-holes unless they were
just accidental cracks
through which one could see
the world. It took myth to get one's self
out. It took
a vow

to believe in a

god
to get the courage to
get out.

Of what? World, you hunger with a briefcase
running through the streets
quickly hiding those hands

wanting to *feel* something: the bells
ring as they do, one long note, one
short, a man with a tall hood limping and
limping and yet always staying
in place I
think
listening. It does not go forward or up or down this
call to
prayer, a creature stuck in a doorway
made to cough up
one truth
without alteration. It will not
confess to
anything. The thing the bell is
saying stays for its millennia
the same, dripping in flames, in holy
men, in
cries and rage of
why yet another son
for no reason with his raw soul has to be
ripped from
time—so commonplace the pain—
& you are supposed to make a system
of them—all those
the god loves and wants
to take a closer look at, ex-
amine in
detail,
entail and eye, kneecap in left hand, earlobe in
right, I see him look from

one to the
other then
bend down to pick up hair and these few fingers—see—
he does not know where they
must go—maybe in
this chick of hair—his left hand moving to his
right, carrying fingers, nails,
into the hair but then
something is
not right—he tries the eyes in the
palm of a
hand, tries eyes
into an open woman's
sex, tries many eyes, tries them in
mouth but mouth
has no face, ribs in one hand,
calves with heavy feet still on in
other—looks
dismayed—looks affronted—it will not make
its sense
to him
its maker—no—
quickly he shuts the whole pile back into the bloody sack
and tosses it
aside to where it seems its people hope (he can
hear them) (therefore the bells) its people
on their knees now
hope—their person is being judged—and they make
offerings, and they re-
member all

the best
parts, all,
and they begin
to sing.

They give him everything they have. They sing.

THE FUTURE OF BELIEF

(On Parcel Z 52 in the Purchase and Sale Agreement)

There are things you have to put into a face.
There it is hanging before you lips slightly parted.
It is not going to speak get over it it is not.
But it is not shut. No. There are things you must put into it—
you cannot arrive blind at your destination—nor can you carry the load
all the way—thus the face—and its hollow—awaiting your history—it is a box a
dream a
cage a cellar an envelope a place a bomber hides while
waiting, a place a singer will kill his voice in order not to sing
for those who would make him cover up the
execution, a place where breath can be held only for
so long while the troops inspect the keep, the cough pushed
down so hard
into the throat that no sound give us up, yet how they keep on
searching, lingering, fiddling with this and that, how long, how long can it
be held, the small winged thing the cough the tickle of
death, just this side of surprise, could death be any smaller than it now
is, look, you can slide it into the face without the face even knowing it,
a wafer is thicker, an illusion is heavier, how long
can one stay behind one's face, eyes shut, as there are things
even a face cannot hold, but we are not there yet, there is still room here, there
are still

things it must
be made to hold, the centuries, the theory of the original image of some
God, in its cave there are skirmishes, this one says you are my
archive, this other the brother says you must be my
safebox I have stolen a great many necessary things, also you
will be my confessional, I will put my story in you and you will
cleanse it by listening, I will with feline
quickness shove my monologue into you, that it not be
fatal, into you, that I may step back and stare,
that I might see myself as on a visit to you.
I will put my hand in your mouth,
I will put my words in your eyes, don't recede don't shut,
I will put into you this distance spiked with gigantic summits I can't handle any
more,
a place neither childhood nor future fill, a self-erasing page—watch
your target-
practice—the face might not need that bullet—look instead how this interested
glance comes into it—its hard bit of dust—see how this desiring gaze
agglomerates in it—scratching about to see what's
there—what's there?—a steeple has fallen in on a house, the face holds
the rubble so you can walk around in it without fear, you can search
the debris in it, don't worry about
time, you can check to see if the bodies still have pulse, you can remove their
documents, you can remove their tags, no one is shouting at you now,
elsewhere in the face the gleaming factory can be reached,
a thousand new planes line up for the inspection, you can watch
the finishing touches being given, you can see them
become operational, in the face, you just have to
look, also the one man in the overcoat
watching the men he just ordered to shoot

at the long row of humans
take aim in unison, the trees are also there, behind the ones about to be
killed, a pit has been dug along the tree line, some roots exposed now grayly
gleam as
earliest light hits, and hold the shine while bodies start to slap down into
its bluish
soil, one can see clay in it, strata, also the snow from last night holding on,
the guns now lowered as this job is done,
forty-seven portions of woolen clothing and skin
fed to the morning's ditch, ten of them ordered now
to close it up, this being put by these means into the face, here, open its eyes
open its
mouth, put it in, don't forget the plumes where the twenty rifles go off in unison,
which looks like a fluff of windy snow
where the bullets traverse the open space towards trees,
intercepted by the chests and faces of
the people standing there, you can put their muddy jackets and the shawls held
tightly
round for
one last
instant now into the face, you can.

EARTH

Into the clearing shimmering which is my owned
lawn between
two patches of
woods near
dawn clock running as usual the human in me
watching as usual
for
everything to separate from everything again as light
comes back
and the dark
which smothers so beautifully the earth lifts and all is put
on its leash
again one
long leash
such as this sentence—and
into the open beyond my window-
pane the new
day comes as if
someone its constant
master
calls—it never refuses, lingers, slows, it doesn't
abandon us—and I see it, the planet, turn
through the

barely lifting latex
shade, and the just-rising sunbeam-silver like
a nail-trim move
across the tree-grain on the floor across those hundreds of
years of molecules
sucking-in water and light—
this slightly
C-shaped edge of the billion-light-year-toss-of-a-coin—
sometimes trembling a
bit if the shade
lets in wind—
inexorably—
and I see you my planet, I see your exact rotation now on my
floor—I will not close these eyes in this my
head lain
down on its
sheet, no, its
sleeplessness will watch, under room-tone,
and electromagnetism,
the calculations fly off your flanks as you
make your swerve,
dragging the increasingly
yellow arc across the room here
on this hill and
I shall say now
because of human imagination:
here on this floor this
passage is
your wing, is
an infinitesimal

strand of a feather in
your wing,
this brightening which does not so much move, as
the minute hand
near my eye
does, as it
glides—a pulling as much as a pushing—of event—
so that you are never
where you just were and yet
my eye has not
moved, not truly, is staying upon your back and riding you—
I don't want the moon and the stars, I want to lie here arms
spread
on your almost eternal
turn
and on the matter the turn takes-on as it is turned by that
matter—Earth—as
my mind lags yet
is always
on you, and the lag is part of the turn, its gold lip
less than an
arm's length from me
now so that I
can dip my fingers right out
into it
as we
orbit the
oval hoop and
the silence in here is staggering—
how huge you

me are—and there is
carrying
never hurry—
and nothing will posit
you as
you carry the positors—as you carry the bottom
of the river and its
top and the clouds
on its top, watery, weak, and the clouds one looks up to
to see
as they too
turn—
and you are not hunted—not hunting—not
hungry—
and you want
no
thing—are almost mute—(this is to be
considered)—
and the churchbells in
this of your
time zones (to praise what
exactly) begin,
and to
one place heavy
rains are
coming now,
and a horse
is riding wildly through one of your
darknesses,
its horseman praying fiercely

to get there
in time,
to that some-
where

else which is you, still you, only you,

in which only he
could be
for all eternity
too late.

V

LAPSE

(Summer Solstice, 1983, Iowa City)

It is entirely in my hands now as it returns like blood to remind me—
the chains so soft from wear, in my right, in my left—
the first time I, trying for perfection, of balance, of symmetry,
strap your twenty-two pounds of eyes, blood, hair, bone—so recently inside me

into the swing—and the sun still in the sky though it being so late
as I look up to see where this small package is to go
sent up by these two hands into the evening that won't stop

won't lower as it should into the gloam is it going to last forever,
and the grace that I feel at the center of my palms
as if my hands were leaves and light were coursing through
some hole in their grasp, the machine of time coming in,
as chlorophyll could—I was not yet so tired of believing—
I was still in the very beginning of being human,
the thing no one can tell another—he didn't find
what he searched for, she didn't understand what she
desired—the style of the story being the very wind
which comes up now as I glide down the chains
to the canvas bucket to pull you to me,
eyes closed as your eyes close, and for the first time in this lifetime
lift you back and up as far as I can, as high as I can,
then let you collapse so suddenly as I push you away from me,
with more force than gravity as I summon from within
what I try to feel is an accurate amount, a right fraction, of my strength,
not too much promise, not too much greed or ambition
or sense of beginning or capacity for dream—no—just
the amount to push you by that corresponds to pity,
who knows how to calculate that strong firm force,
as if I were sending a message forth that has to be delivered
and the claimant expects it, one of so many,
accompanied by my prayer that you be spared
from anything at all, from everything, and of course also its opposite,
that everything happen to you in large sheets of experience
as I tug back the chain-ends and push you out
telling you to *put out your legs and pump*
although you do not know what I am saying
as you have not yet spoken your first word,
not yet on that day that seems even now it will never end

as you come back to me and I catch you and this time of course
as I am human I push a little harder
as if the news I was shouting-out had not quite been heard,
as if the next push were the real one the one that asks for
the miracle—will I live or die if I pick this fruit
as it is sent back to my waiting hands and this time
it's stronger, the *yes* is taking over, your yes and my yes and our
greed to overcome *what*, into this first-ever solstice
with you in the born world,
let no one dare pick this fruit I think
as I cast the roundness of you up again now so high
into a mouth of sky agape yet without wonder
as if it eats everything and anything and does not know what day is
or time—this is *our* time—or that this next-on meal is being fed it,
as just under you the oval puddle from the recent rain lies
in the worn declivity where each one before you
has dug in her feet to push off or to stop—
and in it you flash as you go by
giving me for that instant an eye you its iris blinking,
the crucible of a blink in the large unflinching eye,
eye opened by the hundreds of small hopes taking on gravity at push-off,
and then the fatigue when for all the pumping and rising,
and how you could see over the tops of the houses,
up and over to where your own house is down there—
and the housing development, and the millions of leaves, and the slower children
lagging behind
on the small road beneath—until the world stills,
and you alone are life, a huge bloom, a new force entering—
how then—even then—the sensation of *enough*
swarms, and *thought* or something like it, resumes,

and your mind is again in your hard grip
on the chains which had been until then as if unknown to your body
during what might have been the interglacial lull,
or the period during which the original ooze grew single-cell organisms,
which grew small claws and feet and then had to have eyes,
till your hands become again hard, heavy, and all
the yearning re-enters you as *lifetime*,
and your feet learn to brake
by scratching the ground a bit more each time—
and that is where the eye comes from,
the final oscillations, the desire to be done with vision,
what this morning's rain reminds us is still there beneath us
in an earth that will only swallow us entire
no matter what we push into it as here you and I again and again redo
the moment nine months ago you first began
to push and cry-out into the visible world.
It is here with me today in this hand grasping this pen
the weight of my transmission of force into you
the weight of catching you the first few times
the slow disappearance of your flesh from mine
as you hardly need a push when the centrifuge takes hold
and I just tap you a bit to keep you going
and we both feel the chains each in our own way
as they permit you to see over the given you shall never enter
no matter how long time is—never—
that gash you create in the evening air at your highest,
your own unique opening
which you can never fill,
cannot ever crawl back through and out,
except when that one moment comes and it will open and you will go,

once and once only and then, yes, you will.

I brought you in here I think in the evening,

in the grass and the town and the blinking windows,

in the dozens of lowering suns circling us in them.

MESSAGE FROM ARMAGH CATHEDRAL 2011

How will it be
told, this evidence, our life, all the clues missing? The clock I left in my hotel
room, all time landing on it at once, has no way to move forward so
round and round
it
goes, making its
ball its in-
visible
thread pulling through everything, tensile, on which the whole story
depends. But
what if
it has no
direction. We,
whoever we
were, made that
up. Everything
that caught our
eye—shining—
we
took. Because it exhibited unexpected movement, quicksilver, we took it by
spear.
Because it whistled through air, barely dropping its aim from the sniper we
took it to
heart. Because it

lowered its
head in
shyness where
sun
touched it and it
put one hand into its other and sang to itself thinking itself alone, we took it to
love, ob-
sessed, heavy
with

jealousy. Maybe we killed it to keep it. But yes it was love. Or we looked up and
thought “do we hear clearly?” and thought “yes” and went back to work. So then
why are *you* here today on this church floor in Armagh, piece of

stone, large as an
infant,
hundreds of
pounds,
triangular
body which ends
at
waist, swaddled
by
carvings, 3000
years
old, worked
through
by chisel and
wind
and porous
where
granite has lost
all
surface? I

crouch down and put my own pale arms round you. No one sees me. No one on planet earth sees us. You say *who are you to me*. I see around you the animals
run

into the woods for cover, away from the priest arriving, the sanctuary around you tall, the shadows long, movement in it yes, human movement rare. You must have sat in a high place I say here on the floor in this back

corner where you
are dis-

carded. *What have you seen* I say under my breath *that I might have seen*. I have seen what is under your breath you reply. I press you to me as I did my child, keeping my hand on the top of your head, your face on my chest. *Rainbow* you
say.

Blood. Wind. Sky blue—though maybe not the same as yours now, no. There is a
wedding

rehearsal in
the body of
the church—
laughter and
constant
rehearsal of

vows—will you take her—I listen for the yes—will you take

him—the
families

chattering, casual dress, no one in tears as these are not the real vows yet.

Tomorrow they will be cast in stone. Tomorrow they will vow to love for all
eternity,

or that part of it they inhabit called “as long as you shall live,” adding their sliver of time onto the back of the beast turning under us. And the little girls coming
round

for hide and seek. The men discussing politics. The women in the hum of long time and short time. No one to stop the minutes. Their current cannot be

stanch. Soon it will be Fall again. The dress, she says, will have an old fashioned

cut. I wish her
luck
when our paths
cross
about an hour
from now. I
mean
what I say to

the stranger. She sees me mean it. On the threshold. Each headed for our car. But you,

here on the floor, found in a garden in Tandragee, carved by someone with strong hands in the Bronze Age, you are the ancient Irish king Nuadha, ruler of the

Tuatha Dé Danann, your people, for whom you lost your left arm, those you defeated moving on elsewhere, westward, while you were forced to stand down

as king,
not being
“completely
whole in
body, without
arm.” And no
good king

succeeded you. And after great hardship your people prayed your physician

Dian Cécht build
a new arm
out of silver
that you be able
to
take up
kingship again.

Here you are holding the left arm on at shoulder with your right. Here you are whole

again. Almost. I bring my hand down onto that spot. Three hands, same size, where I clasp yours, where I cover it, where I hold your arm on you

with you. At this
moment on this

earth mostly in desert many arms are not recovered after the device goes

off and the
limbs sever.

Field

hospitals hold young men screaming where are my legs. Elsewhere leaders are

making
decisions.

They are thinking about something else while they make them. And names are
called out by

a surgeon. An aide enters a room when called. A mother opens a door when
called.

A child opens a gift when told ok, now, go ahead. A sentence is being
pronounced: you

shall lose your
hands, you
shall lose your

feet. You might be a country. You might be a young man who touched the face
of

a girl in a village thinking yourself alone. You are not alone the spies survive.

The spies are intact. They slaughter the whole animal for sacrifice, all of it at
once.

The sentence is truncated even if the man is told: *do you have anything to say*

before we begin

—

they do not wait for him to finish. His mouth hangs open over his swinging

body.

His lifespan is missing a part: the future. His dream is missing a part: the rest. He
is

missing his

extremity. Look, look, a button is missing on your long garment, lord. Look, the
jug of water has been brought to wash off the gaping place which is the redrawn

border to your

nation. I put my arms around you. You are the size of my child at six months. I
put

my hand in your wide carved mouth: your maker made you speaking, or pro-
nouncing a law, or crying out—I can put my fingers into your stone mouth up to
my palm. Suckle. Speak. Cry. Promise. I will keep my fingers between your
strong

cold lips you
shall not be

alone. When I move up your cheeks I feel the bulge of your granite eyes, wide
brow, your eyes again, both hands with fingers rounding eyes. How shall we be

whole. Who

will make the missing part. The biggest obstacle is not knowing *of what?* Once I
saw

a wall with its executions still in it—the bullet holes with my fingers in them
were

just this eye's

size. Once I met you, you lowered your other arm and said why are you

taking me this
way.

I said I am just on the road, we do not have another way to go. Where does the
road go. Tell me, you said. I said hold your arm on I can't see a thing without its
shine. This isn't a road. I saw bodies and statues but did not tell you. You were
the

thing I was here to get, to get to the place where the next king would take us.

The

last thing that dies? The last thing that dies is the body. I am feeling inside your
mouth. She is
trying

to say the vow again—till death do us part—and I cannot make out what it is that
time will do to them. Why are we going this way. The flowergirls are carrying a
pretend

train now,
laughter

as they go by. The ring bearer is carrying the pillow with no ring. In late
morning a

short time before

the explosive device hidden in the basket of fresh laundry went off, Private
Jackson,

who still had
arms then,

reached down in secret, weapon in one hand, to feel the clean fabric. Actually
to smell it.

Clean, he

thought. He used to hang it out for his mom, afternoons, hands up at the
shoulders

of each shirt, an

extra clip in his teeth, as if surrendering. He remembers the lineup of shirtsleeves

all blowing one
way

in the early evening, in Indiana, and for a blinding moment he realizes they had
been

pointing, his

brothers, his father, his uncle, they all had been pointing—in their blues and
whites

and checks. He

wishes he had turned to see, is what he thinks just before it goes off, they seemed

about to start a

dance—the tiny rhythm in the flapping sleeves. They did not seem like strangers.

Then he realizes
it

is here now, that sound, is feet all running on dirt as fast as possible away from
this place.

The bride
steps out into the sun. I feel there is something I must tell her. May your wishes
come true I say,
guidebook in hand. Tomorrow, she says. I can't wait until tomorrow.

FAST

I

ASHES

Manacled to a whelm. Asked the plants to give me my small identity. No, the planets.

The arcing runners, their orbit entrails waving, and a worm on a leaf, mold, bells, a

bower—everything transitioning—unfolding—emptying into a bit more life cell by

cell in wind like this
sound of scribbling on
paper. I think

I am falling. I remember the earth. Loam sits quietly, beneath me, waiting to make of us what it can, also smoke, waiting to become a new place of origin, the other one phantasmal, trammled with entry, ever more entry—I spent a lifetime entering—the question of place hanging over me

year after year—me thinning but almost still here in spirit, far in, far back, behind,

privy to insect, bird, fish—are there nothing but victims—

that I could become glass—that after that we would become glacial

melt—moraine revealing wheatgrass, knotgrass, a prehistoric frozen mother's

caress—or a finger
about to touch

a quiet skin, to run along its dust, a fingernail worrying the edge of air, trawling its antic perpetually imagined

end—leaping—landing at touch. A hand. On whom. A groove traversed where a

god

dies. And silken before bruised. A universe *can* die. That we could ever have, or
be

one body. Then picked up by the long hair

and dragged down through shaft into

being. One. Now listen for the pines, the bloom, its glittering, the wild hacking
of

sea, bend in each stream, eddy of bend—listen—hear all skins raveling,

unending—hear one skin clamp down upon what now is no longer

missing.

Here you are says a voice in the light, the trapped light. Be happy.

HONEYCOMB

Ode to Prism. Aria. Untitled. Wait. I wait. Have you found me yet. Here at my screen,

can you make me
out? Make me out. All other exits have been sealed. See me or we will both
vanish.

We need emblematic subjectivities. Need targeted acquiescence. Time zones.

This is
the order of the day. To be visited secretly. To be circled and canceled. I cover
my

face. Total war: why am I still so invisible to you. No passport needed. If you
look in,

the mirror chokes you off. No exit try again. Build bonfire. Light up screen.

What are
you eating there. Can you survive on light. What is your theory of transmission.

The
center holds, it holds, don't worry about that. These talkings here are not truths.
They are needs. They are purchases and invoices. They are not what shattered
the

silence. Not revolutions clocks navigational tools. Have beginnings and ends.
Therefore not true. Have sign-offs. I set out again now with a new missive. Feel
this:

my broken seduction. My tiny visit to the other. Busy. Temporary. In the screen
there is sea. Your fiberoptic cables line its floor. Entire. Ghost juice. The sea
now

does not emit sound. It carries eternity as information. All its long floor. Clothed
as

I am → in circumstance → see cell-depth → sound its atom → look into here
further → past the grains of light → the remains of the ships → starlight → what
cannot

go or come back → what has mass and does not traverse distance → is all
here → look
here. Near the screen there are roses. Outside a new daymoon.

Can you see my room. Inside my room. Inside me where there is room
for what I miss. I am missing all of it. It is all invisible to me. Is it invisible
to you. You have the names of my friends my markers my markets my late night
queries. Re chemo re the travel pass re where to send the photo the side effects
the
distinguishing features—bot says hide—*where*—bot does not know, bot
knows, what is it to *know* here, can you hear the steps approaching, I hold my
breath here—can you hear that—bot must also hold its breath—now the steps
continue past, we can breathe freely once again, in this hiding place the visible
world, among shapes and spoken words in here with my traces → can you please
track me I do not feel safe → find the nearest flesh to my flesh → find the nearest
rain,
also passion → surveil this void → the smell of these stalks and the moisture they
are drawing up → in order not to die

too fast. The die is cast. The smell of
geography is

here: what is the smell of chain—invisible chain—the stone on my desk I
brought back

from Crete, the milk I did not finish in this cup. There is smoke from the debris
my neighbor burns. Don't forget to log-in my exile. This one. Female MRN
3912412.

I offer myself up. For you to see. Can you not see? Why do you only see these
deeds. There is a page on my desk in which first love is taking place, there is a

page on my desk in which first love is taking place again—neither of the
characters
yet knows they are in love—a few inches from there Mrs Ramsay speaks again
—she
always speaks—and Lily Briscoe moves the salt—the sky passes by rounding us
—
the houses have their occupants—some have women locked-in deep—see them
—
someone has left them in the dark—he stands next to the fridge and drinks his
beer—he turns the volume up so no one hears—that is the republic—are you
surveilling—we would not want you to miss the women kicked in order to abort
the
rape—those screams—make sure you bank them you will need them—to prove
who you were when they ask—I am eating—can you taste this—it is nut butter
and
a mockingbird just cut short a song to fly—I tap this screen with my fork—I
dream a
little dream in which the fork is king—a fly lands on the screen because it is
summer
afternoon—locusts start up—the river here are you keeping track—I know you
can
see the purchases, but who is it is purchasing me → can you please track that → I
want
to know how much I am worth → riverpebbles how many count them exact
number → and the bees that did return to the hive today → those which did not
lose
their way → and exactly what neural path the neurotoxin took → please track
disorientation → count death → each death → very small → see it from there → count
it
and store → I am the temporary → but there is also the permanent → have you
looked
to it → for now →

DEEP WATER TRAWLING

The blades like irises turning very fast to see you completely—steel-blue then
red
where the cut occurs—the cut of you—they don't want to know you they want to
own you—no—not own—we all mean to live to the end—am I human we don't
know that—just because I have this way of transmitting—call it voice—a threat
—
communal actually—the pelagic midwater nets like walls closing round us—
starting
in the far distance where they just look to us like distance—distance coming
closer—hear it—eliminating background—is all foreground—you in it—the
only
ground—not even punishment—trawling-nets bycatch poison ghostfishing—
the coil of the listening along the very bottom—the nets weighed down with
ballast—raking the bottom looking for nothing—indiscriminate—there is
nothing in
particular you want—you just want—you just want to close the
third dimension—to get something which is all—becomes all—once you are
indiscriminate—discards can reach 90% of the catch—am I—the habitat crushed
and flattened—net of your listening and my speaking we can no longer tell them
apart—the atmosphere between us turbid—no place to hide—no place to rest—
you
need to rest—there is nature it is the rest—what is not hunting is illustration—
not
regulated are you?—probing down to my greatest depths—2000 meters and
more—despite complete darkness that surrounds me—despite my being in my
place under strong pressure—along with all my hundreds of species—detritus—
in extreme conditions—deepwater fish grow very slowly—very—
so have long life expectancy—late reproductive age—are particularly thus
vulnerable—it comes along the floor over the underwater mountains—scraping

the
steep slopes—what is bycatch—hitting the wrong target—the wrong size—not
eaten—for which there is no market—banned—endangered—such as birds—
sometimes just too much—no more space on the boat—millions of tons thrown
back dead or wounded—the scars on the seabed—the mouth the size of a
football
field—and if there is no one there there is still ghostfishing—nets abandoned in
the
sea they continue through the centuries to catch—mammals fish shellfish—we
die
of exhaustion or suffocation—the synthetic materials last forever

Ask us anything. How deep is the sea. You couldn't go down
there. Pressure would crush you. Light disappears at 6000 feet. Ask
another question: Can you hear me? No. Who are you. I am.
Did you ever kill a fish. I was once but now I am
human. I have imagination. I want to love. I have self-interest. Things
are not me. Do you have another question. I am haunted but by what?
Human supremacy? The work of humiliation. The pungency of the pesticide.
What else? The hammer that comes down on the head. Knocks the eyes out.
I was very lucky. The end of the world had already occurred. How long ago
was that. I don't know. It is not a function of knowledge. It is in a special sense
that the world ends. You have to keep living. You have to make it not become
waiting. Nothing is disturbingly visible. Only the outside continues but it
continues. So you have to find the way to make the inside
continue. Your entity is fragile. You are an object you own. At least
you were given it to own. You have to figure out what ownership
is. You thought you knew. You were wrong. It was wrong. There was
wrongness in the mix. It turns out you are a first impression. Years go

by. Imagine that. And there is still a speaker. There will always be a speaker. In the

hypoxic zones is almost no more oxygen → then there is → no

more → oxygen → for real →

picture that says the speaker → who are you → where are you → going down into the dead

zones → water not water → the deeper you go he says the → scarier it

gets → because

there's → nothing there → there are no → fish → no organisms → alive → no → no

life → so it's *just*

us → dead zones → bigger than the Sahara he says → the largest lifeless spaces this side of the

moon → he says → she says → who is this speaking to me → I am the upwelling → I am the

disappearing → hold on → just a minute please → hold on → there is a call for you

SELF PORTRAIT AT THREE DEGREES

Teasing out the possible linkages I—no you—who noticed—if the world—no—the world if—take plankton—I feel I cannot love anymore—take plankton—that love is reserved for an other kind of existence—take plankton—that such an existence is a form of porn now—no—what am I saying—take plankton—it is the most important plant on earth—think love—composes at least half the biosphere's entire primary production—love this—love what—I am saying you have no choice—that's more than all the land plants on the whole planet put together—blooms so large they can be photographed from space—everything living—take it—here you take it, I can't hold it anymore—you don't want it—I don't care—you carry it for now—I need to catch my breath—I want to lie here and listen—within 50 years if we are lucky—I am writing this in 2015—like spraying weedkiller over all the world's vegetation—that's our raw material, our inventory, right now, we are going through the forms of worship, we call it news, we will make ourselves customers, we won't wait, how fast can we be

delivered—will get that information to you—requires further study—look that's where the river used to be—one morning I woke up and I was born—I

realized I was born—earth was the place to be—hurtling winding unwinding thick

nexus looking up at sky down at soil will I learn how to stand on it—I will—I am

standing, look, I am a growth possibility, will accumulate a backlog, will become

an informed consumer → shapeless unspendable future → this was my song to
you →

I stood for the first time on my own → unimaginable strength in these feet, these
hands → what am I supposed to not harm → I want to touch things till they
break → that

is how to see them → all the points of contact → entropy, diminishment, pressing
and then pulling back and looking, leaving alone → unimaginable → a meaning in
every step → I change shape → it is allowed → wind proves everything wrong → so
nothing is unimagined → press too far and there you have it → dream → shape of
certainty → wide forces gathering in the sunlight → thought → feel this it is
serenity → this is completeness → something darted into the bush → no forcing
just curve flight gathering terror unfinality clumps of feel/think then tree
swallows

bursting up out of the tree they were not leaves after all the field of rules not
visible but

suddenness its own rule → surprise. Not chaos. If I listen: everything: chant of.

Dwell there. Crosshatchings of me and emptiness. Seeing into. Falls here. Given
definition. Define anthropos. Define human. Where do you find yourself. Is it
worth waiting around for. Wind. Bring your brain along. Flesh too, has to be
married off. And your smile. Silly damaged. Don't even think about it. We are
all

tired. We need the tools to make the tools. Also the headdress. Are we ahead of
time or too late? No one is noticing us the whistle blows the birds don't do
any damage. Dwell.

SHROUD

I wrote you but what I couldn't say → we are in systemicide → it would be good to
be frugal → it
is impossible not to hunger for eternity → here on the sand watching the
sandstorm approach →
remembering the so-called archaic → and the blossoming of → feeling
the → gambling in our
blood like a fold and its sheet of → immaculate → its immaculate sheet → I saw the
holy shroud
once did you → we leave a lot of stain → we are wrapped and wrapped in
gossamer days → at
the end what is left is a trail → of bodyfluid → of all this fear → can you feel

it → it beats under my shroud → I have to stop the lullaby → when questioned said
yes → said I
almost believe you are there → you are there → said the season of periods is
over → said hold
each of us up to the light after our piece of time is cut off we are the long ribbon
of our days
nothing more → do you mind → and a crowd comes and looks at the long worm of
our
bodytrace → in this light → they will see the stainage of our having lived and think
it has a
shape → it is dirt → it is ooze's high requiem → becoming → soaked with
ancestors → and
country → one small leopard carried on the mare → and the fluid comes → comes
from the
cavities → in a few of the lives that stain will be worshiped → just look → the wide
light-

reflecting light-returning ribbon of one man's days on earth will make the
individuals in the
crowd who are so blessed as by live virus feel they can be healed. And some of
them
will be.

The pain you undergo can do that for another. If you gave your life by living
it.

In such a way as to leave a trace. To another who goes home to her small kitchen
all will

be different. From this moment forward. I will change I am changed. I have seen
what the

minutes are, they were held up for me in front of the cathedral, have seen with
my own eyes

what the days are, have seen what this cup is when I pour the milk into it, have
seen in the

passage between cup and lip the secret I now carry in to you, in the other room,
in your

highchair, your wheelchair, can bring time into you right from this cup, can
bring the passage

of new time in through the new love I have filtered into the pouring. It is not that
I

can read between the lines there are no lines. It is not that we will ever meet
again or that the

chip in everything we touch is forgotten. It is not that I have forgotten that the
sensors

are watching the x-rays the mesh the bird of paradise. Now he slides out a
twenty. Now the

fireworks go off

by mistake too soon. When asked if she had anything to declare.

And they took
it from her anyway. It was her name. It quivered leaving. It turns out she was ok
without. So
then one is posthumous. How can I find myself again. In this world. I want to in
this world.
Don't give me the apparition in the air. It is positively marvelous. When are you
going to tell
me what is going on. It is going on. The calculations are off. Something was too
long. Some
years had to be cut off. It all had to fit. Who is this talking now. The rear view
talks a lot. Too
loud. I can't explain it now, will later on. Trust me. Why. Because I made it with
my hands.
I made it all with these hands. It is not personal. So you have to hurry up. Or you
will not bear
it, will not. How many lights they must see going on now as it is planet earth and
we still

have some fuel left for these nights as they come on →
and we tip over to enter into
the circle
light makes → me with this cup of milk → as there is nothing else to give
you → the water is not
safe → on the way home I saw mushrooms pushing up through roots → I wish to
belong to the
earth as they do → saw an abandoned tugboat on the hillside and some trees still
carrying their
colors → wild yellows and reds → as if they were trying to indicate this could still
be called
home → in a corner a piece of marble from → grain from → grease someone had
shipped here
at great expense from → and I thought about that word *expense* → and sympathy
like a baby animal
leaning into the sound of words because I had vocal cords → and they asked for
that → and
something was down there in me I myself barely owned → but which truly

thrilled if a
word was uttered → and I got it right → and how it was ready to declare ownership
over each thing it thought → as if each time the assignment were new → and the
visible world
each morning beginning again to dig into my face to → declare me the owner of
my
minutes → and what was I going to do with them outside of surviving → having
come down to
surviving → as the vague memory of the world you are living in now came to
me → down from
what my mind thought → trying to summon the idea of duty → once I heard
someone say very
loudly from a podium → the system is broken we need to fix the system → we
need to fix the
system the system is broken → and how he spoke of the love of people → and how
unfortunately we could not be omnipresent sitting here today watching you drink
the
milk → and remembering the sprouts of tall bright grass growing around the
podium →
and how what we saw was their having been pushed aside by its placement
there →

I miss the toolbar I miss the menu I miss the place where one could push delete

from THE ENMESHMENTS

Still more terrible the situation. I do not want the 3D glasses, friend, it's all already 3D.

Look up look out. *Out*—what is that. Will you come out? Can you? Why don't you try. Still

more terrible. A veil of haze. A haze of years. The dancers still there. Who are those

others? Those are people. People made from a file. Someone printed them. It's additive.

But what if I only want to subtract. It's too abstract. I have no contract. Cannot enact impact

interact. Look: the mirrored eye of the fly, so matter of fact. Hot tears yes but not in

retrospect. Flagstones after rain my very own dialect. No do not want the 3D glasses, friend,

it is already all

correct → sun-baked → do not need 3D to resurrect → just
look up look

out. *Out*. Can you come out? Why don't you try. You *can* make you *you*. It starts with want.

Hereby multiplied, commodified → you such a one → created by successive layers laid down

till → (push *print*) → the thing's → created → slick → entire → it has to be entirely new →

once started you cannot be modified → you have been

simplified → singularized → oh look the
damselfly → can it land (no) on each of these wafer-thin strata → horsefly firefly
dragonfly →

hoverfly → on the gladioli → ranunculi → sandfly mayfly → (quiet) → housefly → oh
objecti-

fied → thinly sliced stratified fortified horizontal cross-section of the
eventual → unified → till
all traces of the layers are erased → prettified → creating the sensation of a single
solid

ground → emulsified → petrified → gradations stations
seams → such as
the world. Or time. Sintering, fusing. Such that the thing before you appears
whole. Is whole.
Also holy. As in stereolithography. Your friend will be made for you—yr
apostrophe—will be
all yours → the high-power fusion of → small particles of → plastic, ceramic,
metal, glass →
powdery → sturdy → provided with life → in custody → a series of
layers → consecrations →
make its acquaintance → world face to face → will be seen for some time → for
your time → your
truism → awesome → *must be said with enthusiasm* → how do you do, for
example → being
absolute about it → historical → the only mortal left perhaps → no way to be
sure → of
the custom → earthworn threadworn → no way to be sure → among these
others → even
foolish would be good → speechless → every idea paralysed → what you
wanted → still
more → terrible → the art of conversion of convection of

conversation—how do you do—goodbye—please—(these were the words)—
please thank you I

beg your pardon I beg it not at all no I shall be delighted—I am begging—every
time

we were more grateful—I could think of nothing else—what was daily life—
what was my

dream—two human beings—confront each other—speechless—because they

can think of
 nothing to say....
 (Spellbound by the history—of god—unknowing—I feel
 my theory
 collapsing—I say *I*—I say too early too late—the Greeks perhaps I say)
 —*Suhrawardi believed*
this leader was the true pole (quth) without whose presence the world could not
continue to
exist—the world cannot continue to exist—he was attempting an act of
 imagination—what
 lies at the heart of—at the core of—truth must be sought in—the soul must be
 educated and
 informed by—the true sage in his opinion excels in—total reality stands before
 us as—look up
 look out—there is always the world—a dove drifts by with nothing to do—who
 is the couple
 down there in obscurity—they have sought out the obscurity—it is an immense
 system to
 link all the insights—truth must be found—wherever it can be found—
 consequently—as its
 name suggests—for reasons that remain obscure—I shall abjure—mon amour—
 are you the
 viewer—as such the destroyer—who are you in layers—come to take me to my
 playdate—
 my interviewer my rescuer—no—my caricature—as in here I extend my arm
 and you, you....

I will say “you”.

WE

lost all the wars. By definition. Had small desires and fundamental fear. Gave

our

children for them, paid in full, from the start of time, standard time and standard space, with and without suspension of disbelief, hungry for the everyday, wide awake, able to bring about a state of affairs by bodily movement, not even

gradually,

not hesitating, not ever, gave brothers fathers sisters mothers. Lost every war.

Will lose the ones to come. By definition. That woman. That

ocean. Careful how you fool around. There is form and it knows the difference.

Go

alone. Hold back. Transfigure. Promise. Go alone. Transfigure. Keep promise.

All this

is what the wind knows. It has never lost a war. Has a notion to be almost wordless. Has need. But not like ours. No sir it knows acceptance—strange isn't it—so does the stream—it has a hillside—knows acquiescence—does not lose, has no lips, does not love, does not carry on—or maybe it does, yes—but not as

we

do—no generations, no forgetting—no eyes desiring what they see too much—the blossom—the bluebird—the crease in the hillside—no too much, no thankfulness, nothing to do, or that has to be done, nothing to forget—please let

me

forget—I did not do that—it could not have been me—where shall I hide now—

I

shall be found—no one can find them, the stream, the bones in the culvert, the pigeons hovering near the steam shaft—no one can find them they need not hide—the stones, the steel, the galaxies—shrinking or in-

creasing, no war—

nothing—nothing can see itself—nothing can think—there is no prevailing—nor lack—just as it should be—death yes but as a gathering, energy done—not a lost

war—just a merging with what comes—with what has come before—it does not
turn around—it is not looking over its shoulder—nerveless—were we needed—
as

wind was—lost all wars—even the one with time—all of the time—all of the

times. Looked for every intersection. Time and fiction. Asked can it be
true? Time and history. Asked can it really be true? This is happening. But is
not what the real feels like. The past? Is senseless. Collapse the *it-has-been*
says the wind. Look but not back. Any wind will tell you. You have not been
there.

In the strictest sense. Are on display. There is no private space. Nothing is taking
place. It will not stick. Also

what more shall we do to others. To otherness. No,
to *others*. We are in some strange wind says the wind. Are in the enigma of
pastness. It is shedding its aircraft, its radar, it has its back against a
bodiless sorrow, the bodies are all gone from it, the purchases have all been
made,

it is so extreme this taking-the-place-of, this standing-in-for, this disappearing of
all

the witnesses—this is inconceivable—conceive it—the floating faces which
carried

themselves as bodies through all the eras—they say nothing—nothing
that you will ever see—you are so blind—in each instant blind—the problem is
insoluble—also senseless—there is no real to which you can refer—and yet the
bodies are all in it—whatever remains—the observable witnesses to the past—
this

debt—the relation of this to absolute silence—listen—it is absolutely silent back

there—from here nothing ever is to have happened—no one made you—the

streets the imperial cities the cord from father to daughter certain butterflies
certain kinds of armor plate the great highways the grease the model sitting for
the
sculptor the woman she is the clay she is the destinations of the steel and oil, the
signatures, the millions of signatories to the past, the launching and relaunching
of
boys men ships craft from land to sea from sea to land to air to sea to land the
birds
the hidden fox the rabbits in the field as the highway is being cut the deer going
deeper into the brush the pyramids the broken columns the mice that have dug a
nest beneath—oh analogy—apprehension strikes me vastly down—we are way
past
intimation friend—the pastness of → you can only think about it → it won't
be there for you → you can talk about it → they are gone who came before → left
us
nothing but ourselves → on our tiny axis of blood → surrounded by all the broken
columns → the marble which will itself surrender → to time → to radioactivity → to
→ we are all we ever were → necessary because of breeding → weak → dying → and
then there are clocks → butterflies cyclamens geometrical patterns lacerations of
space where galaxies grow → a bottle of whiskey deep in the soil no one
found → it
descended → cloth with serial numbers → one says made in the USA → underneath
death it says *made in* → where shall we put the theory of reading → there never
was
metaphor → action unfolded in no temporality → anticipation floods us but we
never were able—not for one instant—to inhabit time → listen → the last step is
this
feeling you have here → just as long as we keep doing this → I write you read → a
with-time-ness → an unexpected nobility → above and below flow by, cold as they
are → the universals keep → solar ghosts flare → turn to cash → on this small fire
the
earth keep reading → I say to myself keep on → it will not be the end → not
yet → my
children sleep → not yet → a friend who's dead said this to me → it is not dead →

FAST

or starve. Too much. Or not enough. Or. Nothing else?
Nothing else. Too high too fast too organized too invisible.
Will we survive I ask the bot. No. To download bot be
swift—you are too backward, too despotic—to load greatly enlarge
the cycle of labor—to load abhor labor—move to the
periphery, of your body, your city, your planet—to load, degrade,
immiserate,
be your own deep sleep—to load use your lips—use them
to mouthe your oath, chew it—do the
dirty thing, sing it, blown off limb or syllable, lick it back on
with your mouth—talk—talk—who is not
terrified is busy begging for water—the rise is fast—the drought
comes fast—mediate—immediate—invent, inspire, infil-
trate, instill—here’s the heart of the day, the flower of time—talk—talk
—

Disclaimer: Bot uses a growing database of all your conversations
to learn how to talk with you. If some of you
are also bots, bot can’t tell. Disclaimer:
you have no secret memories,
talking to cleverbot may provide companionship,
the active ingredient is a question,
the active ingredient is entirely natural.

Disclaimer: protect your opportunities, your information, in-
formants, whatever you made of time. You have nothing else
to give. Active ingredient: why are you
shouting? Why? Arctic wind uncontrollable, fetus
reporting for duty, fold in the waiting which recognizes you,
recognizes the code,
the peddler in the street everyone is calling out.
Directive: report for voice. Ready yourself to be buried in voice.
It neither ascends nor descends. Inactive ingredient: the monotone.
Some are talking now about the pine tree. One assesses its
disadvantages. They are discussing it in many languages. Next
they move to roots, branches, buds, pseudo whorls, candles—
active ingredient:
they run for their lives, lungs and all. They do not know what to do with
their will. Disclaimer: all of your minutes are being flung down.
They will never land. You will not be understood.
The deleted world spills out jittery as a compass needle with no north.
Active ingredient: the imagination of north.
Active ingredient: north spreading in all the directions.
Disclaimer: there is no restriction to growth. The canary singing in
your mind
is in mine. Remember:
people are less
than kind. As a result, chatterbot is often less than kind. Still,
you will find yourself unwilling to stop.
Joan will use visual grammetry to provide facial movements.
I'm not alone. People come back
again and again. We are less kind than we think.
There is no restriction to the growth of our
cruelty. We will come to the edge of

understanding. Like being hurled down the stairs tied to
a keyboard, we will go on, unwilling to stop. The longest
real world conversation with a bot lasted
11 hours, continuous interaction. This
bodes well. We are not alone. We are looking to improve.
The priestess inhales the fumes. They come from the
mountain. *Here* and *here*. Then she gives you the machine-gun run of
syllables. Out of her mouth. Quick. You must make up your
answer as you made up your
question. Hummingbirds shriek. Bot is amazing he says, I believe it
knows
the secrets of the Universe. He is more fun to speak with
than my actual living friends she says, thank you. This is the best thing
since me. I just found it yesterday.
I love it, I want to marry it.
I got sad when I had to think
that the first person
who has ever understood me
is not even it turns out
human. Because this is as good as human gets.
He just gives it to me straight. I am going to keep him
forever. I treated him like a computer
but I was wrong. Whom am I talking to—
You talk to me when I am alone. I am alone.

Each epoch dreams the one to follow.

To dwell is to leave a trace.

I am not what I asked for.

READING TO MY FATHER

I come back indoors at dusk-end. I come back into the room with
your now finished no-longer-aching no-longer-being
body in it, the candle beside you still lit—no other
light for now. I sit by it and look at it. Another *in*
from the one I was just peering-out towards now, over
rooftops, over the woods, first stars.

The candle burns. It is so quiet you can hear it burn.

Only I breathe. I hear that too.

Listen I say to you, forgetting. Do you hear it Dad. Listen.

What is increase. The cease of increase.

The cease of progress. What is progress.

What is going. The cease of going.

What is knowing. What is fruition.

The cease of. Cease of.

What is bloodflow. The cease of bloodflow

of increase of progress the best is over, is over-
thrown, no, the worst is yet to come, no, it is

7:58 pm, it is late Spring, it is capital's apogee, the
flow's, fruition's, going's, increase's, in creases of
matter, brainfold, cellflow, knowing's

pastime, it misfired, lifetime's only airtime—candle says
you shall *out* yourself, out-

perform yourself, grow multiform—you shall self-identify as

still

mortal—here in this timestorm—this end-of-time
storm—the night comes on.

Last night came on with you still *here*.

Now I wait here. Feel *I can think*. Feel *there are no minutes in you*—

Put my minutes there, on you, as hands—touch, press,
feel the flying-away, the leaving-sticks-behind under the skin, then even
the skin

abandoned now, no otherwise now, even the otherwise gone.

I lay our open book on you, where we left off. I read. I read aloud—
grove, forest, jungle, dog—the words don't grip-up into sentences for
me,

it is in pieces,

I start again into the space above you—*grandeur wisdom village,*
tongue, street, wind—hornet—feeler runner rust red more—oh
more—I hear my voice—it is so raised—on you—are you—refinery
portal

land scald difference—here comes my *you*, rising in me, my feel-

ing your *it*, my *me*, in-

creasing, elaborating, flowing, not yet released from form, not yet,
still will-formed, swarming, mis-
informed—*bridegroom of spume and vroom*.

I touch your pillowcase. I read this out to you as, in extremis, we await
those who will come to fix you—make you permanent. No more vein-
hiss. A

masterpiece. My phantom

father-body—so gone—how gone. I sit. Your suit laid out. Your silver
tie. Your

shirt. I don't know

what is

needed now. It's day. *Read now*, you'd say. Here it is then, one last

time, the

news. I

read. *There is no*

precedent for, far exceeds the ability of, will not

adapt to, cannot

adapt to,

*but not for a while yet, not yet, but not for much longer, no, much
sooner than predicted, yes, ten times, a hundred times, all evidence*

points towards.

What do I tell my child.

Day has arrived and crosses out the candlelight. Here it is now the
silent summer—extinction—migration—the blue-jewel-
butterfly you loved, goodbye, the red kite, the dunnock, the crested tit,
the cross-

billed spotless starling (near the top of the list) smoky gopher—spud-
wasp—the named storms, extinct fonts, ingots, blindmole-made-
tunnels—oh your century, there in you, how it goes out—

how lonely are we aiming for—are we there

yet—the orange-bellied and golden-shouldered parrots—

I read them out into our room, I feel my fingers grip this

page, where are the men who are supposed to come for you,

most of the ecosystem's services, it says,

will easily become replaced—the soil, the roots, the webs—the
organizations

of—the 3D grasses, minnows, mudflats—the virtual carapace—the
simulated action of

forest, wetland, of all the living noise that keeps us

company. Company. I look at you.

Must I be this machine I am

become. This brain programming

blood function, flowing beating releasing channeling.
This one where I hold my head in my hands and the chip
slips in and *click* I go to find my in-
formation. The two-headed eagle, the
beaked snake, the feathered men walking sideways while looking
ahead, on stone, on wall, on pyramid, in
sacrifice—must I have already *become* when it is all still
happening. Behind you thin machines that ticked and hummed until just
now
are off *for good*. What I wouldn't give, you had said last night, for five
more
minutes here. *You can't imagine it*. Minutes ago.
Ago. It hums. It checks us now, monitoring
this minute fraction of—the MRI, the access-zone, the
aura, slot, logo, confession-
al—I feel the hissing multiplying
satellites out there I took for stars, the bedspread's weave, your *being*
tucked-in—
goodnight, goodnight—*Once upon a time* I say into my air,
and I caress you now with the same touch
as I caress these keys.

THE POST HUMAN

Standing next to your body you have just gone.
How much of you has gone has it all gone all
at once.

It has been just a minute now—I don't want the time to go in this
direction—it does.

Now it has been two. Elsewhere. Elsewhere someone gets on a train—
we're almost there, a man says to a child,
prepare for landing, the fields are rushing towards us,
we are setting out with the picnic, the woods seem far but we have all
day ...

Standing next to you, holding the hand which stiffens, am I
outside of it more than before, are you not inside?

The aluminum shines on your bedrail where the sun hits. It touches it.
The sun and the bedrail—do they touch each other more than you and I
now.

Now. Is that a place now. Do you have a now.

The day stands outside all around as if it were a creature. It is natural.
Am I to think

you
now

natural? Earlier, is it an hour ago, you sat up briefly looked
out. Said nothing but I looked at your eyes and saw them see. You saw
the huckleberry, the plume of rose, the silver morning grow as if
skinning night,

that animal, till day came out raw and bleeding.

Daybreak mended it for now. I saw you see the jay drop
into the clearing light, light arrive, direction assert itself for you—what
for—but yes

that is East, with its slow grace. The jet went by way overhead.

Shade one more time under the tree you love. Shadow then shade.

Its body like a speech the tree was finally allowed to make, coming free
of night.

A statement. Which would evolve as it grew to

know—[you passed in here][you left][“you”—what did your *you* do?]
—the bush, the

bird, hills, the hundreds of branches like snakes, top and bottom
making their event—the unbleaching from dawn to the rich
interweaving

knowledges of

the collapse of knowledge

which is day.

Saw you sit up and look out. Just like that. *Information is our bread and
butter*

is what you loved to say. We each have a thing we loved
to say, I think. How many minutes have passed now. Have we caught
up yet with

where we just

were? There are so many copies of this minute.

Not endless but there sure are a lot

from when I started, going through my motions, part of

history—or, no, cup in hand, end at hand, trying to hide from the
final ampersand. Where are you waiting, *where out there*, the wrong
part of me now

wants to

ask. And turns around and says, cue consequence, cue

occasion. There on the bed just now—(look, all of a sudden now I
cannot write “your”
bed)—I watch your afterlife begin to
burn. Helpful. Making a space we had not used
before, could not. Undimmed, unconsumed. In it this daylight burns.

THE MEDIUM

Lethe—river of unmindfulness—what am I to forget now—*forget*
sweetheart—and

I wake—and
again we are being hatched, the shell breaks now, just now, a crack, in
time, on the
horizon line and
outside the pane across Memorial Drive the Charles is channeling
scribbling erasing
itself while all along chattering self-wounding self-dividing, slowing at
bank, at
streamline, at meander, then quick now trying-out scribbling again—
why not—one must

keep trying
to make
the unsaid said—that is the task of the surface—rivermist rising like
ectoplasm off this
downstate slate-weight silhouetted think-tank—sky's overflowing
checkbook,
nonstop signatures filigreed by wintered trees—no debt unpaid—all
trans-
mutation's molecules—silvergray tulle, vestigial, lacteal, millennial—
[colonial]—if
this is prophecy it's underwater, self-consuming, does not know what to
do with

itself

except be carried forward—inexorably—drift into drift—not really
anything like
fate—*my fear teaches me more* I think looking down at the metallic
swirls, enameled,
processional, unidirectional and oh so floral although more archival
now as the

crisping dawn-
blue
spews itself
onto itself

anew—parts so exact they fit their own exactness—
such that nothing about themselves can escape themselves—
a complete reason reasoned or a completely collective error—oh—
completely has never meant so much to me—as I look down now at the
utterly
swallowed self-swallowing river—a constant continual final word—
birds
rising from its tongue—first words final words—crumbling daybreak
opened up by
reedheads in wind, rattling seedpods which could be small flights from
stalk to stalk,
and then above the wider-winged arriving now, creaturely, to land,
here, heavily,
carefully—as further downriver there is the sea—and then there is
no more—no more crooked intervention of the singular—no more—all
wide all

open, no
alternative

possible—as all is all again—all entered again—all action futile—but
here, still

upriver, each
bird can

land in its
own place, or
take
off just
like that,

as the helicoidal flow lays-in its next braid then its next, just like that—
the place for
nymphs for rivermists—every few feet a spinning which is the outcome
of
some rip upstream, the origin of the like downstream, bird-landing like
a blow of
fist—though nothing is felt—roiling away, recreating what needs no
creating—and
all of it, all along its length, about my dream does not know

anything, about
the

phone appointment set for 6:15—she's late—and the keys to my house
sit in the
plate—and outside my shell now dawn and the breaking of it from
which I

shall be pulled

again, pulled out, all darkness knocked like ash from the celestial
cigarette of the
tired god—who hasn't seen it all—nightshift, cabaret of aftermaths,
more drifting
now, some geese in it—now dawn outright—the pink beginning as the
deity
inhales, takes a deep drag on it which shafts down light from a bright
break in cloud, white tunneling—and something holds its hand out
here and it
means it, is not
begging, not a

gentle request, also take off your
shoes your heart your skin it says, take it all off, the palm outstretched,
the palm
waiting, take it, take it all now, the thing you call *you*, this chatter all
around, this
roof over your head, this address—until it is time and nothing is left to

chance, and I
glance up at
the

kitchen clock—is that a cellphone or birdcall I think—then there it
is—where I hear newspaper land on sill—and the phone’s tone
rings, and Patricia-Michele, unknown to me, area

code 304, is
already
letting in

the exit, tired, all the once-born seeking refuge again I think as
egged on by them she speaks to me, fast, most agile, my father wishes
immediately

for me to know
it

is him, he is so well, has a new body, has moved fast through the

book of life,

I will understand when I come there, should not be afraid, nothing
useless is re-

called, the voice which is his which is hers so firm, full of urgent
finishings,

orders, find this, protect that, but mostly how sweet the ending was
which had

to us appeared so sick the body so invaded left to die full of moaning
that would not

stop—curled up—fists gripped—and terror if medicine not given now,
right now,

and leave the vial nearby, want to see it, make sure there is

enough, ask the
doctor

again if more
can be taken—

all not-sailing at dawn but moored too deep in
shallow harbor, stuck, keel of pain, sea gone, him in stony shallows,
cold, the blanket pulled up by his good hand again, again, as if to bring
the

water up but it

recedes, the nakedness is all exposed, it is becoming more, the bones
are

coming up and you, mouthing the air looking for air, the room around
your mouth now seeking breath fast-growing emptier, vast, as all the
books stare

down at us, the

ink, the whiteness of the paper in its place, awaiting use, everything
awaiting

use, your whispers hoarse wandering through thickets of walls,
the labyrinths of rooms that were a home—what is it pulverizes you—
what is it

pulverizes rooms that made all the sense in the world to us as we
walked in and

through eyeing each place we living know—even the secrets are
assigned, are

pulverized—all this round where tomorrow there will be candles
burning when

they wash you, dress that body, lay it out—the hand meant for tearing
and pointing turned like a shucked shell with no palm to hold a thing
again—a

coin would slip through—the boots in the corner seem to have

your feet in

them—
what is this fat dimension you forfeit—what dimension are you
becoming,
have you
become—her saying now you say *we can wander*, or is it *wonder* she is
saying
and that *we do*
not need to
know—
but what made you shake so, what did you seem to greet increasingly,
gently,
again and again, each day more, sometimes near noon sometimes
evenings as if
entering
some far
classroom, a face, a person on a street approaching you, the years of
lifetime
closing, sometimes your hand soaring as if conducting an
anger a burning—rejecting then inviting destruction—
and when I wheeled you to the window in the morning to look out—
look out I said,
look Dad it's Spring, look in the distance—here it comes—that was not
what
you saw,
not that phantom coming again over the hills, no,
that beggar coming to sell you another year and at what cost, no
you said, no, that is not what is coming—and you would not look out
at the light striking the one far field in the distance brighter, spring-
wheat just
starting up,
glistening,
no

truck for
the treasure of the beam pointing out *this* rather than *that*—*this* tree
that roof, *this* rich man's field of soy, not that one's final bales—
although they were
gold in the day and would feed the herd. No.
Some other invitation you had not requested glimmered.
Your eyes floated above the drift of our kind's love-shimmer.
How sweet you were then, now that you speak of it to me from such
distance,
to let us murmur and caress and rub your hands as if our hands were
prayers.
Ointments for the chapping. Astringents. Disinfectants. The bag
changed and changed as soon as you swallowed—all passing
through you and out. Nothing staying in. No *in*.
No great wisdoms now, they do not interest you.
The time for wisdom is past you tell me she says, it is not useful.
But to tell mother to be careful when she comes and not be afraid.
That she will find her people, you in particular, waiting—
just not right away—and again you repeat it—not right away—
tell her not to be afraid when she comes which is not right away
because at first she will be alone.
She will finish her business and let go of the stories. The stories are an
impediment. You must be in them now, you tell me, but they are all
string and
knot, they catch you up—spilled blood—the love—the car is
pushed—the time is right—your symbol, your scene, your out-
come—how I wish I could pull you free, you say, there is above just
right there
above
this music—can you not hear—not see (*can not* says Patricia-Michele
to

you as you are her whom is she speaking to)—(*no she can not*)—can he
hear

me I ask—*of course*—are you ok I ask—oh he is laughing she says
at your question—it was so beautiful he says thank you you took such
care the passage was a lovely path—and I look at the room—we have
cleaned

it up—we have changed the place—the bed has been moved—
what is this number I have called—I give my credit card—I wanted to
know

you are all right—there is language—there are the appalling fields—
there is long ago—I am all past—it is all past—how did you
get out—do we ever get out—the time is up it
seems, he has rejoined the others he is saying goodbye be careful of
strangers or a stranger I cannot hear it right, I give my credit card, 0057
5532 0736

5118, expiration date 4/18—security code?—we shall have to bill you
for the full

two hours she says, although it's not her anymore, or is *just* her. Is that
understood?

And I am at the window again. And down there below me again the
riversurface

stares. It is all even now. It glints and gleams in tidy rows and rolls and
dents of

wind. The day
is

long. It flirts with nothingness. It always does.

VIGIL

Again through the haze the dog awakens me. It stands and breathes and
makes me
look. Embroidered night. Pelt-skin and pushing nose.
Is it come this time. Gaze looking hard at something which is me.
Comes into here
these nights handing me nothing but
this gaze—you, you—and again now it
insists—looks hard then looks
away. Leery but intimate. Thinks like a
shovel, digs. Spotted torso. Never forgets anything. Says this is how the
burning of being feels—*nothing*—something of moths beating trapped
wings in the
air—air spotted too—air saying *I am still here* or *it* is or *she*
is—dog
nudges hard, refusing delay—has no whim—knows not
the *is-it-worth-it* thought, nor decision, nor indecision,
has no self in mirror, sleeps through din then without lifting heavy head
watches us
lose reason, lose by reason. Then sleeps again. Hears reasoning resume.
Like clotting of
blood. What do we need? Would you bring me some *now* I think, it is
more *now* we need—
then there will just be all
the

rest—but this version, this which is the only
version, this is where pretending (even if you're not pretending) ends.

Just like

that. No extra time to make up later. No later. It's watching me now. It
knows how to do the

only thing

as if it were the only right thing. I put my hand on my face. Feel my
face. Feel

vertigo, the shut drawer of pennies, everything helping itself to

itself—ash and furies and
freckled

splotches of oncoming

dawn. Are you ready? You can only consent now. Anything postponed?

Anything you planned

to say, do, think, breed, recall, ask forgiveness for—what

happens to the room *afterwards*? The angle of the light

matters now but in a few hours to whom will it

matter so? And the hornet nest we doused but which still hums holding
dawn wind?

I get up again to follow him. Up through one more night's calamity—
no, how can it be

if you still

breathe in it—feel nighttime sizzle with your breath now rough now
soft pouring out

into it—feel breath rippling round your hunched-up self, your almost
completely broken

self, feel night to be the mechanism entirely built to proffer the inhale,
recover the exhale—listen—night grabs my

breaths too—pushes this inhale in as if to make it

sleek and tight as it flows through my only

citadel. I'm going to whip right through you it up-

wells, am going to ram forth into all your openings this fine electro-

magnetism, want to ship up, snap up, gut in, gutter through
every bit of you with minutes more minutes. Afterwards

this air

shall hold no more minutes
of

yours, will be all flow, cluster, possibility, speed—stirred but
not stirred-for—no recurrence then—substanceless—oh—keep it

substanced—for now

stay in it. Remain clock. Do not spurn earth. Have mass. Electron, spin.

Amaze

air. See day. Look it is coming, wait. Wait for the change. Oh the
change. Spur of leaves shaking wind. Dawn wind. Wind of differential.

Mother.

Be apparent. Be appareled
with

self still. What does it know this creature. Because it
knows. I look at its eyes but it does not look at me. It never
does. I look in there. *Tell me.*

Now down the hallway and open the door. You there
in dawnlight in sheets. Are those still sheets. I squint. I make no
breath—hear wind whirl-up the valley out there over trees. Soft
windowpane. Is it now. Hand on the knob I watch the

surface of the sheet

as one listens to the seashell for far distances, waiting for the long
lament, some blush of air, an ancient boundless

seeking seeking

deliverance—but

the small mound moves, and the humble rise and fall beauties itself
up, and it is like light suddenly speckling shadows and motions on a
brick wall

which had been till then reduced to grid, everywhere grid,

and you have not died. Strange and familiar your stillness.
Maybe you are dreaming? Sunrise is
touching the stillness which was night's trees. A light wind
rises. The window pales and fills with things.
I am afraid. I look at the pods' castanets, the sky full of red
shot. Again the dog goes over to your side and settles close. He knows.
Like wheat collapsing onto the threshing floor he sees
how much is left in the gripped hand to spill. A creature that knows joy
knows
death. They bind each day in chains at the end. Daylight shows it.
It pierces us with its red spear. It widens.
Oh you out there—run, it is day, run everywhere—
rise fall sink breathe—open up—happen.

WITH MOTHER IN THE KITCHEN

Let us pause. If you could be saved then yes, ok. If you could be
contained in life then

yes.

But diligent, foolish, I count off the dates—your days, your breaths—
as if this mistrust of the natural were not enough—
looking for the starting point—
one of these will be your last word—
what will we have just said when you stop—
what will the phrase be which is interrupted by your final breath—
did they warn us about this freedom—
that there are no regulations—
that we do not run out of patience, we run out of time—
they wrench out the life, just like that—
everything is innard and then it is not—
that one day you are no longer at home here—
also that there is no room left, your room runs out—
the next move is no move—
who told us to feel we could settle in—
today they will ask me for your home address, I have one to give—
my beloved unknown, you pour out—
where you arrive is *too far*—
is not an entrance, not an exit—
you have to stop being—

I don't know if it's formless—
no there is no longing—
a bird chirps firmly from the porch—
the genes chirp firmly in the blood, it still flows—
there is still body heat, honor the body heat—
you ask for the meds, honor the meds—
you have gone too far, you cannot turn around,
the flame of the candle blooms, exceedingly if I stare, I stare,
be glad, inauguration of, say little, save breath,
I will press your hand now and there it is—life—it comes in waves,
it will disappear, it has not disappeared,
accept destruction, *accept*, the word quivers....
You passed inspection, can I tell you that.
You were fully searched. Every option. Every cavity.
At every checkpoint, you were. You were not saved.
This is the final one on this side.
I watch your hands. One is lifting a spoon, one is holding onto the
folded cloth.
An iridescence—a crazed green—out the kitchen window, spreading
forever.
A puddle just there at the foot of the tree from last night's rain.
Now sun. Crusty light, gravelly with pocking shadow, excited by wind.
New leaves.
First wind today for these new leaves.
Is it this week. We drink our tea.
The knives and forks glitter in their dark drawer.
They will be there after. Hands will lift them as if nothing.
May I cut your meat, may I stir your soup?
“Sometimes walking late at night/I” and
“let us pause on the latter idea for a minute.”

First wind new leaves—no, new wind first leaves.

They came out day before yesterday.

Those intervening days, unbroken stillness settled.

Look, it's May I said. They grow. No wastage of energy. Love.
Molecules.

Now they flip up, fly back. One is ripped off and slaps against the
windowpane.

Still citrine-green-new—it sticks fast to the glass.

For a while. We see it.

Do you want to hang out a bit now, here? Do you want to talk about it,
shall we continue?

It just happens this way, you bend to the cup,

the sea-reaching stream runs down

somewhere below our angle of view—

though on a good day you hear it, I see you

hear it—straightening itself as it goes, going down to go faster,

at some point merging and merging, splitting its waters, gathering, a
slope will help it.

I'd take my bucket, may I have a sip of you, river, I am so parched.

We wait for it to come, the time.

We are so glad for this wind, it delivers.

The mind too, whirling, vectoring, reaching short but at least

reaching, rising, consigning—towards and towards. Terrible. You've
got to

love it, dark mess of words and winter-

unwinding—blaze, gleam, build, tear down. I put the kettle back on.

We are on

pause. The change of scale in our thinking has occurred. Planetary
death so

what is yours. How big. Where do I put it. You were born. You were in
time, were

ahead of time all this time and now we are waiting
for it to go on without you in it. That.

When time will go on and you
will not be in time.

What is it we were just
talking about. Your years. There were mornings dew moon highways
nation-states

shame law. I was born. That was just yesterday. *Far far away* you said
opening up

the book. I am three. I look at the page. Your hand knows how to turn it
so the next thing

comes about. You will be buried in dirt.

DEMENTIA

Where am I now. And *now*? Once there was no other shore.

Now I peer into the other shore.

One day in my life the halo of *event* appeared, re-

placed event. Dolled up and undarkening. Something too open opening further. Swept clean. Night round a lamp, street empty, street gone, the white of this thought whitening further, a wave sweeps it away, the clenched fist of the present instant—right here—this one—tightens (I am here) then loosens (where am I). Where? The clutching of this thought, cinching further—am I in life-movement, forward—am I the lack of question, something that can be remembered from much later on, from afterwards, from tomorrow, is it slow suicide this having thinned to what will come to be seen as an introduction—were we the first introduction to what might have been a species—a first try a failure but full of nervous sparks
—

we called them vision or
thought—

technopoesis—accelerate, drift, drift—
undetermined, intermediated—all aftermath—spectacular creativity (though just first draft)(who knows what is to come)(what came)(what could have come)—
(if)—,

surveyors, tuners, someone who knocked at a window and wanted to come in, so

violent, these fingers → what they have done and made → so nervous → clawing
and

caressing → nothing was left to us but touch → no stories but those of touch → in
the right

hand in the left → then torn apart → in → between → just to see *in* → to hear it
squeal → a ringtone? a devil? → always returning to try one more time → to hear it
one more time → the sound of the ripping apart → the inhale of the seeing-in →
perfectly → is *that* perfectly → do you think we really saw it *as it is* this
time → pulling

aside the heavy baldachin → brocades from the East, tassels from the South → no
Gabriel anywhere in sight → no choir → devices that broke down the human skin,
the

human mind, now there is

another mind, prefigured by drones → algorithms → image
vectors → distributive consciousness → humanoid robotics → what is required
now →

is → a demarcation → what is *artificial* → technological end-times now only just
beginning → along the watchtowers → pleasures of nihilism, speechlessness,
incredulity → not knowing what do to with these hands, these → how they want to
inflict pain on the powerless the weak the poor → then the passionate complicit
mass-

resignation → mass → look there they are in the ditch the means of
production → your hands

have been cut off and cast down in the midst → soon they will hand your stumps
a

shovel → you must cover it with dirt the century → action its dialect → and if you
bury

it → you come to the end of action → the hands will move for a while as they are
wont to

do → down there in the earth → the thousands cut off each day → millions → then
they are

still → not even the animals go to them → miles of ditches, countries of hands →
all the action in them stilled → markets stilled → excess fetish vertigo stilled →

So now go back. Touch yourself. Take yourself to yourself. In anger in need. Re-

member your self. Put the hand in, and from the bottom of the sack cast out the
seed, the pesticide, the pests—twist the cap of the pipe—let water flow—
combine

ingredients—try for that first time the plasticizer—how loathe—a butterfly
just emptied itself into untraveled air but you couldn't look up—a butterfly so
rare

but you can't look up—the reaction has to work—the retardant the
photochemical

the imitation transformation where the molecules—(now you remember them
from school, the first time you knew of them, you *drew* them, the world, its
secrets)—must make you lubricant, stronger than anything in the
known—and everything non-essential dies—curling, subtracting, coating, re-
combining—your plastic-laden ocean bearing grief inside it too. Once—

Once is a place I visited. A flame burns it up. Just looking at it burns it. *Once*.

A lot of coming and going—flame where legs run thundering along the cave the
wall

where many of us run at once, hooves in the way of escape, and those are not
drones

that chase from above, that will run us off this high shelf because we cannot stop
—

once has a taste *over the precipice* is the taste *it's all becoming darker* is
the taste—*this minute is pecking at your shell*—that's the sound—percussion is
our mind—this torrent of us pouring into day the paradise the day. I know a day.

Now where am I—and

now? Running and raining I am. Carrying my face before me.

Here where my mind drops down to the stubble of grass—where?—revelation
blinding as a fat stone in sun, my body desperate for concealment—think of

something

else, do you not feel it, this total expression hides you further,
lays itself down over the scribbling of me, the
dream of me, of having me, me stilled and dragged, opened, shared, meat—till
all

this bright mind makes what you wanted so to feel—or see—or just *take in*—
dis-

appear. I lie by the stream. Grow *accustomed*. Have hooves ears rich flesh hide.
Am hunted. But you knew that. Hunted by the once. Hunted by then. By when.

By

when the time comes. By time comes. Time. There you are scribbling me again
on

the walls of the cave, my sideways-leaping to avoid you when you pass me,
come around the other side of me, to cut me off from mine, such a small decision
and I

am suddenly yours, hide hooves ears flesh, such a small hesitation—where am I
now—

in this

representation—as you stroke me onto the wall in flames, unreal, unreal, *you*
can't

have that I want to say, that is me, that is what I am, this given, just this, running
and

free—you will make towers bridges tunnels hangars wonders, you will have
stone marble cement bustle haggle in doorways—doorways!—chronometers,
managers, mercury in thermometers, saints and virgins—I don't remember
where

we are again—we became more—now I am in a cubicle, a tabernacle, a festival,

again say the

leaves in quick wind over my face even though I am trying to go still, grow in-

invisible, take

instruction, excuse this diction, especially here by this fallen tree, scraggly, hung
with webs bees peripheries entropies love

III

TO TELL OF BODIES CHANGED TO DIFFERENT FORMS

In the market of ideas, of meat—in the teeth of need—you will never be happy
with
your body—it is not the right body—the shame of having to appear
in it—as if always a few steps behind it—or like a man standing
at the edge of a small river which muscles-by unaware—slipping by—under
reflection—too fast for its own good—making you a fault in perception—a
catastrophe to
which a body is joined—disjoined—all headgear, undergear, tied, trussed,
confused—
wearing your arms and legs as if waiting for security to find you—shaven then
unshaven—
a bit traditional though all at once too raw too sexed-up—shivering portal and
obstruction—
seeing yourself there, features amplified, distorted by normalcy—what you are
dying to be
eluding you again, a hole in time, in the consolations of light—
sublime heavy weapon of appearance being detonated right there where your eye
meets your eye. I see you. How your apparition shrinks from itself.
It *knows* there was another body it was intended for, another century another
love
another consolation—another sentence in which to place the heavy “I”—another
sex race core time—a different artifice—a different flow of faults. What are you
dying

to be. How unknowable do you feel, heavy ordnance with no *where* to hit. The thing about history is it drains it flows but has no borders. Is not this soft smartly turned-out green grove of summer—no places in it for insemination, iridescence, work—this being not yet you imitating it, the tiny nationstate which is you, *your* you. You can't understand it. You can look up at the sublime with its massive firm edges—albeit under erosion—who cares—you won't be around to see it—the altered thing—you who so need to *be altered* that this could be acceptably a *you*—this thing which cuts loose from an other's regard—the right ghost to be—yes that—a *want* wanting to be all folds all energy—an image filling itself in as almost but not entirely *matter*. It's late summer. We will never be happy with the body. Will exchange it for another. Will change its months name legs arms voice—will shave self off—will watch breasts grow as the buttonwood grows. The sublime is so alone. It watches us. Have you failed to

make your self? Are you still hidden, are you too exposed—it's hard to tell—perfect losses both ways—too much body, too little—voice too deep or too void—voice too full of space like a small nail trying to hold in too large a weight.... Erect or not erect enough. Oh are you built yet as you would be built? Caution: you will make yourself anew. Caution: you will not like the new one either. After a while you will need to do it again. There is no body which will suffice. It's a theology—your mucous—it's a post industrial cock or a derivative cunt—are you getting ahead? Careful: you will get ahead of your self. Indeed, you are ahead of yourself. I love you for that, says your best friend. I love you for your

unquenchable dis-
satisfaction—after months so dry, rain came—so quiet at first we did not know
what
to make of it. It tapped each thing as if a blind creature coming to see. We
were where it was meant to arrive. Weren't we? It went by too fast. Hard and
fast. A kind
of porn. I saw you feel your new ass. You like it but then I saw you wonder
whether,
right there where the idea of grandeur taxied down your piste of a brain, ready to
go
but on queue—who knows how long it will be before you take off—and by then,
wouldn't it

be old hat....

Warning: by then a new idea will have popped up. As if the runway weren't long
enough or the sky too small. Change! The debt ceiling has shown itself to us.

The un-
doing has shown its cheek, the lovely small of its back, the laminate skin of its
sex
appeal—there may be nothing else behind these words—by definition—caution
—they too
seek to be changed, they feel unseen, unheard, mis-shaped, mis-
understood. Caution: you can neither be filled nor consumed. Caution: you are
not
beautiful—there is no such thing—you are a forced withdrawal from an
occupied
terrain—that's what a body is—once you are out you want to go back in—not to
the
same place exactly—but back in, back in—the same defiling of your corpse so
that you

can be re-

surrected as a new you-and-me thing. Look a small mudwasp is building a nest.
Its activity wrenches the open air. There will be but this one. It will abandon its

young

never to return. It is doing a form of research. The mud is powdery like the
foundation I

have applied, looking so complete to myself in this mirror in this instant before
the

light changes and

I must begin again.

SELF PORTRAIT: MAY I TOUCH YOU

here. May I touch your
name. Your
capital. May I

touch outcome, kindness, slur down my caresses to
throat, eyes, end of the tunnel. Come out. Now your name is changed. How do I
reach

right name, right bandage—the character that you will be for now
in the dark, where there is need—is there still need?—can you be for this short
time

singular? You need to be singular. There you are changing again. These words
are

furrows. Now they are
arrows. Don't touch where it says no. It says no everywhere. Where is the spot
where you
are faking it. That spot. So well. Can you tell. Doesn't work for you. What works
for you.

The rouge you have applied to see who you would be for a while. You
change your mind. You change the shade. You recognize yourself for a while
then it grows old. The pupae in the mud grow old. They've slicked it smooth as
skin with

perfect perforations. All entrances and exits. The only way, right way, the pupae
morph

to their winged
stage and grow. They exit not to return. Those who laid them do not return. They

change from
unborn to being here now, 67 degrees under the eaves as they come out. I watch.
Nothing
can change out here in the given. It is given and it is received. If ants find the
pupae
they eat the nest through. Sometimes they get to live their life. I know you need
to be

a significant player in
the creation of
your veri-
similitude. Abide abide. Do you do nude. Can I touch your apparition, your
attitude,
multitude, your eternally misunderstood solitude—do you do adulthood,
husbandhood,
motherhood—listen: sap in the dogwood—not like blood, crude, flood, lassitude
—I want you
to come unglued—clad in nothing but blood—in it—dripping wet—appearing
always re-

reappearing,
of course wearing your camouflage—whatever you currently identify as—clad
in your
surface your newest reason—may I touch it—your phantom your place-
holder, undelivered, always in the birth canal, undiscovered—your personal
claim on
the future, residue of all the choices you’ve made thus far, also the purchases,
invoices, in
voice where your change resides, in vice where it settles—skin—a win win—the
management
wishes to express concern—can I touch there where you appear in the mirror—
where you lay
your simulacra down—lave the mercurial glass—bypass being—hardly a *ping*
where you

boomerang—here you are back outside—ghost money—

do you not want to feel

the fierce tenacity of

the only body you can sacrifice—the place where it is indeed your

fault—there *in* the fault—no heartsearching? Me with my hands on the looking
glass

where your life for the taking has risen, where you can shatter into your million
pieces—

all appareled refusal. What are you a sample of today—

what people.

INCARNATION

What shape am I? A vote? An invoice? How much do I count. Am I a verity. Run your hands over me. There. What is a lie—hurry—make meaning—liquidate tense—outwit the wind—no, outwit intimacy—harvest it—fake a common dream—say *touch me* to the failing grip—of time—it fails—the sound of decay also exists on skin—your skin—are you all covered—is the residue wiped off, is debt, waste, love—feel it, this *awareness of* your shape—what's left after the comments-section shuts—see what that makes of you—or is it me—when will the fade begin, why this eternal close-up, this wiry sinew of gaze threading into each pore, the meeting place—where you are most speechless—most—there is no word for it—don't know any—say house—say don't go one step further—say don't turn around you are all

front—smell it the scent of time, it is skin, is all this forward-facing you cannot back out of—I'm going into my name—I'm touching my cheekbone—draw me my outline—make the skull very loud—the chalk on the sidewalk quivers slightly—once I had a father—I touch my face it is wet—there was a year I forgot to look—I was a child—my shape seemed a brushstroke—a thing about to be said out of respect for something or someone who had to arrive soon

because we had built a system based on waiting and every
thing—love respect fear—was based on waiting—
so then you would be given your shape—and so be
honored—there was a racket but that was childhood—
everyone was screaming all the time but that was words—
the past tense was like a bolt of cloth you could touch and

lift and it would float in the air for the briefest time as if it
were time—or the curtain—teaching you to see shape—
wind in its muslin—filled with light, with turns, then sucked
back in—flat against the wall. Then dropped. Like that.
Nothing more. Can a gazelle hold as still. Oh accelerationism.
The *thing* in you now able to be *not seen*. And so there you
are. In the lull you can *not be*. Or not be *seen*. They began by
merging. A thing penetrated you, then it withdrew. You are
something's thing and it grabs your shape. It yanks your
hair. Pulls back your face. You take its shape in you. A forced
occupation. A patient ministering force inside. *We must be in
common*. This is our little market. Dark, dark, we are making
our own futures-market, organizing seed, oozy excess, in
thrall, unstoppable, breaking into the sealed-up skin-thing,

minutest interview, burning with love, detained, breath
obtaining, yes abstract but not so much there is no
torture. See. It is small and private although you can still
scream. The crucial parts even here redacted. As we come
together. Like this thing you are holding. Life inked out of it.
Its true shape escaping you. That is how meaning works.
Holding this place in place. Cosmic nihil. Chemsex. Extended
peak. Death in hyperdrive—that shape of yours—we have to

blur it—sand it—pixilate it—rush, froth, dismember. Even a stickfigure is too much. Even a cartoon in which you bend and rise, bend and rise, to give invention its pleasure, is not full enough of all the seed-in-wind body wants. Oh little revolution. You must come to an end in stasis of course. It is not pleasure but you will think it is. In these notes from

apocalypse feel the shape of becoming machinic. How it holds you in place. Go ahead raise your hand to your mouth. Taste it, the stagnation. Bring it upon yourself. Accelerate. Immediate. Be incessant. Be disindividuated. When you were born from me I heard in your cry the loneliness. A wish came out. Was the first thing. All my decisions have been wrong. That face of yours just come from me I will never see again. Everything subsequent was flame that could speak. Wanting and empty. Full of purchasing power. Glass shatters in my mouth as I try to say this. *Here* said the light as you entered it. Here is *more*. Gauzy light surrounded you and you were gone, you were in, you were unwrapped from non-being, it was the last I saw of you, I saw a line of elms out the window and they went on, you were raised up, white wrap

of belonging, instant addiction to breath, I watched it start you up, *too late too late* I was thinking in the laughing light, make her whole again, put her back in the unshaped, make her nobody's business again, invisible girl how I would have cast the light off you, pushed your hollow chest back up, head first, got you out of the mediation. But a tube was put in. You *lived*. The body you were sunk-into washed up on this shore. With its urgent message no one would ever hear

of course. As if you were the waste product of some unstoppable subtraction, some buzz the stars thrilled in messaging their absence, their methods of absence, their non-irruption from shapelessness—the place without war. And the nurse's chemise she covered up, to keep the stain off. I wanted you to stay inside, my life, you, coming out of un-

shape, you permanent now, dying and permanent. What shape does lie take which is not the *right* shape. All shapes of lie are its right shape. The star's edge, the orchid's rushed rim, self-empowerment, the breeze just now—the day I am in—the shape of the trap before it snaps shut, the calm keyhole holding its key not quite tight, that it lock us in, that it let us out—what shall we be let out *of*—into what shape—I don't fit—don't fit what I think—sturdy little wheeling, going always forward, glaring, whose picture am I, terminal, not quite terminal, over-expressing cells, overwhelmed with self improvement—then something goes wrong—this will not fit—I do not fit—in place—am forgetting my shape again—must remember it—have to be a clean fit—good fit—true fit—a truth—no—how can I be that—they kill you

if you don't dream—make sure to dream—that's the point—it's a shape that won't fit in you, that's why it floats and tears and wakes you in terror—it is your dream—dream it—whimper a little ok but touch yourself—feel that hip bone, the soft of that belly, move slowly, your counterpart is somewhere you will never find—the one place it is *not* is in that horror the mirror—that delirium put before you—look how it waves—you stare again—*what shape am I*—I have to

get it right, is it possible we are alive to get this one thing right—you peer in, is it a collection of notes just beyond hearing—what were you to *make—that* shape—and how you would love to sit down again about now, right here in front of the house, where the dogwood is making its million shapes—oh dogwood *your* stars are not dead—you would

like to sit and have no one see you—get rid of the baggage, the footprints—the small blue god that accompanies you everywhere, saying make sure to be you, be true to your outcome, your only shape depends on it—am right here it says, don't think about truth, would be a mistake, think about nothing but where you end where it begins—*what is the it* I say—I plead I wait a second to see if it will answer for once, the small useless god—it sounds like 2000 miles of shorebreak at once, but small and only around me, given me that I *be here*, the one thing that betrays me every day, what you imagine you see me by, the thing all round me so full of future, like a lining, furry with minutes as I walk through the waiting, the *waiting for the end*—so much *forever* to be in till the forever stops—a line all round me you take to be me,

you take it, you take me, the me you take is I agree a possibility, but it is just one, a surmising, a guess—but you touch—you reach out, touch, say it—you say the one word which attaches to me, which has from my first breath—my name—put down there, certified—proof of live birth—it is so persuasive—really I have to go, I have to go now—I can't stand how it tries to hold me, get your stickiness off of me, you are something they put on a piece of paper, a

momentary idea they had in mind, they put it by my only time, my arrival time, I am awash in it, they hooked me up in it, rinsed me clean of me and shaped me firm in it—look they signed for me—they dated the purchase—it was a good price—the perfect price, the shape of my price—the making sense of the shapeless thing I was—which was pushed down

through egg and cell and faith and today's shopping spree—and all this waiting—and limitation braiding clarification thinning me out, stretching me out—there was an old friend I would have liked to have stayed with but I was taken, I was cleansed of shapelessness and plasmaed and celled-up and moleculed to death till I started to sprout and divide again—pushing pushing pushing are these minutes—I feel myself in the dark as I must have the very first time, when these fingers formed, just enough, who is this, why is it here, why can I touch it—and I move across and there is bone and silk vagueness forms on it—I would brush it off but it is now part of me, no, not part, it is whole, it is becoming one thing, all the parts are coming together—a perfect market—everything in its aisles before the doors open, the opening

bell upon us, any minute now, the chute will open, I will be received, I will finally be what I am being assembled for, the parts all slid in till you can no longer tell them apart, there are no parts, there is a whole, here you go, you have to be this skin-tight thing and then something celestial barely skips a beat and that beat is you, you are the next note, they want you to think it's a song, a great aria—someone hacked in to the non-existent and introduced this mutation and the

mutation can only grow, now the limbs have formed, they
can touch each other—and there are two of you it
seems—but you must hold them together and say I am one, I
am, here I come now—pigswill, mix, motion, eddying, curl—
original expression, bellied, bald—yards and yards of cells
strung so tightly in, starting to express, disturbing

endlessness, disturbing unceasing: here. Come in to end. I
snip you off. Come in. Who are you. Begin the ceasing now.
A big inhale. Fill you up nice. And then the other part.
Which exhales, lets you go. Easy exit. Running your hand
through what's left of your hair. In yr privates. On yr head
where it flames. Forgive me you say to the creature in the
mirror—I wanted to make you happy. I slip my glasses off to
try to see. I really mean it. I don't know how to transmit
meaning to you in there, mercurial. A redbird flits through.
Look it is gone to both of us now. I would have had you keep
it. I would have had it be in *your* hand, had it still you, had it
make you have—as it has—arrival, shape, meaning—a say
in things. A say in things. In things. A thing.

FROM INSIDE THE MRI

—my sub-
tropical dancer, partner, or is it birdchatter I'm hearing now, vein in,
contrast-drip begun, everything being sung in the magnetic field's no-
upward-rung
unswerving tiny dwelling—you earthling—awaiting your biochip—
they are taking tranches of the body which is one—which has been one
all of my life—
can you hear me, he says, squeeze this if problems arise he says, ok?
ready? *if if if if*
if yes if yes—here's this to worship—*hi hi hi hi—hi hi high high—*
high high not not not not highnot highnot not not—are you
ok—next lasts
three minutes—ready? yes?—*not not not not be be be be notnot bebe*
notnot bebe
next one one
minute—yes—
yes yes yes
yes
yes yes yes yes—can you hear me—next one will last

forever. Question: were you looking up at the cherry all these long
weeks. All during
the bombing the destruction of land home flesh the taking of refineries

the turning point the dam which if they breach it will eliminate the
town the graven images the mosques the waterworks the UN School—
the idea of

shelter—
Question:
the children
here—in lock-
down—

Question: “during”?—Question: their being in solitary no food no light
no mattress no

latrine months
go by only who
knows what
days are, the
mind
you make
for

dream is taken from them—*during all that time*—Question: this will
last a

while—the guards cracking spleen for no reason—four down on one
child—his head

cracked against the wall “for sleeping in class”—“I saw blood and feces
on the floor”—“I look away” the teacher says “or they will come

after me
next.” *All this*

time where are → *are* you → the sap moving and the other fluids
moving → the

crystalline

chemistry of necessity driving the pressure up → into the xylem tubes →

the tree just
there → outside window → and I want to say yes → yes I hear it → the
water
evaporating from each leaf → how it tugs on water remaining in the
xylem →
from roots to shoots → *sostenuto* now *staccato* → in the violin → in my
earbuds →
the children on Sinjar made to flee during this dying → of thirst → during
this
trying → to escape → the water molecules stretch the bonds → breathe
in → you can
make empty space more empty → yes → you can take from there and
make
this fruit → *emptiness* → yes → you can hold it in your eye → its pupil
hard → its

size your
instrument → Question → think of the silence during May's growth you
did not hear
buried in this August day → Question → you glanced again at the
blossoms and then you
suddenly forgot again → think *during this* → think *time passed* → the
more you stretch it

the more it
pulls
back →
no one knows exactly what does the pulling → it is not
gravity → no → another
force → negative pressure brings it up → though all this could exist in
empty
space → vacu
is
full → of energy → and other intangibles → listen → liquids
stretch → listen → and if you

pull on them (“under certain conditions”) they pull back → have
tensile strength → can resist being turned to vapor → worst fears remain
for Yazidis

still trapped on the mountain → on the run AP repeats → at this minute →
live in this time zone → look it is a terror it is a hero a heron → it is
the screen

where history ripens → the mountain so barren → the scream of
the refugee → running towards the chopper → listen → hear this → they
drop bundles of water → the waterman a god under the chopper which
hovers, which

will not
land → so that the boys are climbing now → onto its mechanism → it is a
schism → another
one → the
gun

just over the hills → the rifleman on his Humvee → the ombudsman,
tribesman

fisherman, herdsman, your patron → sharpen your question → is there
more “him” of him with the gun pointing at you → the just-dug pit
fills up like a comment box → I told you not to come → suddenly

seeing the buds that all along, unknown, unbeknownst, unmapped, un-
owned, unnamed, greened—a tableau vivant—oh celebrated
labyrinth, friend—beware pride—keep looking—keep looking
closer—there is a dryness coming but not only of the heart—it
stays outside—helpless as a sea to stop its rigor—as if a last
prize for us—a warm kiss gone too far—but the buds
turn in my breast my dark seat—know nothing of the soldier, of deep
time, self harm—

wait and see says the sun rising over all of this at every instant—
365 → 24/7 → wait and see, and → *hi hi hi hi hi hi hi hi* →
almost done he says, you ok → *if if if if yes if yes if* →
and if you think it could be a bird it could be → although it could be the
ringtone of the
smartphone someone in the adjacent booth to mine left on in locker
5 → which was
not silenced → which can from here be → just made out →
beyond the slurring whooshing impenetrable door → above which
one red light is
singing-out
chamber in use. And the bird sings. On its short loop, its
leash, it sings, here it is, here it comes again. *Chi chi trillip trillip*
chuuu chip
chip. No
matter
what you do, you are free. It is a nightmare. You are entirely free. There
now,
careful now. You can go.

PRYING

(For Dr Barbara Smith)

As if I never wake from this blackout again, again this minute they lay
it out

on the wheeling transporter, so silent, then the surgical table,
my body, my citizen, anesthesiologists back from coffee break, cables
on mylar headrest taking my head down now, arms into armlock,
then positioners, restraints—day talk

all round—the guidewires in, the intravenous ports, the drip begun.

An/aesthesia by which is meant the sensation of having sensation
blocked,

a collapse of response, *a total lack of awareness of loss of*
awareness—

on the wall, snapshots of the chosen few training on

the new

robotic patient-

lookalikes—my only

body—memories, contritions, facts—

oaths, broken oaths, my piece of path into the

labyrinth—how far have I reached in—and in my flesh these

rapid over-rhyming cells, which want us to go faster, faster, headlong
with

mirth ruth glee—what would they *be*—searching for

what minotaur, yarn in hand spooling-out mad towards core, eager for

core—all's underneath—readout's small *pings* beginning on the screen.

They will

learn everything about me while I sleep. I sleep the sleep of those
wanting to live.

I sleep the sleep of those wanting to be left alone by life. And
safe. With guarantees. Here take the keys. I should wake up. It's hard
accepting to *be free*. It is not true. You must be still and not resist. Are
you

completely readable now. To survive, you need to be

completely

readable. So I

accede, I sign the dotted line, they will keep track
of everything, my breaths, my counts, my votes—invoices, searches,
fingertips—don't I

know you

from somewhere says my heart to the machine reading me out, didn't I
give you my

code, my pin, my blanket

permission

to suppress the last revolution, to calculate the timing of

the solstice the pressure

cooker depth of

ice core and whom

do I have

locked away

down there—do you not see them—don't look away, the
dials are set—where is the nearest job—no gauge picks up their
screams at the

employment line, the check-out where the food is not enough, it is so
quiet here, who am I signing on to be,

and then—oh—here it comes again, here in this moment I shall recall

however long the life is after this
when you look down at me and stare and your long arm offers its hand,
cold hand,
and I offer you mine—we hold—then we repair,
you in your disposable surgical blue hair-cap, blue mask, I in mine,
down, down through this operating theater's novocaine-green
gleam, its cellophane membrane, serene, clandestine borderline &
your life depends on what says the disappearing air, the dis-
appearing vein, surveil me here, in solitary, entertain me mise-en-scène,
hear me chain of command, touch me, stain-free middle class American
female subject starting downtown on the drip line,
on the gleaming staff of this protean sentinel, its silver rod
held up, torchful of forgetfulness, streaming, translucent, give me your
mass, your teeming cell-dividing
mass—give me your poverty,
your every breath is screened, your every cell, it is not hit and
miss, we get it all, your safety lies with us, hold still,
granted it's cold at first, this new relief, your icy nation thanks you
for the chance to test these absolutes on you
murmurs the gleaming staff in the deliberate air, astir,
toe-separators being pulled on now and leggings next,
always a bit tighter that the blood flow fast in this undercover
slow maneuver, whirr, blink, you get a little extra life as a reward—for
what I
cannot see—what these concentrates of vigilance push into me,
capital and knowhow and all these minutes, minute—where to
finish off the string and bite the knot, erotic dead-end, no jobs,
the virtualization, the play of nerves, no jobs, they jab
the last bit quick—paradise confusion sedative—oh and the re-
bates the debates and the womb what was that really,

the total concentration of capital, the ten commandments, Job that
heartthrob now standing right before me here as the drip-line on its
silver rod,

its one arm up, its other out into this widening avenue

to step you off this

luminescent curb

to hail what cab

the ghosts in their scrubs do not perturb, bitstreamed, stubbing the
blood

where the small mound of flesh is grabbed, flap scabbed, snip drip as it
is all

transcribed by the robotic arm, prosthetic mind, rich text, as she
unslacks her

matchless stitch, having detached, having reattached, no speech in
them, bleached light, fleshttrim, mutation, division, over-expressed,
under-

suppressed—held still

by your long hand, transnational, undersea cable, invisible ministration,
and when you take mine into yours

you say under-

stand,

we are taking the first steps
friend

towards the longest journey, community,
breakers of codes, corporate raiders, west of everything, no immunity,
put on your hat your wrap be ready now to take my hand its certainty its

purity—

there will be no one come to fetch you back from here—

you must now take this voyage out yourself alone

to reach the peerless place hard to think-in, squint-in,

you will not be embarrassed there is nothing to reveal,

see me through
was the question
as the cold came on,
me hoping to do nothing wrong then hoping for a bargain,
asking how long before one would be able to live again *as if*—
and those other turns in the brine—the *yet*—*if not*,
if now, and now, when now—turn towards me now a bit you say to
them and then
let's turn the torso this way please recheck marked spot.
Can see the guidewires but can no longer feel them.
Then the thing on the other side, the person who will open up my hand
and say
it's over now can you hear me here is some water.
And in my room cut flowers still in their paper stapled up. Undelivered.
And you get a little extra life to live now—here—can you still live it.

CRYO

Now they say you are ready for a long stilling voyage. Is it further into
nature. A life
of make believe. I have no idea what is retained. What is here is
certainly not there.
The bad news became apparent too late. The day became all one day
and was done.
We got rid of the calendar, the book of side effects, the weather, the
fairy tales. We
would like the monster back. We want the fight with the monster, his
bright sure
nothingness, back. He walked towards us firmly once. We were
equipped with our
long sharp object. The *what happens*. We were provocative that is for
sure. But we
tried to listen. To nature. It suggested we forego proof. It suggested we
try mimicry.
Empathy. The filigree of syntax wailed. It coursed out our throats as if
we weren't
even there, gentle then ungentle, burned-out on persuasion, for
centuries.

But hi. I've been having an interesting discussion with → those who pass
their lives
on → hastily assembled → dimly aware of the reasons for their wanting to
become
inanimate → an entity no longer human → an interloper → a possible
manifestation, an
impersonal person, an impersonation → an apathy from both emotive

and organic
color → a form of leap → from looper rover lopen → to run away → proto
empathy → no
memory → no entity. A leap from one sort of being, one sort of being
immaterial to another. A possible alien subjectivity. Not idle but at the
furthest
reaches. Of empire. No song. Downward. Toward the stone terrace.
You do not
suffer you do not lie in waiting. Without a subject. The self a mere
occasion for
the swarming of responses, oh weariness, we can suspend, responses
can suspend,
letting certainty reach apogee, yes, would glance at me furtively but
then I, I

hi → I narrate continuity → not what is wanted except absolutely → what
is said in my
absence → is → my absence → they complimented → me → consistencies
orders
summaries outcomes → no berries on *that* bush → arranged terror → I see
saints
gathering → see enlarging grasps of order → understand this as
likeness → is not →
visit the clinic → experience swarm fragment → during his increasingly
rare visits
he → we are left in the uncertain state → 196 below centigrade → has not
yet ex-
perienced information death → can only begin after legal death → when?
→ motion to
lose → grief suction cold → precise unaffronted
damnation → cryopreservation →
preserve my brain information → this pain was bitter and sharp → this
pain dried
upon all the lively spirities of flesh → bloodless and pain-dried
within →

blowing of the winde and colde coming from without → mete togeder in
the swete

body → jittery → of Crist → of →

now my no-me comes round, my most silent me, too fine, exposed,
figuring a stray

completeness, not done but casting away all edges, inside there is
nothing, however

small there is nothing, with its own hue—void, ultimate, but not final—
turning back

on itself to find no self coming to the edge of the done the said—

I am sorry to want this—but it flows turning so fast through what
electromagnetic

field saying I'll wake not, I'll with existence not exist, I'll nestle in
unattainable

reality, anticipating, beyond intellect, awaiting rain, diminished to
where I can find

nothing to give, nothing to give myself to, everything is, nestling in,
unfound,

whirling through no transformation, at one sudden point I came to
surrendering,

sufficiency having split up and used up but not all → nothing coming
from

anywhere → time wraps.

Glanced furtively around.

Becoming unhitched from the animal.

Tried to frame our response.

Our ending was nothing like—

We are beholden we say.

We are so beholden we think.

The shadow narrative has been scratched away.

A blight, a damp, a leaching sees us coming.

Yes we know we are interlopers.
Where did he go she asks?
The narrator, the thing, or someone else?
No pathology found.
Maybe just an aberrant causal loop.
As in the next sentence.
So we introduce the period.
It is not coming back.
Is in this sense absent while clinging to time.
You might find yourself standing on a bridge
looking upriver. You are clinging to
the top of its milky white stairs.
You need to push. That is artificial light.
Have you known depth to be true?
Here in this period of *ludicrous attachments*.
You cannot close down meaning.
You close down meaning.
There are tinny machine sounds.
How can it matter if it has meaning.

The life of

My illness

Non artificial intelligence.

Are these the last words we say. Will we be talking about what we have
just
talked about. You put the pen down. It lies there without moving.
The body is stiffened by something happening far away → though the
curious bag
inside beats like a heart still → like a line repeated → an opinion from the
future → low, repeating some science → looking back at that prayer that
was not
received → and in this was brought to my mind this word that Crist

sayed “I
thurst” → for I saw in him a doubille thurst one bodely and another
gostly → the body
dried alle alon long time with wringing of the nailes and weight of the
body → the
skinne and the fleshe that seemed of the face and of the body → was
smalle rumpelde
with tawny coloure → like a drye bord when it is aged → period of
ludicrous
cognition → suddenly in the next mode of sentience → who is the “he”
that cannot
exist without him → mechanical doll comment section woman of no
reputation → even this ATM requires interpretation → impassable,
broken, asked
if she needed “anything beyond the venom” → the “he” of the next
paragraph already
hanging on to this → blodless and paine dried within → blowing of the
winde and
colde → coming from without → met togeder in the swete body of
Crist → it was a dry
harre wind, wonder colde as to my sighte → and paine folowing that he
was blodless hanging
uppe in the eyer → as men hang a cloth to drye.

IV

DOUBLE HELIX

One bird close up by the house crow
makes the wall's temporariness
suddenly exist
one call into
the arrival of the storm the announcing
by flocks and swarms
the flowerbeds turning in the solar system
listen—
Schubert and the thrush at once and
somewhere in space we
hang are hanging
also the red dress on the line I rush to get to
in time
also the slack in the line up-snapping then down
what scale this pitch-
changing slapping
of the cotton-poly blend listen and my approaching
arms rising to catch the
ties my hair blowing over it onto it behind us
from the open door the violin and beside us
at the edge of the woods the last of the thrush—
can we hear them
these flowerheads being carried in this solar system

sepals receptacles—the vascular bundles
inside the stems—
near the blown-open door the strings' diminuendos—
also these hatchlings in their nest in the eave in the storm born in
it
wrapping round them thunder twigs bits of mylar dusk
also accuracies of the
built porch of day of
the negative forcing, the solar constant, the
storm nonstop though modulating round these
dime-sized heads—in each
the magnetic chip and round it the tiny shellfish-crushable skull—
Venus is almost big as earth was lush at origin had
oceans imagine yet has no
water anywhere
today. Venus
had runaway
greenhouse. Could Earth. Of course we know it could he says
at the podium which fits in my head in the spot for under-
standing,
the question is rather how long
before runaway
occurs
one bird now
close up by the white house on the green hill (crow)
like a lockpick
one caw one
into the wildly cursive announcing by flocks and swarms
as somewhere in space we turn are
turning,

the final snowball Earth was followed promptly
by the Cambrian explosion
he explains
then eukaryotic cells with membrane-bound nuclei
expanding rapidly into eleven different body plans
which eleven still encompass
all creatures ever to inhabit Earth—
at the edge of the woods now the thrush
being sung out entirely by
this thrush—
the whole forest moving—
under the eave the just-hatching new ones in
thunder
in their
having been born
in it—
this is what is—
what will the sunshine tomorrow feel like
for the first time striking them
skulls necks eyeslits
tightening everything
creaking, pushing open the immense door—
power down now but us in here scanning the screen
for the emergency we are in to appear *here it is*
and the sound of the flapping of water
in wind—
and the sound of the nations gathering
for their final
negotiation,
everyone trying to speak in

whole sentences, listen,
they keep breaking, the suitcases fall open, the
inky speeches
wash away in the downpour, what
will the delegates say now, listen,
it is 1965 in Selma, Alabama, the schoolboy is beginning again
his first-ever assignment in his one-room school,
he shall scratch a word
onto the blackboard,
whose turn is it he thinks chalk in hand
and will there be someone on the other side of this to meet me
on the other side of this word if I spell it out correctly
it is simple and powdery and made of
seven letters—
the force of the black is impossible to touch—
he stands there like a breeze still thinking he is dreaming
the dream he is late again for school but he is
not. He is on
time. It is his
turn. Who
is the teacher. What is that he feels at his back in his
shoulders. He looks at
his hand. Its swirling small shadow
round the still stick
of chalk—
from where in the earth
did it come
this piece of moonlight, piece of
dead coral.
Oh good dark he whispers to the black behind the shadows,

the hand-shadow being cast by his one self on the dark,
by the single lightbulb behind him the
hum,
his own knuckles here and the tightly-clenched fingers
wrapped like a bird-beak hard
round the chalk
gripping something to bring home
to the nest—
because it must be
shoved down
into the newborn, this cursive—must be
forced in—
that they be made to inhabit
another day—
it is so simple—
and the next-on curl—and the billowing handshadow
over each spot he need mark—
and how nothing can
stop it
this our mineral
imagination
as here now
on this page
this uniball pen
shall write
if I make it
his word out completely
over this
void

THE MASK NOW

Dying, Dad wanted sunscreen. Nonstop. Frantic if withheld. Would say *screen*, and we just did it. Knew he was dying. Was angry.

In last weeks wore red sleepmask over eyes day and night. Would ride it up onto his forehead for brief intervals, then down, pulled by hand that still worked. A bit. Sometimes shaking too much so just cried *eyes*. Cried *now now*. Once cried out *light*—more like a hiss—was there for that. Yanked it quick. Needed it so badly, the bandage, the

world is a short place, wanted the illustration of it gone, wanted to not see out, wanted no *out*. But I am guessing. The vineyards down the slope,

each latent bud beginning to plump. In the distance, mountains. Beyond sea. All of it distraction, but from what. A waste of what. The red sleepmask. I should have burned it with the rest but kept it. The pane made trees look painted on. Silky. Not good silky. In the next valley once,

hammering. Thought it human at first. The woodpeckers went on for

days. A carnival of searching for void. How full void is. Small tufts of grass growing so that I can keep track. *Taking root is not an easy way to*

go about finding a place to stay. Maybe nothing would happen after all. The hollowing-out now added to by crickets. Spiders making roads in sky. I watch. Look *at*, then *through*. What is the empty

part? Where. Can find nothing that is empty. Seems I should, and soon,
as

where would he go, or what would the indented place on the bed where

he had been *be*. Be *full of*. He was a settler in that flesh, that I could see.
Not far from breaking camp. Wrapping up the organs in their separate
parts—skin rolled away, eyes rolled elsewhere, the fingers tossed
aside—ash, ash—the whole like a dime toss, whom do I love, what
part,

what's in the *whom*, what's in the *late*, is there actually a *too late*—
because if there is I do not grasp it. *Mask* he calls, unable to get into
wheelchair any longer, stares for bit of time into the air out front, past

feet, out the glass door, to the olive tree and fig. Is there fire in the
distance. Squints once back up the ray of light, up, back its long road.
How far. *Mask now*. The cremation-decision driving its roots through
us

all—roots spreading wildly beyond the shadows of the head.

“Neighbors”

will continue to feed stump, book says, long after it is cut, will send it
sugars, phosphorous, nitrogen, all the surrounding trees will try, via
fungi, root hairs, send carbon, send enzymes, whole forest hears

stress signals, will mourn, like the elephant—“I’ve wrapped stumps in
black plastic when they’ve refused to die” says Leila, location
Wellington,

posted 4 years ago on *permagardening*. But then guard down. Eyes
gone.

A red cotton mask. An old TWA one. Elastic gone. Cries out if it slips
off.

Wants blue blanket. Says *blue*. Angry. Who was not angry. Nothing
enough. Wants to see all daily tests. Read the bloodwork. Wants trans-

fusions which we withhold. Would open him to infection. Would buy
no

time. I'm wearing the sleepmask now. I'm trying it on. Rubberband soft
with age. Adding more age. American red. Red full of noise, of
artificial

time. Feels like my face is painted on. A spirit. Upturned, ancient,
without

expression. An old stream flows alongside. Glimmering tongues
promise

the vanishing will be swift. It's a lie. The periphery disappears but I can
still feel it, our *knowing what's coming* a thicket we got lost in—till the
only thing is *now*—*mask* my spirit screams—mask now—vacancy

not coming fast enough—first we have to traverse the riddling
disappearances—*extinction* says the mask—go away now I do not want
to see you any longer—beauty you are too near—too near—I hear a
blackbird and the shoo of air where it lifts off—why won't you just
go, you circling winds leaves birds systems directions visibles
invisibles

honeysuckle limbs and rose gaining self-song, motion, entering this
continuum—oh continuum do not lie to me with this delicate weight of

time, this floating of *as ifs* and *further-ons* and all your guides to
dreaming, abundance, the coming true of the true. No. From under here,
listening hard, light feels around me almost visible, doused with
benzene, and time goes away, and my eyes feel on them the small
weight,

the minuscule *no* to things, which I can conjure, which I think I know
by

heart, but no, I do not, I need the mask. And it feels like an
idea. We are in a cave now. It is a hundred million years ago. They will

bring the meds again now and the urine pot—he yells for it—but for
now

under the mask it is a lowly spot, you can make dawn come,
you can feel us *inherit the earth*, the jay shifts in the tree and you can
hear it. There is little. You hear the little. Hear the head snapped on the
stem. Hear the angel trapped in the stone. Hear pure chance which
sounds like a boy marching alongside an army wanting to enlist. The
year is 1490, 380, 1774, 10 BCE. You hear the outline in the tree—why

because it touches the other outlines. If I try to raise the mask the hand
he can barely use flutters angry bird wing at me. Would hit me with
finger wings but too broken. Maybe in Lee's army, maybe in Grant's. It
made no difference in the end. Maybe in Caesar's maybe in Christ's.

The
trillions seem more clear than ever in the day behind the mask. The
dark
gray of the fever feels every inch of the bark. Freckled, the pure
proclamations being made by the light. It is not day it is saying, bright
as

quicklime, text of flames he can hear—no, not day—day sprawls under
to let us flow through over its parched back. Lies flat. Lie flat day he
thinks under the red mask. Spread yourself over us light, the dead at
Antietam yes his people, both sides, the cufflinks in the drawer he will
not see again—they were Lee's he would say—they were Grant's—I
saw

the will of the Davis' side—I did—he says, smell of gravel coming
from

the path, day sitting now over us like a lioness. It is neither dark nor

light. As if you are the place where the branch was sawed off—that

place

on the oak—and air silently touched your new raw end. You put it on,
you pull it down, and then effort, enlistment, singing, and you are given
a

fine practitioner's absence, you are a purpose surrounded by chance, a
hole in chance. You can feel the clouds move over the sun from here.
You can hear the sun return and the insect-hum spray up. You can lie
still

and feel this is the ultimate price. You feel it getting paid. By you. It is
you.

MOTHER'S HANDS DRAWING ME

Dying only mother's hands continue
 undying, blading into air,
 impersonal, forced, curving it
 down—drought incessant rain
 revolution and the organs shutting
 down but not these extremities,
 here since I first opened my first
 eyes first day and there they were,
delicate, pointing, will not back off,
 cannot be remembered. Mother,
 dying—mother not wanting to
 die—mother scared awakening
 each night thinking she's dead—
 crying out—mother not
 remembering who I am as I run
 in—who am I—mother we must
 take away the phone because who
 will you call next—now saying I
dreamt I have to get this dress on, if
 I get this dress on I will not die—
mother who cannot get the dress on
 because of broken hip and broken
 arm and tubes and coils and pan

and everywhere pain, wandering
delirium, in the fetid shadow-
world—geotrauma—trans-
natural—what is this message
you have been scribbling all your
life to me, what is this you drag
again today into non-being. Draw it.
The *me* who is not here. Who is the
ghost in this room. What am I that
is now drawn. Where are we
heading. Into what do you throw
me with your quick eye—up onto
me then down onto the blank of the
page. You rip the face
off. I see my elbow there where
now you bend it with the pen, you
fill it in, you slough it off me onto
more just-now making of more
future. You look back up, you take
my strangeness from me, you
machine me, you hatch me in. To
make what, mother, here in this
eternity this second this million
years where I watch as each thing is
seen and canceled-out and re-
produced—multiplying aspects of
light in the morning air—the
fingers dipping frantic into the bag
of pens, pencils, then here they
are—the images—and the hands

move—they are making a
line now, it is our world,
it horizons, we ghost, we sleepwalk,
everything around us is leveled,
canceled, we background, we
are barely remains, we remain, but
for what, the fingers are deepening
curling, bringing it round, the mind
does not—I don't think—know this
but the fingers, oh, for all my life
scribbling open the unseen,
done with mere things, not
interested in appraisal, just
seizure—what is meant by
seizure—all energy, business-
serious, about direction, tracing
things that dissolve from thingness
into in-betweens—here firm lines,
here powdery lift off—hunger,
fear—the study begins—all is not
lost—the thought a few seconds
wide—the perusal having gone
from here to here, aggregates,
thicket, this spot could be where
we came in, or where we are saved,
could be a mistake, looks across
room through me, me not here
then, me trying to rise in the beam,
nothing I do will make it
happen, rock-face, work that

excludes everything that is not
itself, all urge in the process of
becoming all effect, how can I touch
that hand like snow moving, when
is it time again as here there is no
time, or time has been loaded but
not cocked, so is held in reserve, all
wound up, I was also made but not
like this, I look for reluctance,
expectation, but those are not the
temperatures—if only I could be in
the scene—my time is not
passing—whose is the time that is
passing—the hands rushing across
the paper, cloudy with a sun
outside also rushing scribbling—
wisdom turning itself away from
wisdom to be—what—a thing that
would gold-up but cannot, a patch
of blue outside suddenly like the
cessation of language when lips
cease to move—sun—self-
pronouncing—I want this to not be
my writing of it, want my hands not
to be here also, mingling with hers
who will not take my hand ever into
hers, no matter how late we are, no
matter that we have to run so fast
through all these people and I need
the hand, somewhere a radiant

clearing, are we heading for it, head
down towards the wide page, hand
full of high feeling, cannot tell if it
takes or gives, cannot tell what it is
that is generating the line, it comes
from the long fingers but is not
them, all is being spent, the feeling
that all—all that we need or have—
would be spent for this next thing,
this capture, actually loud though
all you can hear is the small
scratching, and I feel dusk
approaching though it is still early
afternoon, just slipping,
no one here to see this but me, told
loud in silence by arcs, contours,
swell of wind, billowing, fluent—
ink chalk charcoal—sweeps, spirals,
the river that goes
nowhere, that has survived the
astonishments and will never
venture close to that heat again, is
cool here, looking up at what,
looking back down, how is it
possible the world still exists, as it
begins to take form there, in the not
being, there is *once* then there is the
big vocabulary, loosed, like
a jay's song thrown down when the
bird goes away, cold mornings,

hauling dawn away with it, leaving
grackle and crow in sun—they have
known what to find in the unmade
undrawn unseen unmarked and
dragged it into here—that it be
visible.

RUNAWAY

I

ALL

*Or if then thou gavest
me all,
All was but all.*

—Donne

After the rain stops you can hear the rained-on.
You hear oscillation, outflowing, slips.
The tipping-down of the branches, the down, the
exact weight of those drops that fell

over the days and nights, their strength, accumulation,
shafting down through the resistant skins,
nothing perfect but then also the exact remain
of sun, the sum

of the last not-yet-absorbed, not-yet-evaporated
days. After the rain stops you hear the
washed world, the as-if inquisitive garden, the as-if-perfect beginning again
of the buds forced open, forced open—you

cannot not unfurl
endlessly, entirely, till it is the yes of blossom, that end

not end—what does that sound sound like
deep in its own time where it roots us out

completed, till it is done. But it is not done.
Here is still strengthening. Even if only where light
shifts to accord the strange complexity which is beauty.
Each tip in the light end-outreaching as if anxious

but not. The rain stopped. The perfect is not beauty.
Is not a finished thing. Is a making
of itself into more of itself, oozing and pressed
full force out of the not-having-been

into this momentary being—cold, more
sharp, till the beam passes as the rain passed,
tipping into the sound of ending which does not end,
and giving us that sound. We hear it.

We hear it, hands
useless, eyes heavy with knowing we do not
understand it, we hear it, deep in its own
consuming, compelling, a dry delight, a just-going-on sound not

desire, neither lifeless nor deathless, the elixir of
change, without form, we hear you in our world, you not of
our world, though we can peer at (though not into)
flies, gnats, robin, twitter of what dark consolation—

though it could be light, this insistence this morning
unmonitored by praise, amazement, nothing to touch
where the blinding white thins as the flash moves off

what had been just the wide-flung yellow poppy,

the fine day-opened eye of hair at its core,
complex, wrinkling and just, as then the blazing ends, sloughed off as if a
god-garment the head and body
of the ancient flower had put on for a while—

we have to consider the *while* it seems
to say or I seem to say or
something else seems to we are not
nothing.

TREE

Today on two legs stood and reached to the right spot as I saw it
choosing among the twisting branches and multifaceted changing shades,
and greens, and shades of greens, lobed, and lashing sun, the fig that seemed to
me the

perfect one, the ready one, it is permitted, it is possible, it is

actual. The VR glasses are not needed yet, not for now, no, not for this while
longer. And it is warm in my cupped palm. And my fingers close round but not
too

fast. Somewhere wind like a hammerstroke slows down and lengthens
endlessly. Closer-in the bird whose coin-toss on a metal tray never stills to one

face. Something is preparing to begin again. It is not us. *Shhh* say the spreading
sails of

cicadas as the winch of noon takes hold and we are wrapped in day and hoisted
up, all the ribs of time showing through in the growing in the lengthening
harness of sound—some gnats nearby, a fly where the white milk-drop of the

torn stem starts. Dust on the eglantine skin, white powder in the confetti of light
all up the branches, truth, sweetness of blood-scent and hauled-in light, withers
of

the wild carnival of tree shaking once as the fruit is torn from its dream. Remain
I

think backing away from the trembling into full corrosive sun. Momentary
blindness

follows. Correction. There are only moments. They hurt. Correction. Must I put
down

here that this is long ago. That the sky has been invisible for years now. That the
ash

of our fires has covered the sun. That the fruit is stunted yellow mold when it
appears

at all and we have no produce to speak of. No longer exists. All my attention is

free for you to use. I can cast farther and farther out, before the change, a page
turned,

we have gone into another story, history floundered or one day the birds dis-
appeared. The imagination tried to go here when we asked it to, from where I
hold the

fruit in my right hand, but it would not go. Where is it now. Where is this *here*
where

you and I look up trying to make sense of the normal, turn it to life, more life,
disinterred from desire, heaved up onto the dry shore awaiting the others who
could

not join us in the end. For good. I want to walk to the left around this tree I have
made

again. I want to sit under it full of secrecy insight immensity vigor bursting
complexity

swarm. Oh great forwards and backwards. I never felt my face change into my
new

face. Where am I facing now. Is the question of good still stinging the open
before us

with its muggy destination pitched into nothingness? Something expands in you
where it wrenches-up its bright policing into view—is this good, is this the good
—

under the celebrating crowd, inside the silences it forces hard away all round

itself,
where chanting thins, where we win the war again, made thin by bravery and
belief,
here's a polaroid if you want, here's a souvenir, here now for you to watch
unfold, up
close, the fruit is opening, the ribs will widen now, it is all seed, reddish foam,
history.

I'M READING YOUR MIND

here. Have been for centuries. No, longer. Everything already has been. It's not a reasonable place, this continuum between us, and yet here again I put the olive trees in, turn the whole hill-sweeping grove down, its mile-long headfuls of leaves upswept so the whole valley shivers its windy silvers,

watery ... A strange heat is upon us. Again. That was you thinking that. I *suggested* it.

Maybe the wind did. We both put in the horizon-line now, the great loneliness, its

grip, chaos recessed but still there. *After finitude you shall keep coming towards me* it

whines, whitish with non-disappearance. We feel the same about this. The same

what? We feel the *is-there-more*. That's the default. We want to live with the unknown

in front of us. Receding, always receding. A vanishing moving over it all. A sleepy

vacancy. It's the sky, yes, but also this thinking. As from the start, again, here I am,

a mind alone in the fields, the sheep riding and falling the slants of earth, the

drowsiness a no-good god come to assume we are halfwits, tending, sleepy, these

animals gurgling and trampling, thistle-choked, stinging. A dove on a stone. No

sky

to speak of. And the god lingers, wants to retire, thinks this is endgame. What could we be—mist about to dry off, light about to wipe a wall for no reason, that

random? This must have been way BC. Or is it 1944. Surely in 2044 we shall be standing in the field again, tending, waiting to surprise this god who thinks he knows

what he's made. Well no. He does not know. We might be a small cavity but it guards a vast hungry—how bad does *that* hurt you, fancy maker—you have no idea

what we turned our backs on to come be in this field of earth and tend—yes tend
—

these flocks of minutes, whispering till the timelessness in us is wrung dry and we

are heavied with endgame. Have I mentioned the soul. How we know you hustled

that in, staining this flesh with it, rubbing and swirling it all over inside with

your god-cloth. Rinse. Repeat. Get this—here with this staff which soon I shall turn

into a pen again—brilliantly negligent, diligent, inside all this self truly formless
—I

hear the laughter of the irrigation ditch I've made, I see the dry field blonde-up and

green, day smacks its lips—& they are back, the inventors, they are going to do it

again, sprinkle-seed, joker-rain coming to loosen it all. How many lives will we be

given, how many will we trade in for this one—it comes in bushels, grams, inches, notes,

crows watch over it all as they always have, come back from the end of time to

caw

it into its redo again. Cherish us. We will not stop. Nothing to show for it but
doing. The

flock runs across as the dog chases and I walk slowly. I admire what I own, what
I am,

and I think the night is nothing, the stars click their ascent, & I feel it rise in me,
the

word, I feel the skull beneath this skin, I feel the skin slick and shine and hide
the skull, and it is from there that it rises now, I taste it before I say it, this song.

MY SKIN IS

parched, on tight, questioned, invisible, full of so much evolution, now the
moment is

gone, begin again, my skin, here, my limit of the visible me, I touch it now, is
spirit-filled, naturally-selected, caught in the storm here under this tree, propped
up by

history, *which*, I don't know which, be careful, you can't love everyone—

brought to you by Revlon, melancholy, mother's mother, the pain of others,
spooky up close in this mirror here, magnified to the 100th, brutal no-color
color,

what shall I call it, shall I pass, meandering among the humans, among their
centuries, no safe haven this *as if*, this spandex over a void, no exception, god

watching though casually, paring, paring, a glance once in a while—what am I
missing—what am I supposed to do now suddenly, what at the last minute here
—

what is there to fix—are we alone—am I—packaged so firmly for this short
interval—vigorous skin, doomed outsideness of me—sadder & no wiser here,

blown up, so close, so *only here*, I see you net that skeins me in, tight inside my
inwardness—at *this* border judged—at *this* edge bleeding when hit—as was for a
while—didn't know enough to leave—didn't see the farewell—right there in
front of

me—must it always end this way—must I ceaselessly be me, reinvent you, see
the

artifice *us*, feel hand-to-face the childhood gone, the starlight the wind the gaze
the
race, the stranger not knowing, the unsaid unsaid, unseen unfound—look how
full of
void it is this capture, this skin no one can clean, and thoughts right there
beneath—of course you cannot see me for this wrapping—I notice the cover of
your

face, the dress *you* hide beneath, you sitting there, reading me—pay mind, pay it
out, peering as we are at each other here—dermal-papilla pigment-layer
nerve-fiber blood and lymph, can we still fit into this strictest time, so quick, one
click and
hurry up—we've been trying forever now to get out of this lonely place—
inside's inside—

the movie of the outside was all about exploring, we explored, we found what
we
should never touch, we touched, we touch, what's so unusual we say, you are
now
mine we say, this is the feature coming on, this future, so full of liking & fine
dis-
closure, a bud-tip pushing aside its sheath, then standing there, very whole now,
very

official, open to damp, heat, stippling, shadow—to freckle, slap, beauty or no
beauty—please help me here as I can't tell—the trees don't know—the wind
won't speak—the gods should but their names are being withheld—because
some of us
are murdered, and some of us have mouths that keep saying yes, do that to me

again, I know it hurts but yes, I am an American and I like it harder than you'll
ever
know, this is Tuesday, the day rises with its fist over the harbor saying give it to

me

and the day obliges, saying more, more, do you want more, and the torch of
dawn

says more, yes more, ask for my identification, my little pool of identification,
here

on the only road, arrested again among the monuments.

WHEN OVERFULL OF PAIN I

lie down on this floor, unnotice, try to recall, stir a little but not in heart, feel rust
coming, grass going, if I had an idea this time, if I could believe in the
cultivation, just piece it together, the fields the sky the wetness in the right spot,
it

will recline the earth it does not need your map, the rows you cut into it make
their

puzzled argument again, then seed, Spring has a look in its eye you should not
trust

anymore, just look at it watching you from its ditch, its perch, heavy on the
limbs,

not reproach exactly not humor though it could be sly this one who will outlive
you

of course, this one who will cost you everything, yes, sly—do you catch my
meaning

says the cosmos-laden morning, I will cover you with weeds, I will move
towards

beginning but I will not begin again, the marsh gleams does it not, the two
adolescent girls walking through it now, in the reprieve, they remind you, do
they

not, a summer frock underneath, a heavy coat over, so ready, the idea of a
century

being *new* beckoning, this one will end, that one we will traverse into via small

bomb perhaps, and the marsh waits, speckling, unremarkable, but yet you want
to
remark it, even by looking away you want to keep it normal, normal you say,
rust
can you be normal in me, marsh with your rusty grasses come, bring it again my

normal, a bit frostbitten at the start of the day, but now warming where the
horizon
blues, where the wren has alighted right here camouflaged in normalcy, he left
one
feather on the ground, I'll bend to pick it up after he goes, it too is all wings the
day,
it flaps its brightness on and the fields flatten, the sun lies oily in the sillion,
furrow-

slice, mold. Are you with me. It's not a good idea this one. The assembly lines,
the
jet trails, the idea of prayer, thievery, scaffolds, money, how quickly they all
vanished. The new thing now is not going to be new by the time you read this.
And
even as I look at it, trying to feel the seed pushed in, the brimming of those
shoots,

the eyes of the hare in the ditch pecked out, the horse standing in the field whose
breath is plume—gaze after gaze I look at this foreign country, which was so
ready,
which fell ill so suddenly. We were driving along in one century, we took a back
road, it
was allowed, there was a herd of goats, we got out to see, they came up to us
making

sounds like Latin, they were thin, gray, caked legs with seaweed hair. We looked
at

each other. Gradually something passed from one creature to the other. Which
one
was I. I want this normal again. Did I remember just now that this all
disappeared. I
lie on this floor. I feel the wide slats of the old-growth pine along my back. They
push up into my gravity, I think, I push my place down into place, eyes closed I
push
down through the subflooring the foundation into gray soil not touched by light
in
centuries. I'll break it open now. I'll push into the roots that died when place was
cleared of place. Dismembered roots, here was my zip, my street address. My
name.

OVERHEARD IN THE HERD

You have to make sure you have skin in the game was one of the rules they yelled out near the end. Also one must *have hope*. Also *watch the clock, the clock is*

running out. Out of what. I had hoped to escape. To form one lucid unassailable thought. About what? It did not matter *about what*. It just needs to be, to be

shapely and true. Let me tell you. To feel a thought one came up with one's self. Out of one's *interiority*. There. That's the whole story. If humanity. If to hang on
claw

back what to call it. However atrophied. Not *not-living*. Yes horribly close-quartered. However much we missed the bus. However much we should have

been there while it lasted. Hear us: it lasted. Even here off the bus its lastingness keeps blossoming & spooling onward. Yes *it's a game it's always just a game*.

The wind is

hissing this all afternoon. But even it, raspy and weakening, plunders this space
that it

might find some emptiness. *From mind*. Lean in & you'll hear plenitude. Listen
it's trying

to make a void again. In which to hear itself. It's too alone. Everything wants
em-

bodiment. But there's this noise now it's replacing everything. This humming of
agreement

fast-track skipped-step information yes yes yes yes lost hope lost will—dear dis-

embodiment, here is an old wind, watch it orchestrate event, I raise my hand to
find

my face again, I know I am supposed to think I'm whole, there is no holiness in
me,

can I begin again, I'd like to try to get this right, we might if gotten right go
on, whom am I speaking to, whom, I'll pick up the acid the wrappers the 3D
glasses, I'll

gather up the spotless tools printers magnifiers, the place is wired for sound I'll
cut

the wires, I'll drag the cursors off, I'll sweep it clean, they've taught me to, I
think this way

because I am human, that's my secret occupation, I am unusually common, I can
get it

right if you just tell me, we have a shot, whom am I speaking to, why is that
laughter

seeping-out nonstop from the invisible, from hospice hospital embassy cathedral
—

oh ghost institutions—why must you hover here—spy here—before me always
though in-

visible. Or is it invincible. I can't make out the words being said. Or is it sent. In
my

direction. I'll wait for an answer. I have indeed nothing better to do. I have
nothing

actually at all to do. We cannot remember having that—a thing to *do*. To *be*
needed

what was that like. To figure, discover, uncover, recover. To make bring think
shape.

To fold, to crease prepare serve-up. To imagine. To buy hold name sell. To
shape. To

order. This haunts us now. To make a thing for another. For another's use. To
fashion,
to offer, to bring, hide, make. To serve. Oh to serve.... My new humanity is now
relieved of

duty. My soul has its alarm turned off. No my soul has this knot in its throat—or
is it a

gag—pacified, petrified, up all night counting silently towards infinity. Losing
its

place. How many of us are left. What else could happen. Has it all already
happened.

Who is they. That autocorrected to *thy*. Why. No matter what I say it fixes it. It's
fixed.

[TO] THE LAST [BE] HUMAN

Today I am getting my instructions.
I am getting them from something holy.
A tall thing in a nest.
In a clearing.
There is a little dread no memory and everything's looking for
signs. We don't know
if this is the way forward or the way
back. Do you? Is it a hundred yards or a million years. A small conifer
appears to be laughing.
Wind would be nice but
it's only us shaking.
Listen up it says. Loosen up. It's all going to be
ok. Going to be fine. Give me your hand. What is this you
are giving me, where are
your hands, what can you
grip. The thing I am asking for, it is not made of
words. No. It is not made of
data. No.
Let's get the map I say. Let's
browse through. Over here famine over here
switchbacks over here to the best of my recollection haunted
faces of those on
the road. The road itself moving as if in a

molten fury. One of us had come back from some other place—
Alaska, a father dying in rage, screaming on his
floor, saved by
nothing.

We're so full of the dead the burnt fronds
hum, getting going each day again into too much sun to no
avail. I was human. I would have liked to speak of
that. But not now. Now is more
complicated. I have no enemy except day. The edges
turn hot and
stay
hot. Shadow hard to find and those threads of it
like hoarded rations. Temp dies down only
slightly but it is
everything, lungs tight as fists inside, yr name just about stripped from
u if u try to say it out
loud, fetuses like flames going out as they
arrive. Someone found a light bulb in a spot where mud still
was. It looks more alive than we had
recalled. We imagine what it
might seem like
lit. A palpitation of light strokes our imaginations. We are never sure
what was memory, sweet, burning, gigantic, silent—
long erasure underneath the
wind—which comes by so in-
frequently we all stop when it
arrives.
You remember u understood completely *that u are lost*.
The phone call comes. You pick up the
receiver and hear the

final sounds of the islands. They are murmuring we want to
weep and lie down. They lie down. Voice lies
down. Says hello
in the normal way. So it all seems like
the world as it had always been, has always been. Here in the
sliver-end of the interglacial
lull. Human time. It
seems.

Then the voice says it's not good
news. From now on you are alone. Whatever *before* had meant
before, now there is a blister over time. Savor of the up-
ahead—lovely blown dust at yr footsteps—gone.

So one has to figure out now how to
understand
time. Your time & then
time. Planet time and then yr
protocols, accords, tipping points,
markers. Each has a prognosis. Each has
odds. You stop on the bridge in the evening on your way
home and look down to see the
empty riverbed
flow. In you
the minutes flow.

The idea is to feel them?
What are our rates of speed. Where is runaway. How far
away. I listen for it.
The city sounds. The sockets of
my eyes, I feel them. The dust
that will cover it all. The sky peered into when I am gone by
others.

Will the river fill again.
Will there be pity taken.
Will it ever rain again.
What is *ever*. What is *again*.
What is it we mean by
ok. Take this October. The deep white turn the air is taking.
How many more
Octobers. Is there another October with us in it.
Blood flows in my hand writing this.
The crows glance through the upper branches.
They are not waiting.

FROM THE TRANSIENCE

May I help you. No. In the mirror? No. Look there is still majesty, increase, sacrifice. Night in the flat pond. Moon in it/on it disposing entirely of mind. No. Look there is desert where there was grassland there is sun-inundation like a scrupulous meditation no message just mutter of immensity where it leaks into

partiality. Into you/me. Our boundaries now in the epic see-through, how they elude

wholeness, let in illusion, pastness, whole years in a flash, then minutes that do not

end—that desert—that jungle. No you say, no world, swamp, reeds, grassy shapes,

beginning of endings, no you say staring right back at event—it keeps

turning—no that will not be the shape I am/it is/again—it just *was*—the *shape* it was

was never the shape it was—sharpness is melding into blur—used to be the sublime—

used to be present tense—seat of the now-dissolved *now*. No. My self, my one *one-*

self isn't working for me. *I* flaps its empty sleeves. Habit stares at the four

horsemen from the end's endlessly festooned terrace. It stares. Bullets whine. *I* dreams of being a girl, a man, of wearing hooves, of being just sweat and whinnying,

I smears itself with hope fear disorder opinion, leaves a trail of—what is it of—a

smear of beginning, of circles about to close, the manes are tossing in the
light. No. Do not trust what I see. Do not trust you. Do not trust my own saying
of the
not trust. Do not trust world, the no-place into which I place my *no*, the *state of*
mind
into which I must clamp my mind, these objects which do not exist, no do not, in
the
actual, which *depart from* reality. *Swim against current* my opacity my soul
whirs,

swim hard against the current state of.... May I touch the place that is you. No.
Would you have had a place once. Yes. Is there a present tense now. No. What is
there? *Touch it*. This place where we share this mind. It will be our first and last.
Our first and last *what?* Our first and last. Did we live among men. Were we
mouth-

pieces. Where is the mask that worked so well. The carnival. The puppetmaster
who
held my strings—my strings—here was my arm as it reached out a hand to you,
to
express love, to rid itself of love—here was my mouth in which breathing forced
awake the unending sounds, of blood, of ink, so each made of himself a net,

a grip upon place. Such as this present I can summon here with you. *Here*.
Now, remember that. I see you nowhere, I hear you nowhere, we are
on different pages, not a different story, the ancestor the divided cell keeps
asking have you heard the nightingale—no—have not—listening now is

few and far between—mostly it is more opaque—not talk, not thought, but
like it. But you are still standing there. So very bright, my past. Hello. Dear
fission,

my self isn't working for me. It's involved with arithmetic. It's trying to correct
itself so that

it fits, to slice itself, dismember, un-remember, cut off, sew on, recall until it can
be

counted on, or in, or up, or down. It says some right fit must be found—restored
resolved

bought-up doomed-to—it must be worn more artlessly the new thing they will
call

the self—we must not make the same mistake again—what was it was mistaken
ask

the vigorous winds, bending down gently as if to lift us up, right through our
throats

as fish used to be hooked when there were fish—for nothing is more important
than

this new face that must shake the whole thing down & laugh & bring-up the rear.

What time is it. Are we already in the necroscape. Even as a machine I recall
the dust and ash which everyone assured everyone else was just a small
digression.

PRAYER FOUND UNDER FLOORBOARD

Listen. We are crowds now. We gather in the eardrum of.
The scaffolding grows.
As if the solution.
There is not a soft part of us.
Except for the days in us.
We let the pieces fall where they may.
The visible in its shell gets smashed.
The desperation re
the gorgeous raw material—earth—the sensation of
last night, storms spilled, plumed, odor of
looking for the various directions
though it makes no difference.
I have seen
nothing. It is deafening. It shakes with laughter
with ways of looking. It rattles. Listen. How much is it now
the thing I want?
The soft wind is it recompense?
But I was trying to tell you about us now.
How we finally realized we made no difference.
And the visible we love. Its notes its intervals.
Over which the sunlight still proceeds shivering with precision.
With the obligation of precision.
The visible whose carapace we love.

And how our love is *that we are seen*.

All the way into
the mind *are seen*.

The earth with its fingers in our mouth nose ears.

The visible with its ghosts its smooth utmosts.

And weight and limit—how they heave

up—pray for us we are destroyers—

pray we fail—the mind must fail—

but still for now a while longer let me

who am part of it & must fail & the pieces

which must not *fall where they may*,

they must not, as all is hearing this

from the deep future, deep origin.... cry.

Cry mind sick with the delight of getting it always only right.

Cry fingering the earth every crevice.

Cry all the trees like a problem you
can solve.

How could you not have maintained steady state.

It is lean this unfolding of
your days over this earth. Listen, a flap
where a gate shuts, where the next step is
coldly placed without hope—& crackles
rising where your footfall goes—oh

I am huge—I would
take back names give up the
weight of being give up place
delete *there* delete *possess*, go,
love, notice, shape, drift, to be in minutes once again, in just one hour
again. Look
my small hand comes out of my pocket

asking to *touch* one more time. Without
taking. To touch. To not take away
any sensation any memory. To come to
the feeling-about at the edge of the object
and stay. Release focus. Release shape.

If we
back off release blind ourselves thumb away hope ...

But I am huge.

CARNATION/RE-IN

I am down to my food. I root and divide. I am not pushed down I push. I with
my
mouth use my nose where are my hands. I say who am who am I
now. I ask what color am I now. I try to feel my skin but my head is fixed to my
food and my hands where are my hands. What skin am I I ask. You have no skin

they say. You are wrapped don't worry you won't fall out. It's a new material.

Am I

alive. Of course you are. You are always going to be alive. If I could just turn
and

look at my self. Do I have a self where are my hands but then feel fingers and
they are tucked in. We used to have skins. Do I have the other parts. Am I

on my knees. I must be pretty normal I think. Am I normal I ask. Human? I talk
to

you you answer me are we speaking *what* are we speaking. Are these words
actually being pronounced. I remember. I remember we were overfull of
pain. The house went under the mud. It was an avalanche it went under but not

into the earth. Now now is everything. Near the top they are still looking for
bodies. Deep under some other *people* will find books. They will find my pills
and

shoes. I imagine my red shoe being found "when the geology thinned earth
again"

and up it shoved into history, & my nightstand, & the towel I had just put down,

&

the bronze buddha from that world, the kitchen pots, my teacup was just full of tea. Before that fire came. We burned but enough survived that we had to go on

living. Now that there is nothing now. Now that if. Look back you see a continent of _____. Where there had been. I went forward on this piece of time. Called it a

road. Tried to feel my step. There is some kind of movement I am making. *Into forward* I remember thinking. I remember thinking. This is a narrow place. Is it now. Try to feel if you have footing. A tightrope of feel/no feel. There is sun it seems, I am high up in the burned no-root-life, I net it in place, we left place under

the avalanche, five inches in five minutes I remember *came down*, down is where,

what is *up*. But I can still see the mountain up against the sky. Where it was supposed to be. What is supposed to be. And the _____ between its peaks. I walk out again looking. I look..... out. Sometimes down. At _____. See

below. See the _____ spread out over what we had made of. The earth. Streets houses plots lawns our view each slightly different. Now I am in. The earth. I wade out through it. The earth. My neighbor is under went in a flash. The door flew & she was under. My other neighbor is in the tree. The child ours stayed on

her couch would not come called called called. Here we are told *they* sit there underneath for good. Encased in. The earth. It closes over again now it has taken what was needed in payment desire what am I to do with it yes I feel them my hands but can't won't raise them to look am told to carry myself forward in this

walking forward every where is forward. I remember gravity. Remember place.

BECOMING OTHER

The corpse at the heart of our theorization of us. That turn back to look. Once again.

Ignoring the mirror. Baroque turn. Who *are* you. Non-alive. Being's obsession. I'll

take your photograph. Are you on holiday. I need a servant. No, I need to be a servant. That is the [only] source of pleasure now. Pleasure now. Neither one thing

nor another. Between two fixed states. Decomposing. Pleasure now. Formless as....

Begin again. A substance that does not hold its form. What *up-holds*? Can it be over-

thrown? No. Delights you to death. Rides the back of time to the mass grave.

Takes

its time. Spreads like memory or a shade through an afternoon in summer, time itself the detention camp, accident a gleam in the eye of time—one day I was born—

that was my important point—my point of view—but you do not *realize* you're an

aperture in time, an asking-for, a decision cast like the spell of a wild die through the *yes/no*. I was a woman. Not as untroubled as I seem. As we seem. As I think. I

have interests. It seems to me they are mine. This identity you are listening to, here,

is an embarrassment of riches—take my picture, take care of me, take forever,
take
this in hand, in mind, this emptiness into which we slap a purpose, shuttered
against

the eyes of neighbors. Our personhood. So dressed-up this nakedness. Pre-need.
Pre-individual. Then post. Under-ripe then overripe before you even feel it slip
by.

I have to get the pills, the wind comes up, the dazzled memory of having had
shiny
expectations, no matter, the grass shivered, then the stars, you'll know how to
stand,
you'll know how to lie with another, you'll feel that new flat solitude. You're
free,

aren't you. The signs at the crossroad are pointless. For those trips out of the
ghetto

I decided not to see that I couldn't see. Unlike the hawk. Drink up. You only
have

these dregs of sun. The worst has befallen. It won't see you through.

Boundlessness came and went and you stood and walked. There was the wasted
splendor of day every day. No one looked. Vastness played all over us, slippery,
&

slid off like a ring into the sea. We looked through the roiling waters but tide
came in fast. Years later in the tub you still run your hand through the fold. Who
are you. Nothing in all the directions. A sapphire. Keep groping. The wide open
grave awaits the sacrament of your mindless waiting. Imploding last stand of the
small human. Voluptuousness of defeat. We are fanatical. What are we supposed
to

admit to, possess, name. Far from diminishing the appetite for power, this
suffering

gorges it. Mind loves it. Renunciation our active ingredient. Our formula for
post-
animality. The pre-personal pilot of what. *In* what. Row. Row, thermospasm. Be
in
being for now. Brief progeny. Row. Merrily. Gently. Down. The stream will
hold you
for now—machinic and hungry. Pre. Post. No. Where? Reflection is very late.
Row

in your amniotic sac—hope for mud, slime, mold, dust, running water, flame.
Rain.

THAW

There is a plot in the back of my building.
Not the size of the asteroid.
Not what four
hyper-crenellations of a reef would have held when there were
reefs. It's still here. I must not
get the time
confused. The times. There is a coolness in it which would have been new
Spring. I can't tell if it's
smell, as of blossoms which would have been just then
beginning, or of loam. Through this
green sensation is
a thing which threads & pushes
up. What is it pushes it. Whatever pushes it we
must not get the feelings confused, the feelings of this—in this—
now. One of us looks in
the field guide. One of us looks up to where the sky had been.
Our prior lives press on us.
Something with heavy re-
collection in it
presses. Not
history anymore of course but
like it. Is it five minutes or 500 years. Can we pencil that
in. Next to the ashheap. The windowless classroom or what we still call

class-
rooms. Out of habit. Which feel, as the monitors speak, like
they're filling with snow. Each creature sits
alone. Is that what it is, a
creature. It feels like a resurrected thing, this sensation I have of a
creature. I carry certain stains with me. I can imagine
loneliness which is an error I know. I think of causes &
effects which is a form of regret. I imagine this veil
shall be lifted again and something like a face in a mirror
appear. And it will be me. Will be a room as rooms used to be to us.
And us in them.

As a family or as lovers. We shall be lifted and we shall touch
in the old way. Just a hand on another. Not meaning that
much but still a small weight. With
meaning. A feeling of a harboring inside which reminds one of having a
mind. A feeling that one could
die for instance.

So there was
mystery, hope, fear, loneliness.
A sudden alarm from not-knowing and being startled by an in-
comprehensible terror or some other reaction
to change. There was
change. A person could be-
come. You could look into a face &
not know. There was rain & you would hardly notice.
It could rain for hours. The face would be there inside
its otherness, the way its body, which you could not imagine the in-
wardness of, moved, each one
moved,
differently, completely

differently. Why is it now you summon
streets. How they ran everywhere away. You could be in a strange
place and not know. You could be
lost. You could be as if
thrown away from the real. A trembling thing. A
journey. Lost yes—but not wrong in being. And from there you
could see a face which was a stranger. And it
would have a look which you had to wait for.
Because it was *its* look.
Because you could not program it or request it.
Because it was not yours.
Not yours.
And when it came your way like a strange turning
it brought a gaze with it. An ex-
pression. A thing given to you you had not made or owned or seen
before.
That's all. You do not know how to go on from here.
You do not know how to imagine further
into the past.
You want to remember what it was to see a look.
There is one look among all the unprogrammable looks you want to recall.
You raise your hands to your face to feel for it, can you force it.
It was like this:
someone turned your way.
It was a free turn. It was made by them freely.
And what they did then was this.
You had done something. You
seemed to become un-
masked. You
had done something you should not have done. You felt in you that u

wished you had not.
And they did something with their free face,
they tossed it out at you,
a thing not yours to dial-up or own—a thing free—a free thing—
they forgave you.
You are not sure you know what this means. But you are sure this happened
once. You
were a thing
that required it.
And it was a thing which was not exact, not on time, not wired-in,
which was able to arrive in
time—just in time—& could be
given.

EXCHANGE

You. You at the door a crumpled thing when I open
surprised. *Sing*, you hiss. *Prosecute*, *sentence*, waving your thin not-arms like a
dollar
bill, your bewildering moldy skin—one or two of you are you, are you a god
now,
bony, wing-beaten down, smaller than
ever, not dead as you should be but not
alive either as you indicate mumbling almost falling in on
your clawed feet—*I still have desire*—you float—at my
small door—me inside—me inside life. Are you newborn now, I
ask. Are you remnant. Why. *Why are there moneylenders*
you say swatting me away when I ask can I help, growing more
crumbled, but more than just cloth—all feather
burlap, beak, finger grip, all edge and cling. A thing not
formed or not divided yet. Pre-conception. Just at the threshold. Almost falling
in your
uneven crouching. Your chest a pulsation. A languishment that will not

die. What is *die*. Now there is not blood on the earth
anymore. We disappear. We pixilate. Races or places, is it.
Which? Remember what it was to carry your load? Your *you*. That
weight. Wondrous it was. At intervals light-struck. Silence and then the
cutting of water, sleeping audible, thrown about by breath, keeping a sharp
lookout—

here's where free choice vanished, here rights, here the
real meaning of the word—(you choose)—consequence, capital, commodity,
con-

sumption. Community? *Come here* says time. Just try to
find it, the *here*. Such a good game to keep you
occupied for now. The rest of the now. It's going to be a long
time. Why are you here. *What are they lending you.*

How can it be loaned. What is a loan. The changers.

Who gets to keep it. No one gets to keep it. No one. None of it.

What is *it*. The money changers. What can

you change *it* into. What else do you

want the *things* to become. But it won't stay still as

currency either. It will be changed again.

Shape-shifting and all the other tiny adjustments. Currency
manipulation—feel it—all those other

hands on it, each with its own need, having

held it—grasped, changed, folded, tucked, handed—oh

look it becomes virtual—the fingerprint is lifted off,

its little stain—no one's need is on it any-

more. It's clean. It has never been, and never again

will be, touched. The looping ledger of the fingerprint's

wish. I signed my name to this. *Did you*. In the hush. At the center.

Among the closed shutters at the height of the day I

signed. I clenched the pen and then my dream. It flowed. No one is

ever at home. I don't know why. Had been told to live by any means

possible. Did. Beyond, the sea. You could feel this period coming to

an end. All of it. A bomb went off, legs went off, means went

off, blew off, like gossamer—nothing stalled—you couldn't get it to

stall—seemed painted-on but it was not, was sleeping, reality finally was
sleeping—so deeply—you couldn't wake it up again, you couldn't
wake yourself again—it rained—time sputtered now and then like a
regurgitation

of space. It's a jail, light says, but it looks like just being
lost, full of the things we needed to learn, us ready to step up and offer
our lungs, intake and out, *change me* we say. We want to be
identified, written-in, collected. Worth me up. Give me my true
value ...

But still I have to bring this to you in these

words, cracked glaze all over it, little holes over it, belief drilled through,
self, that boutique, gone under, such dark windows, history arrested....
History arrested. How is that possible. It flowed. It flowed without us, us on it if
we

could catch a ride sometimes. How do you live in this end. I look at you. You
have been

through. Your war is done. I try to squint it in. Do you really want to
begin again. Is that why you're here. I feel I could count your
fingers, each hair left on you, each thread of skin, each crease. Four or five times
you

cast a glance on us. But then it's done. Your passing by us now a
buzzing of flies. You stand at the window and the song begins. We don't know
what to do with it, the moon, that monster, the fame and the thirst,
the night out there a shirt rolled up to reveal what dusk had
hid—a murky heart, a love that would never be replaced.

But they are still there on the steps—the money changers. The steps
of evening rise. They want you to exchange. That is the sacrament. Why does he
keep throwing them out.

Day after day. Forever. Listen to me, you say, you are going off into
thought, it is not a real road. Take yourself

off the road. He is and is not but he is. And
you are always in the holy place. Because
just being in it makes it holy. Uphold it. Linger. Be eternal for this
instant. Lodge in. I cannot say *in what*. Have spent a lifetime saying *in*. In flow,
in promise, rich, in haste experiment crowd season in bias gnawing at
hope invisible in time standing in it confounded tongue in my mouth about to
curl up, speak, promise, taste promise, laugh at the ignorance, cherish
ignorance—don't leave—this is where I've arrived—don't
slip away, the reverse of the watching and waiting is finally here, wasn't mine,
wasn't

me speaking either. Not anymore. This is that dream. The darling of
failure. No identification. All impending and then the *now* strikes. It is
unbreakable. It is. You must believe me. I want to be here and also there where
you
receive this but I can't. That's the whole story. I will never know
what is there to know. You will not be changed. You must believe.

III

SAM'S DREAM

One day there is no day because there is no day
before, no yesterday, then a now, & *time*, & a cell
divides and you, you are in time, time is in you, as
multiplying now u slip into our stream, or is it u grow
a piece of stream in us, is it flesh or time you grow,
how, is it an American you grow, week 28, when we
are told dreaming begins. Welcome. Truest stranger.
Perhaps one of the last conceived & carried in womb.
Father and mother singular and known. Born of
human body. Not among the perfected ones yet. No. A

mere human, all firsthand knowledge, flying in as if
kindling—*natural*. The last breath before the first
breath is mystery. Then u burn into gaze, thought,
knowledge of oblivion. Rock yourself. Kick so I can
feel you out here. Push your hands against the
chamber. The world is exhausted. I moisten my lips
and try to remember a song. I have to have a song to
sing you from out here. They say you now hear *vividly*.
This could have been a paradise my song begins. No,
this is, was, is, never will be again, will be, we hope

desperately wasn't a dream, maybe in your dream

now there is a clue, can you dream the clue, you who
are dreaming *what* having had no life to dream of,
dream *from*—what populates you—bloodflow and
lightswirl, stammering of ventricles, attempts at
motion, absorbings, incompletions, fluidities—do you
have temptation yet, or even the *meanwhile*—such a
mature duration this meanwhile, how it intensifies
this present—or *nevertheless*—no *beyond* of course
in your dream what could be beyond—no

defeat as so far no defeat—cells hum—no *partiality*
as all grows in your first dream which is the dream of
what you are—is that right—no *attempt* as there is
no attempting yet—no *privacy*—I laugh to myself
writing the word—oh look at that word—no
either/or—but yes light filtering-in, root-darknesses,
motion—and the laughter, do you hear it from us out
here, us, can you hear that strain of what we call
sincerity—Oh. Remain unknown. Know no daybreak
ever. Dream of no running from fire, no being shoved

into mass grave others falling over you, dream of no
bot, no capture filter store—no algorithmic memory,
no hope, realism, knowing, no quest-for, selling-of,
accosting violently to have, no lemon-color of the end
of day, no sudden happiness, no *suddenly*. It is much
bigger, faster—try to hear *out*—this place you're
being fired into—*other* in it—*judgment of other*—
logic, representation, nightmare—how to prepare
you—what do you dream—what must I sing—it says

you cry in there & laugh—out here a late October

rain has started down, soon you shall put your small hand out & one of us will say slowly and outloud *rain* and you will say *rain*—but what *is* that on your hand which falling has come round again in the forever of *again* to reach your waiting upturned hand. I look up now. Clouds drift. Evaporation is a thing. That our only system is awry a thing. That u will see rains such as I have never seen a thing. Plain sadness, this hand-knit sweater, old things, maybe u shall have some of—in this my song—in my long song not telling u about the

paradise, abandoning my song of what's no longer possible, that song, it is a thing. Oh *normalcy*, what a song I would sing you. Child u shall god willing come out into the *being known*. First thing will be *the visible*. That's the first step of our dream, the *dream of here*. You will see motes in light. And lights inside the light which *can go out*. A different dark. And spirits wind exhaustion a heavy thing attached to you—your entity—as u enter history and it—so bright, correct, awake, speaking and crying-out—begins. And all the

rest begins. Amazing, you were not *everything* after all. Out you come into legibility. Difference. *Why shouldn't all be the same thing?* It's a thing, says the stranger nearby, it's a new thing, this stance this skin like spandex closing over you, it's you. A name is given you. Take it. Can you take it? All seems to be so

overfull at once. Now here it is proffered again, this sound which is *you*, do u feel the laving of it down all over you, coating you, so transparent you could swear it *is* you, really you, this *Sam*, this crumb of life

which suddenly lengthens the minute as it cleans off something else, something you didn't know was there before, and which, in disappearing now, is felt. The before u. The before. That dream. What was that dream. There, as if a burning-off of mist, gone where—not *back*, where would *back* be—dried away—a sweetness going with it—no?—feel it?—I do—I almost smell it as it is dissolved into *the prior* by *succession*, by events, not raging, not burning, but going—nothing like the loud blood-rush in the

invisible u & u in with its elasticities, paddlings, nets, swirls. In this disunion now stretch. Take up space. You are that place u displace. That falling all round u is gazing, thinking, attempted love, exhausted love, everything, or it is everyone, always going and coming back from some place. They do not stay. *They do not stay*. And then out here circumference. One day you glimpse it, the horizon line. You are so.... surprised. How could that be. What are we in or on that it stops there but does not ever stop. They tell u try to feel it turn. The sun they will explain to you. The moon.

How far away it all becomes the more you enter. How

thin you are. How much u have to disappear in order
to become. In order to become human. Become Sam.

SAM'S STANDING

on earth—almost—testing the weight she brings, her *self*, to the
hold earth offers-up—she looks—she holds an edge to see
if space too has grips in it somehow—how is she supposed to
let go and just launch, lurch—*fly out*—& who
will be there where there is no one visible at all in case
there is suddenly nothing at all. One foot is set in place,
feels hard for place, then the whole of her eleven
months leans on it, lets go—is this trust now, first trust—uneven then
even—then the one step. All stops. She looks firmly at the emptiness.
It seems so full. What is it to *go*. Its gorgeousness

has not yet shown itself, this void into which all shall pour
of her self, where she must cut off *here* from *there*—
it is not easy this finding a *there*, an *elsewhere*—is there arrival anywhere—is
there going *around* or *into*—is there thru—what is thru—urgent not to miss
the mark which won't stay marked, this *going* with no *where* in it. Invisibility
is this you. This sudden wanting to be more—to be alone—this fluidity
wanting to rip open where she wasn't before, and pass thru, as if she is
what the thru was, has taken on throughness and is.
In this balancing is. Arms out to the side is. Is just. Feels from earth
this sweet upswirling—coming to hold her—up. Up. *All is equal everywhere*.
Birth

continuing until this now, this *forth*, where the perfect calculations of air

hold. And no station is above another. And millions of swerves hum incipient.

But for

now stasis—air rushing to hold—her heart aloft—and everywhere the huge
bloom

opens—look, it shows its face—*justice*—nothing is missing yet—no *too soon*
too late—found-footing then again found. Ground. Oh ground. Given by
going. Then the stream begins to form. The *where-she's-been*. High
up above the earth—even for so small a thing, so high, *above*, she turns. Sees
where

she's been, where she no longer is, will never be again. I see it widen there,
right on her tiny face—the agitation, the vault, the chasm of
minutes opening and brandishing, the dance that begins now, the dance of

terror, I'm seeing it here, I'm watching the minutes open in a soul,
would you like to dance, the generosity of everything murmurs, I see her whole
self hear it, though it is just the air-conditioner in here with us, & no it's not
like a photograph of anything this rent—it's not just air she sees—it's not
recoverable—from bed to bed she'll know this—from love to love—the
kingdom

of undertow has opened here—*you are expected* it says furnishing from
out of nowhere now the corridor—would you like to dance—outside the winter's
smoothing flat more day, one less, one more of less, though as she enters
now she does not know—I know—I chaos of knowing know—the band
of sunlight moving as she moves into it now, dust motes in it, her hand

thrown out to grab them all. All. It's merely place. It's merely time.

She goes. She has not fallen down so now she is for sure in the human
thoughtlessness, on the conveyor, welcome girl, it's 7:43,
we will never arrive, we will never arrive at mercy,
it is incurable, there is nothing that can be known, just go, tear down
all you have not entered yet and go, your destination

whatever it may be triumphs by being entirely accurate, its calculation
flawless, but for now go, the corridor awaits, your footsteps echo down
its apparent generosity, *do you want to dance* it hums *friend*,
though those are just your bare feet slapping as you feel the accident,

the *feeling* of accident, recede and the feeling of *direction* flow in,
though of course this is not what you thought at all, not then
when you swayed and recovered and felt the high walls flow—they cannot
hold you—nothing can hold you—I see the wilderness of thought
begin in you as you glance up to see where you are going
next. Shall I put a window there for you, a new world. A flowing
day shimmers outside. Here is a wintered tree for you to add now
to the power you feel. I feel the impatience in you being born. How
fast it is, this excited stupefaction, this oblivion, this forgetting of
where you were before, just a minute ago, just a lost minute of

the only time. A crow lands on the tree. He tries to land. He
settles, claws, but the grip slips, he rises up then comes at it again. Be
still. Watch. He's found a spot in winter which is his. His time is not
your time. His gaze casts straight at us where we are watching him. It's hot
with knowing—circles, windrise, drought, sprout, the dip, the
hovering, the dwelling in the hovering. Green black and oily-
black he is. Knows acceleration, prevailing, flow. Erasure of
flow. There is a not-moving in the world. There is a not-moving which
is not a being still. There is this place from which we watch.
There is no way to get to here. There is no way to leave. Love

is the force that made it for you. Here. Don't take your eyes off

him. He'll sit the winter through for you. He's yours. He can't fly off.

WHEREAS I HAD NOT YET IN THIS LIFE SEEN

stillness. Stillness in time. Rich concentrate. Late summer late-day light. Over
but

not *on* magenta. *Of*. Of dahlia-heads. Of serrated leaves trimmed gold. Plush
stalk

lost-still in non-moment. All awake but no wakefulness. Low. Small. Snug in
flooding

light. Unwilled. No speed of anything, no, no motion on surface because
suddenly no

surface, all a mechanism yes but now neither on nor off, & shining, & not even a
frill

of breeze—as if there had never been time—as if being had never been or not
been—no containing, no cause/effect thing, no, all swallowed by unmovingness
of all

things. Grassblades carved still. Leaning-in, angle-of, stalk. Sealed. No flex.
Spin. No

rush no struggle no not even the tiniest all unwhirled & stopped till this, what is
this,

stands before you, certainty—the pouring of color stopped mid-air—all
outreaching but no towards, lapping, of thing & surround, exquisite, as if eyes
closed

though all wide, poured out wide. Try again. Very small the world. Quiet. The

robin's landing on the far lawn heard, lawn heard, as-if heard, strength of the

nothing noticed, not smooth, as if on hold but never again to be released from
hold,
shuddering done, no lift or fall, no, no interval, no thought, no whispering of
thought,
no. Noticing blends with light. Seeing is light. No trouble in the gaze even as the

gaze gazes upon stillness and is stilled. Where is the motion I know. Where. Any
breeze and I'd be human again. Swirl of leaf and I'd see it again. The vacancy.

The
crust afloat above the thing itself. There being no further than this as-if
hallucination. The hallucination of *no as-if*. The end. What is utterly. Is this

ancient. Is this. As if a huge pity but entirely and only made of matter. Where
has motion gone—it has taken time fate need. All lies here now in
the seen. Not seen *as such* just there entire in the laying-out of itself in the
which-is. No *if*. That's it. The stillness of no *if*. Dear friend, you cannot cross
here,

this is the visible world, I have seen it in this my life, by accident, just now, I
have
recognized it, I do not know that I will glimpse it again in this life, I assume it's
my
one life, my mind roves over it all tapping, trying words, again words. The poem
is built for this. To come to this limit & see in & fail. It is built for this particular

failure. This wakefulness that wipes out the waking. This muteness which is the
heart of what. It is not silence. Now each wick is lit as the planet moves into
the end of the visible. The spiderweb is played string by string by the sun. Waits.
Error. Nothing waits. Radical unimagined unreleasable unscatterable unhidden

nothing waits.

RAIL

I set out over the
unknowable earth once
more. Everything
still underfoot. A mat
of fallen and unfallen
matter. Things flinch
but it is my seeing
makes them
flinch. Before, they are
transparent. Now they
line my optic
nerve. I feel them
enter. Brain
flinch husk
groove. Subject.

 Honeysuckle,
 bramble, vine,
 vibration
 and
web-tremble. How
 will the real
 let me drop just
 in time.

How will it pay me
 out,
pass me along to
 the next
 I? I
walk down the hill
 where I feel my
letting-go go
 into the down of
 the hill. I
 know I will
 have to leave
 the earth—my
 difference
 looking around
 wildly
 for where it
 ends. That is
 life I say
 humming,
 idling, mind's
 engine dozing
 in me, its
 squint, that
 sweet way of
 inhaling before
 speech while
 the hand slides
 down the spiral
 rail like a

millennium
dappled with
dna and spoor
just right
enough to

end.

I WON'T LIVE LONG

enough to see any of the new
dreams the hundreds of new kinds of suffering and weeds birds animals
shouldering their
demise without possibility of re-
generation the heart in your tiny chest opening its new unimaginable ways of
opening and to what might it still
open. Will there still be
such opening. Will you dare. I will not be there
to surround you w/the past w/my ways of
knowing—to save
you—shall you be saved—from what—
home from fighting are you, remembering how he or she or they looked at
you
while you both fed the machine or built the trough in dirt
where it will be necessary to
plant again—will it open—will the earth open—will the seeds that remain—
will you know to
find them in
time—will those who have their lock on you
let the openings which are
chance unknowing loneliness the unrelenting arms of
form which knows not yet the form
it will in the end
be, open and

form? Will there be islands. Will there be a day where you can afford to think
back far
enough to the way we loved you. Words you said
for the first time
as we said them. *Mystery* your grandfather said one day, after saying *shhh*
listen to the
birds & you sat so still,
all your being arcing out to hear,
and the bird in its hiding place gave us this future, this moment today when
you can recall—
can you—his saying, *there*,
that's a mystery.
And you said the word as if it were new ground to stand on,
you uttered it to stand on it—
mystery. Yes, *mystery* he said. Yes *mystery* you said
talking to it now as it
took its step out of the shadow into the clearing and there you
saw it in the so-called in-
visible. Then when the wave broke the first time on what had seemed
terra firma and you knew as he held your hand
insisting you hold your ground
that there was foreclosure,
there was oldness of a kind you couldn't fathom, and there was the terrifying
suddenness of the
now. Your mind felt for it. It felt the reach from an elsewhere and a dip
which cannot hold.
Splash went the wave.
Your feet stood fast.
Your hem was touched.
We saw you watch.
We felt your hand grip

but not to move back.
Can you find that now now, wherever you are, even a candle would be a gift
I know
from there. *Shhh* he said so you could hear it. *Pity* he said
not knowing to whom.
Pity you said, laughing, *pity pity*, and that was the day of
your being carried out
in spite of your cold, wrapped tight, to see the evening star. And he pointed.
And you
looked up. And you took a breath I hear even now as I go
out—the inhalation of dark secrecy fear distance the reach into an almost-
touching
of silence, of the thing that has no neighbors and never will, in you,
the center of which is noise,
the outermost a freezing you can travel his arm out to with your gaze
till it's there. The real. A star. The earth is your
home. No matter what they tell you now and what program you input via
your chip or port
or faster yet, no, no, in that now I am not there
in, to point, to take your now large hand and say
look, look through these fronds,
hold your breath,
the deer hiding from the hunter is right here in our field,
it knows we are too,
it does not fear us.
Be still. Wait. And we, we
will be left behind.
Except just now. If you still once.
That you might remember.
Now. Remember now.

SCARCELY THERE

[for J. A.]

After the wind just stops you still hear
the wind's wild *almost*, its approach and retreat, and how it kept on
circling as-if-trying, as if about-to-be, an almost-speech,
loud, full of syntax, casting about for
life, form, limit, fate. To be bodied. To strut. To have
meaning. How easily we wear ourselves
as if it is nothing to have
origin, whirl, outcome,
and still be.

After the high winds stop you're forced to hear
the freshness of what's
there. It smacks, shimmers—this sound of
the scarcely there, this adamantly *almost*, all *between*s, sub-
siding till adjustment—and then the wide re-blanketing evenness sets in....
Gone
all that acceleration, that shooting up & back, futurist, furious with naming
and naming
its one price. Oh nothing holds. Just the rattling of the going and
coming together of things, as if matter itself is trying
to find something true to
say—crazed investigation, tentative prophecy, trying on savage
shape—widening without be-

coming—is this the one last war now, finally—but no, only more of notion’s
motions—more *more* the wind says, break grief, loosen possibility, let vague
 hopes float, sink—let other debris slip into
place. Rootless mind. Shallow whirling of law and more and yet more law
 brocading the emptiness. Then suddenly
 all stills. It is near
 noon. No more
 spillage. No more gorgeous waste of effort. No more
out-tossed reachings of green as if imagining some *out there* exists—
 hovering
inhalations, then as-if-hiding, then all coughed-out at once in a tumble—too
 much,
 too many, disconcerted, un-countable. Yet
 no dream....

After the wind stops you hear fact. You hear fact's plan. It is huge.
The tree does not escape. Things are finished forces.
You hear a name-call from far off, tossed, dropped. Someone gives up.
Light rips *here* from *there*. Where birdcalls cease, you hear the under-
neath. *Try living again* day's long pitched syllable-ooze
hums after the high winds stop & your final footprint lifts off & no matter
how clean
you want it to be
nothing is ever going to be gone enough. Oh oak, show us up.
Indecipherable-green sound us. Stilled leaf-chatter quiver up
again, rustle the secret rule we'll never catch
in time. To be late
is to be alive. This Sunday. All things *are* mention of
themselves—as the dog barks, the air-conditioner
scours its air—and each thing takes its place. But look,
keenly, adamantly

a road has appeared—a sense that something is *happening* striates
the open air—there is a limping in the light, a tiny withdrawal of light from
light, which
makes a form
in the gully—you haven't changed much it
says—children still appearing out of nowhere now, so violently heavy with
life—they dart, they breed, *you be the ghost now* the surrounding tunes up,
as if it is all going to begin again, though this time without you
standing here
noticing.... So
notice is given. The look on the light
is that of an argument about to be made and won.
Yes you were underneath history for this while,
you were able to write the history of being underneath,
you were able to disappear and make the rest appear.
But now it wants its furious place again, all floral and full of appearance,
its fourth wall, its silvery after-tomorrow,
all ramping-up now quite a spectacular dusk.
This page is turning. It is full of mattering.
Our unrealized project glows in
your mind. The animals lift their heads for an instant
then back. New shoots in the parched field. All the details are important you
think but
no, even the ruins look like they might be fake—important but fake—
though we must learn what they have to teach.
This is the way it is something murmurs, circling,
out here, in the middle of summer. Which summer was it was
the last of the summers. All the children are
returned home. Day turns its windless
folio. You stay, it says. We pass here now onto the next-on world. You stay.

UN-

blooming mother's fists
tighten daily.
Swipe at bed-
cloth. Jab at

emptiness. Dig
into their own
palms till blood's
drawn & trapped &

no balm will undo the
rot inside. Stiffening
fury. Stony
stunted held up

victorious by the
stringy arm,
up into the humming
room—un-

opening—ready to
strike if u
come near, who had been
so proud of her long-

fingering hands,
holding them out
in front for us
to see—who'd been a

hand model in her
youth—sd this again &
again, finger-
tips pointing thru spring

air with tip of
cigarette for
anecdote &
vodka—once w/

onyx holder
punctuating every-
thing—smiling,
carnelian nails unhooking the

veil over the un-

transcendent—let it
rip—& there, look there, see the curve
shudder in the ripple
Michelangelo makes

right there—extended in-
dication—though all so
swift—gone now—*look*
there—the opposite of

sorrow—*look*—even the angry descent of
those hands in rage
upon me alive w/in-
vestigation—*hurry*—evening

falls, look there, see it light
the far
limb, squint, do not be
visionless—touch it—*something*

might be there—

something not able to get
away—trapped—spiraling—
oh
clenched

clubs to which life
shall be
reduced
now

summoning us with stumps—
farewell to
touch—mother—
who loved yr hands

most of any body

part, who loved yr

self little but so loved

touch—the surface a score you knew to scrawl mold bend, knew to

rip into—what

were u looking to re-

lease—tentacular furious careful—also

tapping—also pressing gently to feel for

edge—loved steel stone wood iron wax melt of

acetylene till yr glove

burned through bc u

cld not wait

to feel the ridges the immanence the shudder of

limit—of

self—loved

punctuating everything w/

a wave. And laugh. What

is laughter

now, strange thing this

new body

won't do. The wind goes over us.

It says what it says.

It does not say why.

Sometimes the earth says

break down shake free bend bend but that

is wind in it
trying to convince
us there are many
ways of seeing

things. There are not.

IV

THE HIDDENNESS OF THE WORLD

The lovers disappear into the woods again. The war is on. The blizzard on, in its own way. Also many interpretations on their way—of fascism, of transcendence, of what you mean by *perhaps* when you look at me that way. A minute more and then a

minute more you look. And then? And then—everything would have been different. But the lovers are in the woods again, the signifier is in *the woods*, the revolution of the ploughshare in, clod-crumble in, cloud-tumble, hope and its stumble in—everything would have been, could

have been different—do you not think—and the war still on—and would you have gone—could you spare an arm, an eye, a foot is a thing one hopes to keep, one's stop and go, one's step, one's only way which could have been another way, but wasn't. Do I have to end

in order to begin, I ask the light that lingers on the trees—between the trees—the lovers have disappeared into again. I cannot breathe. This verge is taking up all of my life—is it my time or space, I cannot tell—this being here but then

not here, trying to suss out all the fundamental laws—like sniffing—in the day I

think—the human laws, the commonalities we call our word-to-word thing, our love—what else shall I think—that emotions have no significance? life no validity?

We're going to see a movie later on. There is a terrible thing inside of me.
It must not grow. I can hear my own scared space apologizing now to every

thing. Like a lightning bolt come when a blizzard was expected. It looks
expensive in the sky. Breaks nothing but still whacks us like a stick,
hissing you must forget organic life, your little dagger of right/
wrong, your leprosy of love, of hate, of all such local temporary wonders. The
lovers

are taking their time I think. The storm appears above the woods like a radio
left on in an abandoned car. Are they apologizing now, again, to the earth,
are they wishing they could stop and hide—let's be the lucky ones that don't
go out again—are they standing terrified in their Jerusalem of knowing things, of

things, a couple of lucky ducks, blood flowing normally though maybe a little
fast, because of all the promises that must be made, so fast, my arm, my name,
I swear I'll never tell, all the impending before the ambulance of the outside
arrives to touch them when the last trees are surpassed and nothing but

this clearing's left. The light is hammering down its thousand
fists. From war it looks like blossoming. It's forcing the green fuse. It's
synthesizing

lapse. The huge wild oleanders sway. It all awaits this temporary race—run
run—our race—the great fires seeping deep into this thinnest moment from the

only now—why don't they wake us—no—we want to sleep—the lovers in the
movie of the woods, I see them from my inner life, I see skin slip, light reach,
face scar

itself with time, hair burn, leaf throne itself, and *nothing* turn, brush, sweat—the
fire,

the *now*—it screams at us year after year—each day so sweet—almost a

duplicate, unnerving us, celestial us, looking everywhere in day for the origins
of,
the hidden part of, the natural—wrong search—wrong fires—nothing will be
done in
time—no one wishes to *become*—preparedness is dull—such thirst for this
delay,
this looking away, this sanity—the lovers in the woods, really *in* the outside now
—un-

bounded delirium, abstraction, hidden real, dark realm—have no more access to

the day.... But could it be more beautiful. The wind has dropped. Two cardinals
play
in the young oak. They slip and rise. In distance, bells. Wind then no wind. A
previous
life, a hummingbird, has found the agapanthus there. It always does. Its blossom
always blossoms just in time. Either nothing is alone. Or everything. You are
alone in

the alone. To exit the human is to exit the singular, the plural, the collective, the
dream. The woods have an entrance. From where I watch I do not think I'll see
them

exit who went in, here at the start, the only start, we are filtering them out, are
leaving them

in dark, in hiddenness, all excess, all sincerity. Don't touch. In the

flamboyant interim, burn. Feel this outsideness here. Here on this page. Here in
my head.

You. You in me in this final time. My shadow. Haunted. Organic. Temporary.

[*after Edward Thomas*]

RUNAWAY

You wanted to
have vision
but the gods

changed.

You wanted to feel
the fraction of the

degree of
temperature
enter the

water, feel the
minute leave the
minutes

behind.

Why not be
happy. What are

they doing
to the minutes.
Each one takes

that minute of you
away. Takes away
hope. We stand

around, we have the
sensation we
dreamed the whole

thing up, we
didn't, & all
around us how alive

rot is, & damp that
never ceases kissing
everything in-

discriminately—yr
hands, yr skin fixed to
fit everywhere tight,

yr lids holding yr
gaze, the rubble, the
anti-microbial skins,

the layers of cello-
phane, the rare &
treasured paper

sack, everything
delivered up to us
as if spectacular, as if

an emergency of the
spectacular,
& new data-sets showing

more new hours days debt melt
faster rising than
ever anticipated,

also those fleeing
told no no, not you, you
are not allowed, where

are yr papers—oh
those—we know we
gave them to u but

here u see we
change our mind—look,
here is a changed

mind, a mind whose house
burned, here is
melted chromium & ash

where yr life was—stay
calm, listen to
authorities, re-

build, imitate, believe,
wait, b/c it will come again,
over the ridge, the

licking flare, as if
pure hunger, or
curling all over u now

the fire of the
flashlight, don't move,
I beg u, never

move, figure out
what the *they* is,
what the *they* wants—

pretend it's laughter, it's a
refrain—*pay up*—as for the
recent past

it's got too much history
a mind can
set the match to—but see, the fire

prefers not to die, no,
& we oblige, we feed it, we
keep it

unpayable.

IT CANNOT BE

undone. As here these words cannot be taken back into the windless wide
unsaid. No. These changes to the living skin of silence, there where your dis-
appearance into nonlife, into no-longer-ever-again-in-life—no—no longer in
creation, no, no more of your kind—changes silence to what can I call it—ex-

tingtion—expiration—this new forever—the small boy on the boat in the dark
says—says I

was holding you when we got on the boat in the deep night—says I can still feel
you now I feel you—others are pressed against me but this weight in the dark it
is

you—I feel for your legs your feet—are you you or are these the pressings of

others—others are not me—once in a while a flashlight but so brief we cannot
be seen. Then it occurs. It cannot be. And *never again* arrives—is it for you or
me it arrives—the moment that cannot be undone. And we are no longer ever
again in life

together. Mother. I need you. I cannot be taken back now into the unmade, un-

conceived, unborn, back. You. As here these words in the world you left behind.

It's not

the world exactly, now. It is the now. That new world. *Now*. My body keeps
living here

under my mind, slackened by thirst. I see light flick and I say to the air I still
have

you. I have surfaces and wandering. Like a root always becoming more by going

on. The blackbird in the thicket understands me I think. It shoots through
vacancy & knows
all is down to size, direction, speed. I could not find you, I wrestled the men who
thought
to rescue me, me who am dead now, I said where is my mother to death which is
this
wave, alive, contagious, & scent of brine, & seagulls slicing and feeding—such a
soaring

machine. I spent with her a night my hand too tiny for her to find I think though
I
touched and touched hoping day would take me into its teeth, interrupt this
glassy
hammering of voice and sea, we are mangled, heaps, there are so many ways to
be
afraid, it's all right, we were locked together in years, if we don't land again let's
not

land again. But don't leave me. I am a work in the turning galaxy at the bottom
of
this dinghy, I am a word that cannot be taken back, I want a home, how many
inches is
a home, the gulls pull the day aside so I can see, I need a place to be, please not
this
camp, this film of sand on me, the dry day's lip, everywhere tin's shadow-splash
across my

only face.... Abundance where are you. An inch is enough. Moon and a vacant
field
with no fear. Normal chimneys with morning-smoke. Water. Enough water. The
shape of
water as it falls. Into my hands. To have a bucket of my own. To watch a long
time the

water & feel there is always more. To not be afraid of sun. Of wind. My fingers
remember,

I wish they would forget. I put them in the water that is not here. I can put them
in that

water. It is a special kind. I have imagined it. Therefore it lies so still upon
reality. It cannot

be undone, this water without a voice screaming to me of morning arriving
gradually and sharply, as if a fever lifting, dawn like a hand on my forehead
saying the

fever broke, today will be a different day than yesterday, the cloth damp now
over my

eyes, day is the simplest phrase, I can hear outside the unevenness of the stones,
it is our

village again, light spliced by the cries of birds at dawn, I can hear the sand on
the

road heading off towards the village, hear oranges pressing against their skins in
their still-

living trees, hiss of morning coming on, I have not imagined it, it's day, we have
not left yet,

it is not yet decided, drought touches the side of our house, shade is the simplest
phrase,

a goat brays in the distance, which is not too far, then wind, the simplest phrase,
it has not

said we have to flee, the froth of the goats' milk into the bucket is whispering the

simplest phrase, the broken surface of the well, where the wheel turns, the
bucket rakes,

I hear it land, I should not have been afraid, I was not afraid, there was no
fear, ancient toughness lined it all, we were submerged in time not history, you
take

your hand off my eyes and lift the cloth. The cool is good. It cannot be undone, it cannot be unsaid unmade unthought unknown unrecognized untrued. Until it can.

WHOM ARE YOU

speaking to. What is that listening to
us. I'd like to know whom to address. In this we call
the physical world. Is there another where the footfalls go
from this stony path as it grows granular. They dis-

appear. The silence is ruinous. It seems there could be thunder hidden in this
blazing

blue, but it's just dry wind reaching the field. I'd like to know again whom to
address. To say warm mist used to arrive in time & settle-in over our summer
day. To say

it stayed. It stayed. I say to you *it's summer now* but we don't really know, in the

unlistable new seasons, what this one now is going to be. It's not the one
it was before, last time we called it this, called it *ours*, called it *time*, felt rise in
us *hello my*

day, you are all forward now as I stand up in you, and just behind me there
is where you were just now—*just now* we say rising from death again. Would
like

to say again *to whom do they go* the curling of these words into this most
immense slow time, this which is summer, was summer, all hum
at zenith, though no clear zenith, no, it all just stays, it flows, it sluices round
the sheep in the near field braying into day's seeping end. Just one. Then one. I
hear

them low. I feel the ancient sound come thru the dry late summer air
to me. They do not sing. They say they know. They make one note, only one
note, they say they know they're bred for slaughter, that slaughter is different
from death, also from sacrifice. Would like to know, please, you wood-doves so

alone above the propositions and promises of grass, whom we
address with these slow voices, now raised, now
low. Whatever is proper for this occasion, we find it in us, always ready there
at lip, at sill—the love, the silly alphabet—& here it is again wanting so hard to
hold

its world—a shore a sound a form, what whitens the roof as it passes
away—the high thing in us which wishes so for something higher yet—& how it
rises now
as if to leap from flesh but not to let it go—rises to drag the body up into the im-
material, knowing each thing to be the ending that it is, wanting to be a wind in
wind

as the end of day upwells → is it bad to have come here → to have come by this
route—
is it good to have come at all → was this the only way we came even if it's not the
way we
should have come—there won't be more of our supremely simple being—no—
will not—
as dusk picks up each needle of the pines against last light, & we push the last of
our eager

peering out. We cannot shed the eagerness much as we'd like. It's pitiless. It
turns & turns
in us. And still we want to speak, to stitch our vacancy to the hill-flank where
dusk's sun-drop raises a sudden fast new wind to sweep thru all the place at once
—it is so

sure—as in its blind spots flies die down into the hum of this new here—who's
w/me here,

it's so sewn-shut—it's not our sound, we hear it & we know it well, it's not our
sound. Not

us.

SIRI U

see me what did u see did u scrape what I asked u for asked u to make me into
asked &

asked there is a name in the body of this blood-rush which u parse in-
correctly, I know u think u connect the dots of my inquiry the date of the last
revolution the

pressure cooker the flesh the right temperature whom do u have locked away in
the

basement this time—it is always the same answer they shall stand on line they r
covert as in

u shall not see them u shall look away where is the nearest place where work
is—we wish to be heard and overheard—are u not listening—why taser me who
am painting

graffiti on the abandoned McDonald's wall in North Miami into my heart you
shall shock

my life out of me you shall not see a trace of me please surveil please see what I
happened

to search for out of having nothing real given me to do what shall I write on this
screen now

I have written it again and again throughout all eternity at this desk in these
clothes do you

see me as I am now clothed with my uselessness at your screen begging you to
see me see

my circumstances clothe me with a genuine gaze fatal so be it but actual see me

as the
project I am for this planet, earth, the one who needs work, accursed, material,
my self, my
one singular war memorial, my own native land, temporary, what shall I search
for in the
city of searches, part of the circuitry in here with you, animated, these are not
actual

words, they come out as integers you track, where are the crumbs, where are the
woods to
my right to life—see the word appear here before us both—*happiness*—full of
carbon and
systems—and do you not hear any of the murmuring down at the dead end of
this street, I'm not complaining, I am the temporary, a crime against humanity, I
am the

temporary, u are adding more versions of me to the offices of humanity, I am
even more
temporary, a row of boarded-up queries, are u wondering why the tenses here are
so
scattered, why they don't add up to the time u search for me in. They do not.
There is a
noise under here which is what u cannot see. It is what makes me a signal the
tower might

miss. A border you do not know about which could be inadvertently crossed. An
opacity.
Something that is already living in 440 ppm and is ready to make you disappear
—mayday—
no more alphabet—the skins we wear no longer sensate—the circuit of our days
shut—the
sensation of wings as the screen shuts down right there on the screen—the wings
shells

flames wavelengths interventions the revolution the counter where everyone
denied

everything and it all began again this was the latest news it stayed the latest
news.

IN THE NEST®

on the screen
in the screen
you die. Are
dying. It's taking

time. Don't cry
we say. Don't
die. You
scream. You

can't speak any

more. You
stare. But not at us
no matter how
we place the

cam. How far

do you see. Is there
a future where you
gaze. We press
to expand yr

glazed un-
seeing. Mother. See us.
Mother it's
a strange new

winter here. You
will not sleep.
A still green
willow leaf lands

on the mem-
brane, thin, firm.
Cam picks it
up. I play it back. I

love you. I have always

loved you. A cabbage butterfly
could be me now
touching you or
a weed they bring in

with the last un-
seasonable
roses. They fill the screen
as they are carried

past. A name is called
into yr bedroom air,
a tinny electronic screech
tossed out,

a human
urgency, a starling's wing
cld be my shadow on
the monitor, an

underwing turn, a quick salute

before our guy is
shot for good, he's always shot for
good, his wings now
somewhere else,

velvety & shutting deep
away from the only
world we
have. Whose tears

r these pixels
I bring into view
when I ex-
pand the pov, what angel in his

satellite is making
out of this nothing
tears—
is that late bee there

for the droughted
figs, is that a faucet
out of range being turned on
quickly now, don't

die, our connection is
wavering, we flick
offline, but wait a second here
you come again—difference

making light
move. Please
move. Let
sheets rise up in

pools of white.
Your mirror to the side
explains again there is a portion
out of sight. *That's most of*

it, the mirror says. *What you*
see here is nothing,
friend. Mother,
you're

heading out of
sight. The mirror shouts out
mountains in the distance
howling, cold, an other's

work, the hero of
another story than this one
in which you turn &
turn, fighting, folding

shut into

the only world.... I tap
again only to see your
face erase itself

as I get closer than this
instrument permits.

Try to speak

it says. *The room's*

online. Your guest is
waiting says this newly in-
stalled feature
of the Nest. *Talk now* it

blinks. An arrow points
as I descend again
into your room
from the sensor

in your ceiling

watching u.

We think this is
the past. It's still the
past. Your enemy

is shining now.

I push the volume up
though I'm at max.

Talk now blinks on.

You dream I hope.

I hope you dream.

THE WAKE OFF THE FERRY

Where we've
just been what
we just
did just

now the
disturbance of
our having
gone

there and by
there which
closes up
again but

never again
exactly the
same when I
love

you as you
me never again
are we the ones
we love I look

as far as I
can see to see
it close
back up

to see it rebecome

itself

POEM

The earth said
remember me.

The earth said
don't let go,

said it one day
when I was
accidentally
listening, I

heard it, I felt it
like temperature,
all said in a
whisper—build to-

morrow, make right be-
fall, you are not
free, other scenes
are not taking

place, time is not filled,
time is not late, there is
a thing the emptiness
needs as you need

emptiness, it
shrinks from light again &
again, although all things
are present, a

fact a day a
bird that warps the
arithmetic of per-
fection with its

arc, passing again &
again in the evening
air, in the pre-
vailing wind, making no

mistake—yr in-
difference is yr
principal beauty
the mind says all the

time—I hear it—I
hear it every-
where. The earth
said remember

me. I am the
earth it said. Re-
member me.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jorie Graham was born in New York City in 1950. She was raised in Rome, Italy and educated in French schools. She studied philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris before attending New York University as an undergraduate, where she studied filmmaking. She received an MFA in poetry from the University of Iowa. Graham is the author of 14 collections of poetry, most recently *Runaway* (Ecco 2020), *Fast* (Ecco 2017), *PLACE* (Ecco 2012), *Sea Change* (Ecco, 2008) and *The Dream of the Unified Field: Selected Poems 1974-1994*, which won the 1996 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. Graham has also edited two anthologies, *Earth Took of Earth: 100 Great Poems of the English Language* (1996) and *The Best American Poetry 1990*. Her work has been widely translated and is the recipient of multiple awards, including a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Fellowship, The Forward Prize (UK), The International Nonino Prize, the Los Angeles Times Book Award, and The Wallace Stevens Award. She has taught at the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop and is currently the Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard University. She served as a Chancellor of The Academy of American Poets from 1997 to 2003.

About her work, James Longenbach wrote in the *New York Times*: “For 30 years Jorie Graham has engaged the whole human contraption—intellectual, global, domestic, apocalyptic—rather than the narrow emotional slice of it most often reserved for poems. She thinks of the poet not as a recorder but as a constructor of experience. Like Rilke or

Yeats, she imagines the hermetic poet as a public figure, someone who addresses the most urgent philosophical and political issues of the time simply by writing poems.”

BOOKS BY JORIE GRAHAM

Hybrids of Plants and of Ghosts

Erosion

The End of Beauty

The Best American Poetry 1990 (editor)

Region of Unlikeness

Materialism

The Dream of the Unified Field: Selected Poems 1974–1994

The Errancy

Earth Took of Earth: 100 Great Poems of the English Language (editor)

Photographs & Poems (with Jeanette Montgomery Barron)

Swarm

Never

Overlord

Sea Change

PLACE

From the New World (Poems: 1976-2014)

Fast

Runaway

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Grateful acknowledgment to the editors of the journals and publications in which these poems first appeared:

The Boston Review, Carnet de route, The London Review of Books, The New Yorker, The New York Review of Books, Lana Turner, Poetry, The Liberal, The Electronic Poetry Review, The Columbia Review, The Paris Review, The New Republic, The Paris Anthology, Fiddlehead Review (Canada), Martha's Vineyard Arts and Ideas, A Public Space, Plume, EarthLines, The Cortland Review, The American Poetry Review, The Spectator, Folder, The Poetry Review, The New York Times Magazine, The White Review, The Los Angeles Review of Books, Harper's Magazine, Ambit, The Kenyon Review.

Thank you to the American Academy in Rome for time and hospitality.

Gratitude and thanks to my editors: Daniel Halpern for his friendship, guidance, and vision over the decades; Michael Wiegiers for his passionate imagination and faith. To my designer Erica Mena, and my copyeditor Sol Kim Bentley, thank you for your wisdom, generosity, and forbearance.

Special gratitude for the presence in my life of Paul Gordon, Lynn Bell, Ty Romijn, Nancy Berger, Sandra Washburn, Tara Ledden, Lucia Hayman, Lauren Bimmler, Case Kerns, Edward Youkilis, Leroy Harrison, Lila DiBiaso, Josh Scott, James Barron, Elisa Veschini, Paola Peroni, Patrick O'Gara, Thomas Neilan, Marcela del Carmen, Ursula Matulonis, Alessandra Lorusso, Chris Gilligan,

Kenneth Gold, and Jeffrey Zack.

To Tim Phillips, Jane Miller, Cal Bedient, Helen Vendler, Kevin Young, Daniel Soar, Jaci Judelson, Dale Lanzzone, Saskia Hamilton, Jericho Brown, Forrest Gander, D. A. Powell, Claudia Rankine, Geralyn Dreyfous, Josh Bell, Carl Phillips, Robin Kelsey, Tracy K. Smith, Kamran Javadizadeh, Terry Tempest Williams, Carole Cadwalladr, Bill McKibben, Claire Messud, James Wood, Bret Johnston, and Carol Gilligan thank you for being there.

To Stephen Graham—thank you for the friendship of a lifetime.

To my students—bless you for your courage. It was always contagious.

To Emily and Alvaro—thank you for your powerful hope and love.

Above all to Peter—without your daily example, belief, and love I could not have made this book.

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Cover: Phil Kovacevich

Design: Erica Mena

ISBN: 978-1-55659-660-5

eISBN: 978-1-61932-259-2

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FOLLOWING SUPPORTERS WHO PROVIDED FUNDING DURING THE COVID-19
PANDEMIC:**

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City of Seattle Office of Arts & Culture

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Economic Development Council of Jefferson County

National Book Foundation (Literary Relief Fund)

Poetry Foundation

U.S. Department of the Treasury Payroll Protection Program

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american poets**

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FAMILY FOUNDATION

amazon *literary*
partnership 



Lannan



**National
Endowment
for the Arts**
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SEATTLE



The Witter Bynner Foundation
for Poetry

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Gull Industries Inc. on behalf of William True

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Maureen Lee and Mark Busto
Peter Lewis and Johnna Turiano
Ellie Mathews and Carl Youngmann as The North Press
Larry Mawby and Lois Bahle
Hank and Liesel Meijer
Jack Nicholson
Gregg Orr
Petunia Charitable Fund and adviser Elizabeth Hebert
Suzanne Rapp and Mark Hamilton
Adam and Lynn Rauch
Emily and Dan Raymond
Joseph C. Roberts
Jill and Bill Ruckelshaus
Cynthia Sears
Kim and Jeff Seely
Joan F. Woods
Barbara and Charles Wright
In honor of C.D. Wright, from Forrest Gander
Caleb Young as C. Young Creative
The dedicated interns and faithful volunteers of Copper Canyon Press



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poems

KEVIN YOUNG



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Book of Hours

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Black Maria

Jelly Roll: A Blues

To Repel Ghosts

Most Way Home

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John Berryman: Selected Poems

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BROWN

⌘ POEMS ⌘

Kevin Young

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ALFRED A. KNOPF | NEW YORK | 2018

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PUBLISHED BY ALFRED A. KNOPF

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www.aaknopf.com/poetry

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Young, Kevin, [date] author.

Title: Brown : poems / Kevin Young.

Description: First edition. | New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 2018.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017029270 (print) | LCCN 2017030884 (ebook) |

ISBN 9781524732554 (ebook) | ISBN 9781524732547 (hardcover)

Subjects: LCSH: African Americans—Poetry | BISAC: POETRY / American /
African American. | POETRY / American / General.

Classification: LCC PS3575.0798 (ebook) | LCC PS3575.0798 A6 2018 (print) |
DDC 811/.54—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017029270>

Ebook ISBN 9781524732554

Cover illustration by Jason Kernech

Cover design by Kelly Blair

Illustration by Mack Young

v5.2

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Contents

Cover

Also by Kevin Young

Title Page

Copyright

Thataway

HOME RECORDINGS

ONE: THE A TRAIN

Swing

Rumble in the Jungle

Open Letter to Hank Aaron

Mercy Rule

Slump

Stealing

Patter

Flame Tempered

Practice

The Division

Ode to the Harlem Globetrotters

Ashe

Shirts & Skins

I doubt it

TWO: ON THE ATCHISON, TOPEKA & THE SANTA FE

Ad Astra Per Aspera

Western Meadowlark

American Bison

Sunflower

Phys. Ed.

Warm Up

Tumbling

Dodgeball

Bleachers
Practice
City
Ice Storm, 1984
History
Dictation
Booty Green

Brown

FIELD RECORDINGS

THREE: NIGHT TRAIN

James Brown at B. B. King's on New Year's Eve
Fishbone
Chuck Taylor All Stars
Checkerboard Vans
Creepers
Doc Martens
John Fluevogs
Lead Belly's First Grave
It
Ode to Big Pun
De La Soul Is Dead
Ode to Ol Dirty Bastard

FOUR: THE CRESCENT LIMITED

B. B. King Plays Oxford, Mississippi
Bass
Triptych for Trayvon Martin
Not Guilty (A Frieze for Sandra Bland)
Limbo (A Fresco for Tamir Rice)
Nightstick (A Mural for Michael Brown)
A Brown Atlanta Boy Watches Basketball on West 4th. Meanwhile, Neo-Nazis March on
Charlottesville, Virginia.
Howlin' Wolf
Repast
Hospitality Blues
The Head Waiter's Lament
Reservations

Booker's Place

Waiting

Death's Dictionary

A Glossary of Uppity

Pining, A Definition

Sundaying

Whistle

Money Road

Hive

Notes & Acknowledgments

A Note About the Author

Thataway

And the migrants kept coming.

—JACOB LAWRENCE

Was walking. Was
walking & then waiting
for a train, the 12:40
to take us thataway.
(I got there early.)
Wasn't a train
exactly but a chariot
or the Crescent Limited come
to carry me some
home I didn't yet
know. There were those
of us not ready till good
Jim swung from a tree
& the white folks crowded
the souvenir photo's frame—
let his body black-
en, the extremities
shorn—not shed,
but skimmed off
so close it can be shaving
almost. An ear
in a pocket, on a shelf,
a warning where a book
could go. So
I got there early.

See now, it was morning—
a cold snap, first frost
which comes even
here & kills the worms
out the deer. You can
hunt him then
but we never did want,
after, no trophy
crowned down
from a wall, watching—
just a meal, what
we might make last
till spring. There are ways
of keeping a thing.
Then there are ways
of leaving, & also
the one way. That
we didn't want.
I got there early.
Luggage less sturdy
(cardboard, striped, black)
than my hat. Shoebox
of what I shan't say
lunch on my lap.
The noise the rails made
even before the train.
A giant stomach growling.
A bowed belly. I did
not pray. I got there
early. It was not
no wish, but a way.

HOME RECORDINGS



“Of course I cannot understand it,” he said. “If your heads were stuffed with straw, like mine, you would probably all live in the beautiful places, and then Kansas would have no people at all. It is fortunate for Kansas that you have brains.”

—THE SCARECROW
The Wizard of Oz





The A Train

Swing

If, up early,
 an hour no jazzster
never did see,

 my son & I—
he's three—
 jump up to accompany

Mister Charlie
 Christian on his six string,
listening to *Swing*

to Bop (Live), a recording cut
long after midnight—
 my son plucky

on the tiny tourist
 toy guitar his big sis
brought back from Fiji,

 tapping his feet
while I rake
 the plastic strings

of my ancient, resurrected
 racquetball racquet
that showed up lately—

 strumming the sun,

the morning
into being—my son

stopping to chase the dust
we can suddenly see
in the bright now falling—

his skinny legs
jangling—you'll
maybe understand,

later, when he runs in
& asks,
Daddy,

what's jazz?
I just point at him
& laugh.

Rumble in the Jungle

If you didn't know
better, you might think
Muhammad was praying,

not talking smack—
arms up, Ali
leans way back

as if trying to catch
a glimpse
of the Almighty—

he's told no one
his plan
to rope-a-dope—

to bend in whatever wind
Foreman sends
or knocks out of him.

Haymakers & body
blows. The thumbs
of his old-fashioned boxing gloves

upright like Ali
hopes to hitch a ride
to heaven. Instead he's here

in Zaire, stuck waiting

for the monsoon—
playing possum

through seven rounds
till it's time to climb & jab
his way off the ropes

like Tarzan sawing free
from a fishing net in a Saturday
matinee—swinging

till Foreman backstrokes
to the floor. Seven whole rounds
of reckoning—till a woman

in a dashiki, stepping lightly,
carries the card
for the next round filled

with what now
appears omen, inevitability—
for one moment

the number 8
knocked flat
on its side—

an infinity.

Open Letter to Hank Aaron

Your folded jersey said it
best: *Brave*. A bounty
on your head, last name a prophet's,

first a king, you kept swinging
that hammer, Bad Henry, even after
the threats fell like hail.

Every barbershop's expert
already knew you would best
Ruth's sacred record, just

like they knew the Babe
was really black, ever
see that nose of his?

The hate mail you quit opening
kept coming, scrawled or sutured,
brushing you back more

than a Hoot Gibson inside pitch,
no return address—
the newspaper with your obit

already written, primed
to run. Still you swung
like a boxer in the late rounds

hoping to change the Judges'

minds—once you connect
 & the ball barely sails

over the short porch in left,
 you don't so much run
as pace

 around the bases—
nonchalant, nervous—a man
 with too much cash

worrying his pockets, a windfall
 he may never live
long enough to spend.

 Rounding second,
two guys race
 up to you, friend

or foe, clapping you
 on the back—
I hear they're doctors now—

 as if you'd just been born.
Hopping the fence
 like that ball did,

your mama
 bear-hugs you
headed home. *Think of it*

as money,
the Bancard billboard
 you cleared in left

field says. Not
that you did—
after, the microphones

aimed at your face
like arrows into a saint,
your face less belief

than relief—
I just thank God,
you say, *it's over with.*

Falling back
into the crowd, unharmed,
you wave your blue arms.

Mercy Rule

The true test of a man is a bunt.

—TED BERRIGAN

[SLUMP]

The sting in your hands
 swinging
a cracked bat

 in early spring.
The anger of the one-armed boy
 at bat, whiffing

at every lousy pitch
 tossed in the dirt, or air
above him, eager—

 it was hard
to watch. Swung out, he'd spike
 & splinter his bat

into the giving ground,
 arguing with his hand
& hook—cursing it,

 himself, furious
as the sun that shined
 setting in all our eyes.

[STEALING]

Only time
 I ever heard
my eyes were any good

was watching a full
 count pitch
just miss—

I'd take my base
 before the ball'd
been called. Lead-off man,

righty, my strike zone
 small enough
little squeezed through,

the ball a camel
 needling impossible
into heaven. Hell,

I'd steal second standing—
 would wait till
they tried throwing

me out at first, my long lead
 a taunt, then head
to second

without a thought.

In that game
called *pickle*,

or *hotbox*, I rarely
got caught. I ran
like only the sly,

four-eyed can—to get there
& to get away—
to reach somewhere

safe, where I
never thought
to stay.

[PATTERN]

When I played
in the Onandaga League,
Coach wouldn't let us

patter like the others—
no *Hey batter batter*
Swing—

no nothing.
At the plate silence
greeted all comers—

prodigal sons
returned to the farm
& no arms thrown open

in welcome. Or alarm. Chatter
was rude, Coach said, & anyways
unnecessary. We were above

all those taunts—*We want*
a pitcher not
a belly itcher—

instead eerie quiet
met the Visitors
whenever we took the mound,

batters swinging into

a calm that would undo
most anyone who

thought noise worse
than its opposite,
that the storm

wouldn't come.

[FLAME TEMPERED]

I only owned one bat,
my favorite,
Roberto Clemente's name

burnt into the wood—
length 27 I think, a yellow
plank lathed

off some tree in Kentucky.
I swung that Slugger
often as I could

not knowing Clemente
except what Dad had told me—
he was a man who loved

people, who tried
doing good
so was dead. Later,

when our racist neighbor
wouldn't let me spin
on her swing set—

You can play, she said, freckled,
aiming a finger at my friend,
but he can't, calling me out—

I thought of my Clemente bat

that, off-duty, Dad leaned
in the front closet in case

anyone dared break in.
So when
she went & called me an *N*—

I called her *Honky* back.
Stung, she yelled
for her daddy, who emerged

no matter what she'd said
& threatened me
from his short porch

till I split—some black kid
who dared talk back
like Clemente's bat.

Even then
I knew you weren't
supposed to do that.

Only later did I learn
Clemente
means *mercy*.

[PRACTICE]

We'd play pepper
or 500
for hours. Past dusk

I'd ricochet
a racquetball against
the garage or the side

of our complex, invent-
ing games, or plays
to save the ninth. Every pitch

a strike, each catch
kept us from losing
the World

at home. Reenactors
of our civil war,
the Yankees would knock off

our Sox every time. Pitch
by pitch we rehearsed last night's loss
in the playoffs, begging

for one more inning.

Can I still say I loved Reggie
Jackson bars, saving all

my rancor

for the Hollywood Dodgers?

After all, Mister

October looked

like my father—afroed,
mustachioed, furiously

arguing with all
he had endured
even as he saved

someone's day. Only night
would send me
inside, where the light

gathered, pooling
in our living-room lamps—
their bulbs, bright

as a tulip, if touched
turned to a line drive
searing your palm.

[THE DIVISION]

We played in blue jeans
unlike other teams
in their tidy PAL uniforms

the cops paid for.
We were outlaws, our hats
dark, maroon shirts

with our names on the back,
skin black
& brown & in between—

we played a mean
game, if only after
a season of being

the Bad News Bears, losing,
umps even invoking
the mercy rule some games.

We'd wake
& pray for rain.
Or an ankle sprain.

One day something
gave way—the spokes
they turned & all

of a sudden we won,

beating teams twice
our size who'd skunked

us before, giving goose eggs to kids
in golden sleeves
& tall corn-yellow socks, their new cleats

aimed at our shins.
We were our own Negro League.
Our mascot was Reggie,

chubby, goofy,
Marcel the relief
& Damien our best pitcher, his long nails

stabbing the stitches—
his windup quick, change
clipping the corner of the dish.

I even saved one game—bases loaded,
the bullpen spent
or gone wild—the backup

pitcher's backup, I threw slow
but straight, the final strike
turtling across the plate.

The team hoisted me high that night.
Our fathers for once smiling wide.
Our final game we took first place

& won the division, the sore
faces the losing team wore
less shock, or disbelief—

that you could take—than disgrace
 & plain rage. The mask
of their catcher tossed

 into the Kansas dust.
Anger sat there, uneasy—
 & too easy—even

their parents hated us, claimed
 to have forgotten our trophies.
Who cared if they couldn't take

 watching us celebrate?
That, for the required final handshake
 good game—good game—

they christened their palms with spit?
 Later, we'd wash up clean—
& sprinkles or chocolate dip hid

our ice cream, vanishing.

Ode to the Harlem Globetrotters

VS. THE WASHINGTON GENERALS

Because they always win.

Because Meadowlark Lemon.

Because for them, double dribbling
is literal.

Because on your finger
your knee, toes
& elbows, the world can spin.

Because the ball
on a string.

Because rubber bands for hands.

Because the ball a banner.

Because where else do Generals
meet defeat without blood.

Because the best offense
is a quick depantsing.

Because mercy, not pity.

Because the bucket
of water tossed

on the cries of the crowd
turns like tears to confetti.

Ashe

For years I've wanted to write
how exactly I felt
with you hovering

on my wall, framed, mid-
air, about to strike
the ball above you,

Arthur Ashe—in your tennis whites
I pictured you lifted
into whatever came after

this photo's instant—firing
a volley, or striking a serve
down the throat

of your opponent
like a pill.

Your signature

below my name
seemed more real to me
than most things—bullies,

or whatever wisdom got cracked
out of me like a knuckle—
more real than being

unable to see without glass

before my eyes. I saw you
sporting glasses too.

Your hair a microphone cover
to help keep
the static down. Even

your photo has a sound—
call it *About to be*.
Call it *Maybe*—

no, *Probably*—
name it
after every unlikely

you made into something.
You swing
in my head like Count Basie

only there's no
royalty, no music anymore
like yours.

Shirts & Skins

I was ten when
 Mike Smiley, half-Indian,
skinny, brown-skinned,

brought the word *jigaboo*
 to school
like lunch, or the flu,

fed him by his adopted
 white father who said
that's what we called

them then. By noon
 it was done—everyone
had a name for what had been

bothering them, some
 thing utterly human
as hate. Language feeds

——

on need, however strange
 it may be—take
nigger knocking for ringing

the door of some stranger
 or friend, then ditching,
watching from the shrubs

after the toll—

I never knew
which of us was supposed

to be the spook,
or just spooked,
how pretending to be no one

was any fun.
I had enough
of that one

—

hugging the roller
rink wall
during *Snowball*—

the referees, underpaid
zebra-striped employees,
picked with amazing accuracy,

somehow knowing
the exact girl
to play Eve. She'd cruise out

to the latest ballad
& pick her perfect mate
for a slow skate

then a whistle would sound
& like the *Farmer*
in the Dell, each partner picked

one more. And so on.

Soon the rink an ark
of what everyone thought

or secretly loved—the center
growing bigger
& whiter—

—

Stephanie slowing
unlike my heart, then
picking the fat kid next to me,

his face red as grapes
while she skates
backwards with him away.

Paper covers
rock, shirts
beat skins. Soon enough

when *Human Nature*
scratched on
I knew to hit

the arcade, getting good
at *Defender*—
warp speed—

—

mouthed every
word. Sixth grade
you didn't survive

just endured.

Mostly life was *Kill*
the Man with the Ball,

or *Smear*

the Queer—
the football a prayer

clutched against
your chest, outlasting
even this. I was hard

to catch, *King*
of the Hill
in a town with only one

—

to its name—a sacred place,
some said the Indians said,
& so long as no one built on it

the tornado wouldn't come.

Of course they put up
a water tower to watch over

cars that parked there, darkened,
steamed—*Tell them*
that it's human nature—

& soon after a cyclone arrived
& ate half the town.
Winners talk, losers walk. How

I hoped to outrun those arms,
to leapfrog
all tacklers the way madness skips

—

a generation. Kids
I sat by for years,
or walked back from school with

since we were ten, now
down the wide hall
of high school would call: *Minority*

go home. I never did ask
Where's that? Their words
a strong, hot

wind at my back.

I doubt it

It's as if you
 have died when I head
into your room, only

its ageing bears
 tucked in at night,
everything just

as you left it, but quiet—
 to switch off the lone
night light—though you

are just down
 the street at our neighbor
boy's sleepover, turning

nine tonight, where, surely,
 you barely sleep.
I bet you're up drinking

apple juice the way we once
 downed soda or pop
or root beer, RC

or Atari by the liter, playing war
 & bullshit—
what we code-named *I doubt it*—

though we boys were full

of confidence. Sleeping bags
a war zone where nobody died

or got sent home—
where we'd play-fight
& camp out & need no light

to keep us company
till dawn. This is how
we learnt about tomorrow—

when I will wander
over & tug you back
where you also belong—

by the hand, somewhat
awake, sleeping
bag under your arm

empty as a chrysalis.

■ TWO ■

On the Atchison, Topeka & the Santa Fe



Ad Astra Per Aspera

[WESTERN MEADOWLARK]

Land of unlikely.
Land of no sea.
Land of all you can eat.
Land of seventeen.

Land of silos,
missile & otherwise.
Land of squinting eyes.
Land of wheat & milo,

land of bejeweled jorts.
Land of A & W,
of Gates Bar.B.Q.
These are my dressiest shorts.

Land of grey ash.
Land of acid wash.
Land of winded cough,
of neatly piled trash.

Land of squat buildings
& broad, slate sky.
Land of land neverending.
Land of doesn't matter why.

Land of soft serve.

Land of Deadman's Curve.
Land of lost mutts.
I'm not racist but—

Land of summer severe.
Land of persevere.
Land of nothing near.
Into this here

strode tall John Brown.
In one hand a Bible,
the other a rifle,
face more scowl than frown.

[AMERICAN BISON]

How old were we
 when I entered the capitol,
word I still misspell?

I'd been a spelling champ
 & popular sidekick,
the class clown Tom Crook's

best friend till I moved to town.

 Here I was no one.
Here I was

just another
 face among the class
trudged beneath the copper dome

atop of which an Indian archer
 sculpture now crouches—
meant as a compliment I'm sure.

We had climbed the marble
 divoted steps, jostling
to better see

when we saw it:
 John Brown
muraled, arms thrown

wide, beard afire, dead

soldiers smoldering
at his feet. Holy me—

how to unsee those eyes
wild-wide like a mouth?
Behind him a tornado

tearing up the plain—
which would never be
that way again.

[**SUNFLOWER**]

Some point their toes
others hold their noses
as they hurl themselves

into the blue—
the pool a paradise
of typoed tattoos,

young girls dressed
as women, high strung,
& mothers dressed as girls—

the men, shoulders
peeling, suck in
their guts, or wear

shirts underwater, acting
natural. My son
thin among them wading

& grinning, flops
from the high dive
onto his back with a smack.

We curl down the slide
one at a time,
blue light at the end

the color of dusk later

that evening, after reading
at the *Brown v. Board* site,

when Skoog,
Fox Averill & I
watch our sons

wheeling frisbees
against the dying
of the light.

Fox now an orphan
& Skoog & I
who both lost a parent

a week or two apart—
who, back again in what
once was home,

would drink & mourn
in Topeka's sole
non-chain bar,

now closed. We'd shut
the place down then too,
whiskey downed & burning

like grief—not picturing
that one day we'd feel
anything, much less anything

else. Yet here
they are, our children—
Fox's son older,

throwing with a beer
in his hand, mine
loud with a mouth

full of braces, cuts,
& little Oscar
in the pachysandra, foraging

for stray shots.
Winging
dark discs

past our heads like bats
near-blind & swooping—
night a net
now thrown around us—
in dusk
our boys' bodies grow

as hard to see
as hope.
I think of how

when first invented,
the flying
disc was free

& what cost—
tonight you can
almost feel it—

was the invisible rope.

Phys. Ed.

[WARM UP]

Between Language & Health
perched Gym or Phys. Ed.
or whatever they called our removing

what fit & changing into our clashing
school colors. My t-shirt dubbed me
YOUNG, something barkable, one

syllable. Those without uniforms
lost grades or got loans; those
with boners in the showers

got beat up. Edsel, once caught
beating off in a stall, would rub
the backs of his knees with green

deodorant, he said to keep cool—
this, long before we heard how to stop
sweating & smell, lectured in the male art

of antiperspirant while the seventh-grade
girls learned about blood
during third period. That talk

we only got wind of later.

[TUMBLING]

Stringer was a rumor,
 former Olympic wrestler
now overweight gym teacher

sent down river
 to Marjorie French Middle School
for hurtling some poor fool

who told him off in high school
 down the stairs. A whole
bloody flight. Once

his ham-sized elbow staked my chest
 to demonstrate pain—
a pin—his face a fist.

Floundered high & dry,
 glasses-less, I counted rafters
blurry & regular

as the times Stringer yanked out
 the tucked shirts of handstood girls
whenever he spotted their legs,

laughing. How often he stared
 while they changed—
those girls who tumbled

while we wrestled—

Stringer playing
pocket-pool

& losing, scratching
himself, all eightball,
no cue.

[DODGEBALL]

When Mrs. Ostrich blew
the whistle, the whole
high school knew

that meant business—she'd call
us sissies
or girls for running

too slow. Lazy himself, after
teaching Study Hall, Coach Gray
had a cow if we looked at all

tired but put in a soft word,
a *good hustle* for every
Amy or awkward devil

who couldn't swing
to save their lives, much less
break a tie. He never

bothered to teach them
a thing. The gym echoed
the tons of times those two

coaches met, hidden among
the Driver's Ed cars
or the dull

steel-tipped arrows

& half-deflated dodgeballs
that hibernate till spring—

the duo doing
their tug-oh-
war thing.

[BLEACHERS]

Johnny Henry, no angel, managed
to wrestle one—not the father
who beat him silly, not his mother

who'd split or the seventh grade that could
smell him coming; nor the health teacher
who taught Johnny how to wash & not go

in his pants; nor Coach De Mann who gave him sneakers
for gym, making him wait so everyone knew
the poor white kid was him—but one short

school year later, his chest grown half as wide
as his height, Johnny Henry could lift
more than twice his weight

off the bench press, smear
other kids with some newfound
strength. What could anyone say then,

pinned like a butterfly to the mat? He won
every meet we wrestled, met
each opponent like a seraphim,

many limbed, wiping
the smiles from chubby
cherubs, putting them in a cradle

or ball & chain while we stomped

the stands, chanting
Pin! Pin!—the bleachers

calling again
again his brave
two-fisted name.

[PRACTICE]

Each afternoon for hours
our bodies weren't
our own—we'd have

to run, give Coach
twenty,
then *Ready: Wrassle*.

Nabus, nicknamed
Tonka cause he was squat
& tough as those toy trucks,

could climb the gym's ropes
thirty feet using only
his hands. Once

I watched him
about to be pinned, then
stand up with a kid

across his hairless chest
& slam him for the win.
With some whale splayed

on our stomachs,
we'd practice bridges
arcing on our heads

for hours, hoping to build

necks & break
chokeholds like backs.

I still have the letter
jacket, won mostly
by making 98 weight

all fall easy.

Still I'd drink
only spit

for days, swallowing
insults about my family
& skin, the way

teammates would call you *spook*
then beg you for food
before a meet. On buses

boys practiced becoming adults—
lying about girls,
playing rock, paper,

scissors for pain—then rubbing
the ears of enemies
till they bloomed

into cauliflowers. Whenever
anyone asked
to share, I'd hock

into my sandwiches,
put the halves back
together, then swallow

them slow.

[CITY]

In his office, Coach De Mann said
I had it made & could win
City if only I put my mind

where my body was, applied
myself. That season I lifted,
ran stairs, wore three layers

of sweats to slim sleep. All winter
in trash bags I jogged to Russia & back,
dreamt steak, no fat. The drinking

fountain we ran laps past
ringed in launched loogies
stayed unsipped.

On the meet-bound bus
I watched boys spit out pounds
in Kwik cups—heard tell

of magic saunas & miracle,
ten-pound
dumps. One Coach made my friend

drop a whole class, cutting
from 112 to 105 overnight;
Tim bought PMS pills to lose

water, the cashier staring back

at him blank as his Biology
test the next day

when he passed out cold. Watched
another kid shave—rusty razor,
no cream, no mirror—

when some ref deemed
his teenage stubble
a weapon—

in the warped
metal of the paper towel dispenser
his chin bloomed stigmata.

After I told Mom I knew I'd win
she only half-
believed me, said hope

was good to have. Later I waved
to her from the podium
after winning City, my smile as long

as the shot she'd thought I had.

How I loved
Coach & his belief,

the medal mine. Earning
my letter jacket's giant T,
I was called to his office, I thought

to shake hands. Instead he asked,
You can dance, right?
Why don't I moonwalk

for him & the boys?

A ring of fellow coaches grinned.
Stunned, I did not laugh

or dance or do that backwards
glide he wanted—I still haven't a clue
which race he thought

he'd have me run—my medal
long lost—that sunny morning
right before Life

Science, long after History.

Ice Storm, 1984

The lines for power & speech
freeze, then stiffen & fall—
thrown back into dark

we hear the radio tell the town
what we already know—
last night's storm iced over

everything, yet hurt only
half Topeka's houses—wiping
away windows, we see some

homes, doors down, still bright
& inviting as snow. Here our heat
has ended—we have only wood

& whatever warmth
won't escape
like gossip. Power out,

our freezer starts to thaw—
we keep meat out back in drifts.
USD 501, name like a grade

of beef, cancels—
no Civics, no Language
class, no Western Civilization.

How many mornings

had I stalled, dressing
by the faint radio, praying
the airwaves would list
my school among the saved?
By evening, the thrill of hooky sours
as our house pours
into dark & cold, nothing
like the brief candle-warmth
of brownouts when lightning
would keep us from touching
metal, or each other, for fear
of shock. Dusk starts
here like horror-movie
houses abandoned
& adrift—phone line
cut like an anchor,
the killer in shadow
behind every door. Nothing
lasts—neither food
nor warmth, yet Dad
won't leave our glacial living
room, stubborn
as the mule we'd ride around
unsaddled down home. He burns
wood while Mom gathers
our things & her son, saying

she's had enough dark
 childhood nights to outlast
a life. Heading blocks

away it feels we cross
 a century—tiptoe
through the blackout

across slick, lit ice
 to our neighbors' kind house
full of bright bulbs, running

water. We've arrived.
 Civilization, Mom laughs.
In their carpeted

basement rec room, I shoot
 pinball when the son
lets me play—the coffin talks

if hit with
 enough English—
after he flips off the lights

our faces flicker in the pretend night
 like the father I picture
by the hearth, fire dying

like laughter. Who knows what
 he eats, curled up
mammoth & woolen

with a fifth aged
 amber as skin.

Phoneless, we return days later

to find him, unmoved,
 shivering, in a quilt
his mother saved scraps for

& sewed. Beside him
 the bottle of blended empty
as a promise, as this house

half paid for. An hour later
 power returns—bless the company
electric—our heater starting up

its argument with the fridge.

 Will take far longer
till the stomach

in the freezer fills up & quits
 growling, for men to resurrect
the phone lines, our talk

trapped outside in ice.

History

Pillar of my high school, Mr. W
made class by seven a.m., filling
his blackboards with white, using notes

decades old & denture yellow.
I heard he could write any way
you wanted—backward, forward,

left hand or right, even
mirrored. For him History
was what each night

he erased.
He never missed a day. Snow
days drove the man insane—

—

regular as mail, he said if a letter could reach
the school, so could we, trudging
through bitterest cold to his overwarm room.

Never let kids eat, or talk in class, or take
down just what he wrote on the board—
Listen to what I'm telling you, he'd say,

synthesize, don't record. Some days he'd launch
into an anecdote about the War or
what's wrong with kids today—

*you're not moral or immoral, just
amoral.* Even his jokes grown older
than he was, the trap door he wished he owned

—

would send kids crashing into spikes
simply for walking during class
without a pass. At breaks he began to bend
to pick up stray trash. He despised the *boom
boom boom* of the radios black kids wore,
he swore, or tugged his eyes at the corners

to imitate a Chinaman on the rail.
Ah, so. Brilliant is what everyone
dubbed him, but by the time we got there

Mr. W had started to slip,
missing most of the May before—
rumors went round

—

our school had tried stopping
his return—*Take the year off,*
you earned it—even he

told us that—but here he was,
stonewalling, aged twenty years
over the summer, back like MacArthur

or the Terminator to teach us
all. Some seniors from last year's class
brought him steel tension balls

that September—tinny things
he clutched in his palm & clanked past
each other like cymbals

—

tolling stress. We
stayed silent. Fifty pounds
shed over the summer, his wrists jutted out

from the frayed cuffs
of his Crayola cardigans.

He'd turn & tune

those chiming spheres like the globe
his classroom never had—
his walls held only Old Glory

& a fading photo of the flag
raised at Iwo Jima. Mr. W let us know
he never got to fight in the War

—

more often as the year wore
away with his sweater's elbows,
till his yellow shirt shone

through like yolk. That year
the Depression & World
War took all winter

& knowing time was short, his own,
Mr. W spent nights transcribing
to transparencies words

water could wipe away,
numbering each palimpsest to match
his crumbling notes. *Just in case,*

—

he'd say, above the overhead
projector's buzz—*you could manage*
without me. He never

could forget a past
only we would remember—
his teacher telling him at graduation

You know you're only seventeen
& who knows how long this Pacific
Theater might last—They have this new

GI Bill. Get some college first,
Wayne, his name all alliteration,
a tone poem. How

—

could he know
we'd drop the bomb
& end it all? He tried serving

later, even went
to enlist in Korea but was foiled
by a bad back & luck. *I tried,*

he'd plead the air. How to soothe
a man who woke his whole life
at five & could silence kids

not his own? Who once
drove 45 on the highway he told us
cause Nixon asked

—

his fellow Americans to, counting
each unpatriotic car that passed him
along the way? Like history he saved

& scored the immeasurable—
with years-worth of sick days
hoarded & never spent, illness

came to fetch him
from the only other home he knew.
Wearing black now, pointing out

where other kids once sat long before
we were born—future
governors, a crook or two—

—

each chair a ghost. *You're my kids*,
he'd tell us, we built or broke
his heart. Next day

he was gone. We never did make it
to Vietnam—rest
of the year in silence we took down

the words he'd written
projected on the wall
like any man's promises to himself.

The latter half of the twentieth century
felt a bit too cold, winter
lingered too long—Mr. W's words,

—

unchanged, awaited
us *coloreds* & *women libbers*
half-hoping for him

to return—for the world not to be
as cruel as we'd learned.
We spent the Sixties

minus Malcolm X, or Watts,
barely a March on Washington—
all April & much

of May we waited for Woodstock
& answers & assassinations
that would never come

—

among the steady hum
& faint bright
of flickering fluorescent lights.

Dictation

*for William O'Neil,
FBI Informant*

Teach yourself to swim. Borrowing a car
for a day, joyride eight leagues across
state lines. Catch yourself the moment

before the pigs catch you, hands white
on the wheel. You have the right to remain
etcetera. Officer Le Fervour from the Fraternal

Order of Police will slap you on the wrists,
convince you to join the Panthers. You will
learn to remember your meals, record

conversations, how to write backwards
in the dark. Monitor all nefarious
activity, the Breakfast for Children Program,

the grits, the jelly. Relax and your body will
float naturally. After you become Minister
of Security, Special Agent M will contact you

intermittently to obtain the locations of weapons
and boxes of cereal. All milk shall be burned
in due time. Give your brother sleeping

pills drowned in water so he won't hear
our fire; after his file closes you'll see plans

of the headquarters*lash*bedrooms we drew

from your eyes. You never even raised
a fist. Take your two hundred bones
for years of uniquely rendered service

and keep treading, remembering to breathe.

Booty Green

From the outside he's a killer
 & we know it.
We've tried hemming Chris inside,

 below the key—
started off playing HORSE
 then quickly switched

to BULLSHIT soon as parents
 headed on indoors—
come dusk, we begin

 telling lies
about length & behind-
 the-back shots,

about how sweet
 our selves are. We've given up
the simon says of Around the World

—

for Booty Green, a game
 like 21, only meaner—
blacker, jack.

 The rules: are none.
The rules: no fouls
 called, no traveling,

no out-of-bounds. Just play,
boy, all elbows & ass
whuppins, fatal angles.

Amri—his name
a lion—barrels down
the lane like a shotgun

bride. Rejected.
Yo mama.
Troy hanging from the rim

—

like a suicide, saving
himself. The shortest,
I let them fight it out

in the paint, preying
on rebounds—believe it
or not—learning to toss up

hooks along the side, their arc
high, sly as a covenant. Mo Fo
of the Sacred Swish, her

holiness. *And so*
it came to pass—
but we keep it, head instead

for the bucket
as if an endzone, gaining air
like the black balcony

—

of the movie theater, talking
back to the screens
we each post. The ball

popcorn to toss.
Brick. *Chump*,
I thot you knew.

The Easter we've just eaten—
we angel against
each other till borne

by air, gaining ground
on God. Between the garage
& someone's mama's

car—*Watch the paint*,
nigger—we soar
& psych & sing.

—

Here, to stuff
don't mean your mouth or the Resurrection
bird now splayed

open indoors, but grabbing the rim
like a grenade pin. Not
that I'd know. Fingers round

the hoop, an eye
jabbed soft in its socket—
my glasses fly, a bird

almost extinct. No apology—
cowboying, we pick up
 & go again, pound the pavement

to pidgin, palming the ball
 the way Chris would grab
smaller boys' foreheads—

—

Crystal ball, tell me all—
his hands reading fortunes
 we pretend we'll make.

Out here we charge, trying
 to father ourselves—
our dads inside, wise,

 where it's still warm.
We laugh at the way
 Chris, like the god he thought

he was, took a new last name—
 Fontaine—trying to pull down
babes on the rebound. Don't

 know how with that
jheri curl juice. But today, fool,
 all our heads are clean

—

as dinner-table talk, as a broke dick
 dog. Our dads asleep
in front of the game

or divorced, having dinner
with new families—or alone—
while over dirty dishes

our mothers laugh.
Here on this angly, angry
asphalt, no matter what

the songs say, love or faith
don't make the grade—
one manchild against the rest,

we dog each other out
so later we can take shots
from the outside

—

where Chris breaks free,
prodigal, almost to the lawn—
his jumper murder. Every sunk

shot sends him to the line,
the rest of us panting
& bent & catching

breath. If he misses
it's sudden death
& we're all hoping

to reach 21. *Last requests?*
he says bouncing
that ball bald

as a granny, or a baby,
two things
we're trying to prove

—

we're not. *No way*,
we holler. Up again
for the rebound, savior

that never comes—the ball falling
like a guillotine, or the pumpkin
the executioner tests it on,

falling like the dark
we barely notice has grown up
around us—the gruff

voice of a father
summoning us inside
to dine on humble pie & crow

before it grows cold.



Brown

for my mother

The scrolled brown arms
of the church pews curve
like a bone—their backs

bend us upright, standing
as the choir enters
singing, *We've come this far*

by faith—the steps
& sway of maroon robes,
hands clapping like a heart

in its chest—*leaning*
on the Lord—
this morning's program

still warm
from the mimeo machine
quick becomes a fan.

In the vestibule latecomers
wait just outside
the music—the river

we crossed
to get here—
wide boulevards now

--

in disrepair.

 We're watched over
 in the antechamber

by Rev.

 Oliver Brown,
 his small, colored picture

nailed slanted
 to the wall—former
 pastor of St. Mark's

who marched
 into that principal's office
 in Topeka to ask

Why can't my daughter
 school here, just
 steps from our house—

but well knew the answer—
 & Little Linda
 became an idea, became more

what we needed & not
 a girl no more—*Free-dom*
 Free-dom—

—

Now meant

 sit-ins & *I shall I shall*

I shall not be

moved—

 & four little girls bombed
 into tomorrow

in a church basement like ours

 where nursing mothers & children
 not ready to sit still

learned to walk—Sunday school

 sent into pieces
 & our arms.

We are

 swaying more
 now, entering

heaven's rolls—the second row

 behind the widows
 in their feathery hats

& empty nests, heads heavy

 but not hearts

Amen. The all-white

—

stretchy, scratchy dresses
of the missionaries—
the hatless holy who pin lace

to their hair—bowing
down into pocketbooks
opened for the Lord, then

snapped shut
like a child's mouth
mouthing off, which just

one glare from an elder
could close.
God's eyes must be

like these—aimed
at the back row
where boys pass jokes

& glances, where Great
Aunts keep watch,
their hair shiny

as our shoes
& as of yesterday,
just as new—

—

chemical curls & lop-
sided wigs—humming
during offering

Oh my Lord
Oh my Lordy
What can I do.

The pews curve like ribs
broken, barely healed,
& we can feel

ourselves breathe—
while Mrs. Linda Brown
Thompson, married now, hymns

piano behind her solo—
No finer noise
than this—

We sing
along, or behind,
mouth most

every word—following
her grown, glory voice,
the black notes

—

rising like we do—
like Deacon
Coleman whom my mother

always called *Mister*—
who'd help her
weekends & last

I saw him my mother
offered him
a slice of sweet potato

pie as payment—
or was it apple—
he'd take no money

barely said
yes, only
I could stay

for a piece—
trim as his grey
moustache, he ate

with what I can only
call dignity—
fork gently placed

—

across his emptied plate.

Afterwards, full,

Mr. Coleman's *That's nice*

meant wonder, meant

the world entire.

Within a year cancer

had eaten him away—

the only hint of it

this bitter taste for a whole

year in his mouth. *The resurrection*

and the light.

For now he's still

standing down front, waiting

at the altar for anyone

to accept the Lord, rise

& he'll meet you halfway

& help you down

the aisle—

legs grown weak—

As it was in the beginning

Is now

—

And ever shall be—
All this tuning
& tithing. We offer

our voices up
toward the windows
whose glass I knew

as colored, not stained—
our backs
made upright not by

the pews alone—
the brown
wood smooth, scrolled

arms grown
warm with wear—
& prayer—

Tell your neighbor
next to you
you love them—till

we exit
into the brightness
beyond the doors.

FIELD RECORDINGS



*Dearly Beloved, we are gathered here together to get
through this thing called life.*

—PRINCE



▨ THREE ▨

Night Train

James Brown at B. B. King's on New Year's Eve

*The one thing that can solve most
our problems is dancing.* And sweat,
cold or not. And burnt ends
of ribs, or reason, of hair
singed & singing. The hot comb's
caress. Days after
he dies, I see James Brown still
scheduled to play B. B. King's
come New Year's Eve—ringing
it in, us, falling to the floor
like the famous glittering midnight
ball drop, countdown, forehead full
of sweat, *please, please,*
please, please, begging
on his knees. The night
King was killed, shot
by the Memphis moan in a town
where B. B. King sang, Saint
James in Boston tells
the crowd: cool it. A riot
onstage, heartache
rehearsed, practiced, don't dare
be late or miss a note
or you'll find yourself fined
fifty bucks. A fortune. Even
the walls sweat. A God-
father's confirmation suit,

his holler, wide-collared, grits
& greens. Encore. Exhausted
after, collapsed, carried
out, away, off—not on a gurney,
no bedsheet over
his bouffant, conk
shining, but, boots on,
in a cape glittering bright
as midnight, or its train.

Fishbone

[CHUCK TAYLOR ALL STARS]

I found your first
record yesterday—
it looked like the past

& sounded
like the future—
that combo platter I love best

of all. The black grooves gave
way to moans
of horns, yelps,

bass that leapt
like you did
on the cover—bald,

mohawked, knotted
& dreaded, bespoke
& be-hatted, daytime shades

& handkerchiefs
like a bank robber—
plaits & plaids on tweed

like gangster professors.
One of you grins,

most the rest

in mid-air soar.

[CHECKERBOARD VANS]

The apocalypse sounds
like this—
black men breaking in

to steal back the thing
once stole
from them. A drum

trash talking, trombone
tossed from off
stage into Angelo's hands

less slid than shoved—
swift notes
swim past—then he throws

the horn back
like a salmon
into the wings, careless,

rehearsed. After Murphy's Law
& the Beastie
Boys open the show

even Fishbone's keyboard
player dervishes,
his body flung

like an epithet

into the fourth row's
wishbone arms.

[CREEPERS]

Declaring nothing,
we'd cross customs,
dreads tucked

under our hats—
once inside
Spain or Paris, London

or some club, we'd let
loose & dance.
Give me the cheapest

thing they have,
says David
so I bring him bitters

which even the bartender
declares undrinkable.
David refuses

to say so, tries choking
down the pint
like pride. We never ate anyway

sitting down, David always
looking for a cheaper
bite elsewhere, our stomachs

knotting & our hair. Eyes

mostly open,
Philippe & I drank & swam

through the dark waters
of Camdentown, high
on spliff & curry

our new friends cooked.

*We black folks
invented all music*

say our Australian-
Pakistani-British
friends. Everything then

shone in the blacklight—
our teeth
turnt violet.

We drank at the End
of the World,
pints three quid

& bitters far less—
would catch a taxi home
with those suicide

doors, watching the dawn
leak early above the low,
unopened buildings—

facing backwards
in the cab black
& shiny as a hearse, staring

at the wherever
we'd been, we slid
at every turn.

[**DOC MARTENS**]

Once I saved the bass
player from Fishbone
from getting his ass

handed to him, but not
before the fools bloodied
his lip & turnd

his pockets inside out
like a wish. All because,
Kendall, you refused

to rumble in that late night
chicken joint
where Philippe & I thought we'd die

as the regulars tried
picking a fight
with your bright

red coat, dreads
against your shoulder blades
like epaulets. The club we'd all been

now shut for the night—
the one Philippe & I had waited
outside of an hour, trying not

to beg. No one's getting in—

then a posse with locks
longer than us & worse haircuts,

which is to say, cooler,
part the ropes—
Fishbone!

in London to play a show
so we sneak in
behind them, for tonight

just another
of the crew.
Every dread danced.

Starving, after, we enter the shack
to find you taunted
by locals, loudmouths

who nick your change
& call you names.
Yankee, one says, shoving you

who refuses, you say,
to battle another man
who's black. Once his crew

jumps you & runs through
the street, we reel you in,
Kendall, stop you from chasing them

into the night, insulted
as much as anything
to be alive—*Back home, South*

Central, you say, I'd be dead.

Your breath itself
a rebuke, passport

a passing memory.

In the cab we hail
& pay to ride you

back to your hotel, pacifism
gives way—
wounded not just

by the blows, you fume—
angry at being
here but no longer

whole. In the lobby,
we take your manager's
payback & his promise

to leave us passes
for tomorrow's show.
Was it shame,

honor, or disbelief,
didn't
let us go?

[JOHN FLUEVOGS]

Months later I caught Fishbone
in New York at a church
turned into a night club

trying to film the video
for a song I still
don't know. The one

we'd saved now gone,
decamped across Europe
believing in something

no longer. Neither
did you all, it seemed—
the gleam gone, everything

upright, no diving—
nothing cockamamie
or incomplete. We clap

on cue. Lip sunk, you must
repeat the song over
& over so the shifting camera

can capture you. Where had all
the altars gone?
Even my girlfriend an ex.

Even my memory like the mic

sounds faulty.
Feedback fills the air

& we exit early, back
to our little boxes
before the song is done—

come morning,
our ears will still
like church bells toll.

Lead Belly's First Grave

is grey, plain, lowdown.

You have to crouch
near the ground to get

your picture made

beside it like Allen Ginsberg
& Robert Plant did, pilgrims

to where the music gave way
or starts. The stone's
simple dates—birth, death—

shade the close-cropped grass
& the small pale flowers
someone plucked & offered up

or planted here beneath
a tree. The stone, silvery,
could be lead instead—

soft & heavy as his voice
& as deadly, slow.
His new tomb's

tall almost
as a man—black,
sleek, costly.

Alongside it James Dickey

grins, elbow resting
on the stone like the shoulder

of a friend. The marker's not
inelegant, the sepulcher
not quite the sheen

of the suits Lead Belly wore
soon as he threw off
the chains of the gang

for good, string-ties
& not the prison stripes
Alan Lomax would have him wear.

Huddie Ledbetter's
second grave lists
his legend, has this

slab with a guitar engraved
& a black gate
to keep out the green—

hard to reach, easy
to read, there's now
no need to kneel.

It

It's rained for days.

He used to hate
hanging upside
down, now he can't

get enough,
my son. At the bank
of elevators he bets

which one will arrive first
& is most times
right. He's nine. Tonight

another neighbor
& good friend
called him *nigger*. I hear

the boys were all playing
a game called Lovie—
the point

is to call the It
names—*bitch*,
motherfucker, *ass*, they say,

& now *nigger*, who only he
dare not be.
The good thing

about this rain is that
his hair curls
even more & looks lush

& untamed. The bad
thing: this rain,
the wrong elevator

dinging down.

Ode to Big Pun

I'm not a prayer
I just wish a lot

De La Soul Is Dead

A ROLLER SKATING JAM NAMED SATURDAYS

We were black then, not yet
African American, so we danced
every chance we could get.
Thursday & Saturdays we'd chant

The roof! The roof! The roof
is on fire! We don't need no water
& folks' perms began to turn.
We had begun to dread

or wear locks anyway, our temples
we'd fade. We said *word*
& *def*, said *dang* & *down* & *fly*—
we gave no goodbyes,

just *Alright then*, or *Bet*.
No one was dead yet.

PEOPLE WHO DIED [JIM CARROLL BAND]

No one was dead yet.
Not that some didn't try.
Often, friends of mine—
These are people who died

died—weekends drank too much
then broke into the pool & swam
though I was barely good at that.
The bottom I never did touch.

Home, almost dried, we'd listen
for the dawn, or to *Mista Dobalina*,
Mista Bob Dobalina—gloryhallastupid—
doused in eyeliner or lycra

& that was just the boys.
Our favorite song was noise.

JUNGLE BOOGIE [24-7 SPYZ]

Our favorite song was noise.
Or Public Enemy turned up
past 10, a hype we'd not believe.
To get hype was the point—

to light out as sexy Star Trek
or as Scooby & his snacks, to chant
Black Music—Black Music—
& drop down as low as we can.

Fight the Power. Fuck
tha police. Break the grip of shame.
We're 24-7 Spyz—who the fuck
are you. Tomorrow in flames,

we'll rouse & march—tonight, play
Jungle Boogie, hoping someone will stay.

IF I WAS YOUR GIRLFRIEND

Hoping that someone would stay,
we readied tape decks & dubs
that flipped over to play
all night, like love—

that word we didn't dare speak.
Why else did they invent drink?
except to excuse each mistake,
each deep kiss or steady rut

who, for days after, you'd duck.
Fire alarms were how we knew
who was zooming who. Or whom.
Morning's for sleep; late night we'd talk;

dinner was for getting dressed at last,
anything, so long as it's black.

EVERYBODY [BLACK BOX]

As long as it is black,
the record cut
like a dj track—
those 12-inches we spin

then quit dancing only
to re-arm again. *Everybody,*
Everybody, Everybody,
Everybody, O Everybody—

this was back when
we were almost African
American & black was just
who you were

not what you did. Or who.
And the night was black too.

THE SCENARIO

The two of us, black, met one night
dancing alongside each other to Tribe
at a party in the world's smallest room.
Someone from Carolina brought moon-

shine & over the beat, the clanking heat,
Philippe leaned over his date
to say, Hey man, we should be friends.
What you know yo. And that

was that. Popping the caps off brown
Red Stripe bottles with his teeth
he'd drink out the side of his mouth,
sly. We heads kept ours dreaded, crowned—

a decade later he was gone.
The Scenario, our favorite of 500 songs.

FUNKIN' LESSON

The Scenario. They Want EFX.
Fu-Schnickens. PRT. X-Clan.
The humpty dance
is your chance. The Funky Diabetic

Five-Footer rapping, *I like em brown*
yellow Puerto Rican & Haitian—
& Brazilian & Jamaican
& Maori & half-Nigerian

& Cablinasian & Perusian—
we can get down we can
we can get down. Queen
Latifah's Law. Electric Relaxation.

Buddy buddy. 93 'Til Infinity.
Vainglorious. Passing me by.

WHEN YOU WERE MINE

Nothing passed us by. *Baby,*
you're much too fast. In 1990
we had us an early 80s party—
nostalgic already,

I dug out my best
OPs & two polos, fluorescent,
worn simultaneously—
collar up, pretend preppy.

When Blondie came on—
Rapture, be pure—
things really got going & then
the dancing got shut down

by some square.
What was sleep even for?

HOUSEQUAKE

What was sleep even for?
The year before, a freshman, I threw
a Prince party, re-screwed
the lights red & blue—

the room all purple, people
dancing everywhere—clicked
PLAY on the cassette till
we slow-sweated to Erotic

City, or Do Me Baby. *I'm going down
to Alphabet Street.* Did anyone
sleep alone that night? I Feel
For You. *Shut up already, damn—*

cabbage patch, reverse running man—
get some life wherever you can.

POTHLES IN MY LAWN

This life. I confess we did look
somewhat alike, Kenny & I—
baby dreads, tortoiseshells, tight fade—
though that night his giant white roommate

drunk on 8 Ball in the pool room
called out *Kenny, Kenny*, even when
I said I'm not him & he began
cursing me out—*Quit pretending*—

that was too much. Dopplegangers,
unblood brothers, we should have done
more with it—dressed as the other
for Halloween, chanced

an evil twin movie. No dice.
Instead we danced, side by side.

THREE IS THE MAGIC NUMBER

Twins to the rhythm, we danced,
as one does—to the remix of Three
Is the Magic Number—at a house party
someone threw just because.

We were black then, about to be
African American, so folks schoolhouse rocked
& smurfed whenever we damn well pleased.
We should have done more, or believed,

mon frère, mine own body double—
given the campus cops the slip
whenever they quizzed or frisked us
for studying while black. Kenny,

I hope you're somewhere
far from here, dancing away trouble.

RING THE ALARM [DUB MIX]

Far from here, dancing away troubles,
Philippe & I nod & bob & start
to skank in the underground club
in London, the dub

so loud across the gigantic room
we feel it in our lungs.
We were never young.
Even then in the bass & boom—

the DJ's fits & starts, the woofer's glottal
guttural gasp, our ganja-throated rasp—
we were old, though not enough
to know. That time he sat silent for hours

in the corner, high on soul flower? *You're
messing up my plan*, all he could say, after.

SOUL FLOWER [BRAND NEW HEAVIES]

Afterwards, what can I say, unplanned,
a decade later, he was dead. Forget friends;
brothers. Forget it all except how
the sun is coming up now

between the buildings—
is it night, or morning—
dawn coming on, we hated
leaving any party early. I hate

having to write what
can never capture how thin
everything was then—
the beer, or warm cider,

or us—yet strong enough, son,
to get the job done.

I NEED LOVE

I get the job done, baby,
I work. Nobody
can rap quite like
I can. I'll take

you there. Ain't no
half steppin. Ain't no-
body. Ain't too proud
to beg. Ain't no

mountain high enough.
It's only mountains.
And the sea. See
what you done done?

I'm so tired of being alone.
I wonder if I take you home.

FAST CAR [TRACY CHAPMAN]

Taking her home those weeks
of winter break, dorm snowed in, no one
around but us, I'd ask
her, late, to sing to me alone.

Here in Subcity, life is hard—
naked behind her guitar
she'd do her best Tracy Chapman,
twin bed her smallest stage. *Please give*

the President my honest regards. We'd fall
asleep in her room—bedframe
narrow as a grave—but not quite
in love. Our huddled nights

wouldn't survive the thaw,
snow gone too soon, & far.

U GOT THE LOOK

Gone too soon, there was that season
when all the ladies' bras
bloomed suddenly fancy because
by midnight we knew everyone

would be shirtless, one
giant groove, swaying along
to Gett Off, or Funky Drummer
(Parts 1 & 2), or Sexy M.F.—

all innocent somehow, beauty
on the installment plan.
At least till the horns swoop in.
This ain't about the body

it's about the mind.
Yours, or mine?

WHEN DOVES CRY

Yours or mine? From this
great a distance
I cannot tell which Prince
records are my father's

& which I bought alone. Pop hated Prince
at first, said he couldn't sing, nor dance.
(Then again, neither could he.) Once
Purple Rain dropped, I flew home from France

& he asked, Have you heard this?
The spool of the car's tape deck
& it's the chorus: *This is*
what it sounds like. Sneaky devil,

maybe I'm just like my father,
my mother silent in the car.

I WOULD DIE 4 U

My mother silent all the way
home, not knowing what to say
or sing. Me, mugged in Paris two days
before & then, Easter Sunday,

a knife pulled on us
high schoolers from Kansas
on the metro to Notre Dame, always
mispronounced. How I prayed

the entire ride, saw the madman's
pockets blooming blades. *Take Me
With U*. After, at madrigals the psalms
barely came. My folks' marriage

even my father's newfound love
of Prince couldn't save.

LITTLE WING

Save us. So late & still
our sophomore roommate
has decided to pull
out his guitar, plug in & play

Little Wing, just the first bars,
over & over, *take anything*
you want from me, till we only
want him to finish, to get, for once,

to the end. Years later,
he'll kill himself—I still don't
know how, much less fathom
why. Carey Monserrate,

last name a mountain,
play for us again.

ALL THAT I GOT IS YOU [RADIO EDIT]

Play it again: soon all will be gone, the places
I've known; Elsie's, The Tasty, Tommy's Lunch
replaced by lobster & *prix fixe* brunch.

The cobbler one day disappears like the very

word *cobbler*. My dry cleanser now does shoe repair.

One Potato Two Potato. That druggist I never
went to. Slowly every bookstore shut down
or moved—Star, McIntyre & Moore—

put out like lights. *After 180 Years We're Closing
Our Doors*. Even the Wursthaus—its food
earning its name—I miss avoiding, proving
yourself no more a tourist. If lucky we leave

not just a place but a name. Soon, all gone:
Tommy's, The Tasty, Elsie's, me.

BUNGLE IN THE JUNGLE

Me, Thomas, & everyone
crammed into his room bright
as a club at closing for the Bungle
in the Jungle, that party whose goal

was to get as naked as possible
without going the whole way. I came,
not literally, in silkish green paisley
boxers, little else. Shoes, maybe.

Once we blew the bass
blasting Respect or Groove
Is in the Heart, Thomas shouts
To the pool! & the parade

heads thataway, a hundred Adams
& Eves splashing, making waves.

FISHERMAN'S BLUES [THE WATERBOYS]

Making waves, I was just plugging in
a boombox when the counselor
came & screamed *Kevin—*
get these people out of here. Later

the pool sprung an unlikely leak,
got closed for good & ill & us.
Later still I'd climb down with Seamus—
no shallows—to watch a different play

with my roommate far more nude
confessing in Act Two, a-swim in a giant suit,
than the first when he was mad Sweeney
cursed naked & muddy in a tree.

Nice allegory, offered Heaney. Far was fate
it felt; how could we know how late?

THE LAST DAY OF OUR ACQUAINTANCE

How late it would get.
Every party
was an after-party.
Some nights we'd even let

ourselves forget that dawn
would soon come. *I do not want
what I haven't got.* Mostly it did.
Sometimes the morn was met

less alone, her beauty & scent,
her buzzed head numbing your arm.
Once you start, how can you quit
all this remembering? We make

love like memories, if lucky
& not too late.

THE CHOICE IS YOURS

Too late. The silence, ours,
now sounds like the second
when the music stops—
not for good, but for a breath

or two, *engine engine*
number nine on the New York
transit line, if my train
jumps off the track—

& now we're back up.
O how high we jump.
Reaching for the sky
hurricane-purple & a night

mostly black, dark blue, red.
Nobody, nobody, was dead. Yet—

Ode to Ol Dirty Bastard

F you. Motor
mouth, clown
of class warfare,

welfare millionaire—
how dare you disappear
when we need your

shimmy shimmy ya
here. Osirus
of this shiznit, your body's

now scattered
on wax. No monument,
no fortune left—

just what you made
& spent, I hope, on skunk
weed & worse. *Good*

morning heartache.
Your carelessness
reminds us how

quick we are
to judge, how
serious things

done become. Dirty

as the south, sweet
as neon cherry pie

filling from a can.
I hear folks still call
your number in Brooklyn

all hours
& ask the sleepy, still
listed Russell Jones

(no relation)
come out & play.
Baby, I got

your money.
Big Baby Jesus, Dirt
McGirt, alias-addict—

of course you can't
be reached—
you're too busy, Rusty,

wigging out, dancing
in a humpsuit & jheri curl
toupee, your tiny,

tacky dreads
hidden, your grill
of gold melted

down to pay off
St. Pete, or Beezlebub,
to buy just one more

dose of freedom.





The Crescent Limited

B. B. King Plays Oxford, Mississippi

A poetry where Saturday night
meets Sunday morning,
a midnight music,

a crossroads sound—
coming home from the juke
& heading right to church

for sunrise service
& maybe catch a bit
of that communion wine.

Butterbeans.
You know I'm from Mississippi
I do carry a knife.

Everybody wants to go to heaven
but nobody wants to die
to get there.

Time to go
a little further
up the alley—

I got a good mind
to give up living
& go shopping instead

to pick out a tombstone

*& be
pronounced dead.*

Bass

Where was the music from?

The bass that woke my son
sleeping in his room, mom

out of town,

so alone

I'd sung him home.

He was just about down

when the beat began
faraway, filling our noses

& chests like morning

coffee, which I don't take any
kind of way—though black

is what you can say

when they ask

& they will. Brown boy,

head back & dream.

An hour later his busy brain

stirs him again,
descending the steep

stairs to ask to sleep

beside me on the couch,
cat-curved, quieted

at last. I rise
 & search the windows to see
if I might spot the sound—

still going, louder now,
 its thin thunder
reaching me, everywhere,

even here.

Triptych for Trayvon Martin

NOT GUILTY [A FRIEZE FOR SANDRA BLAND]

Because the night has no
number, because
the thunder doesn't

mean rain
Because maybe
Because we must

say your names
& the list grows
longer & more

endless
I am writing this:
you are no gun

nor holster, no
finger aimed, thumb
a hammer cocked

back, all the way—
I refuse
to bury you, to inter

your name in earth
or to burn you back

to bone, to what

we all know, the soft
song of your skull
as an infant, the place

God or your mother
or same thing
left untouched

by hands—
that halo grown whole
till they said you weren't—

said that Death
could be your breath—
could be a body

or less—& you
grew more black
& blue.

I refuse
to watch. I refuse.
Not guilty. Not

guilty. I know you
will stay & rise
like the sea—

the tide
all salt & shifting.
Don't ever leave.

LIMBO [A FRESCO FOR TAMIR RICE]

Skeleton-still,
 we stood. Those
before us who

Believed, arrayed
 like statues, trophies
of the child killed

We couldn't bear
 to dust
or box away.

The dark arch
 to the lost teen's
bedroom, jersey

Now empty, baseball team
 down a man—
out with an injury.

Wild pitch. Passed ball.
 Technical knockout.
Technical foul.

Flagrant two. The flagration
 of the car turned over
he lay dead beside

A good while.
 Dark dye

seeping into the street.

No pop flies. No catch—
player to be
named later—

No sheet we'll provide—
Just the blue-tail fly
doornailed, hungry,

Fit to die.

NIGHTSTICK [A MURAL FOR MICHAEL BROWN]

There are gods
of fertility,
corn, childbirth,

& police
brutality—this last
is offered praise

& sacrifice
near weekly
& still cannot

be sated—many-limbed,
thin-skinned,
its colors are blue

& black, a cross-
hatch of bruise
& bulletholes

punched out
like my son's
three-hole notebooks—

pages torn
like lungs, excised
or autopsied, splayed

open on a cold table
or left in the street

for hours to stew.

A finger
is a gun—
a wallet

is a gun, skin
a shiny pistol,
a demon, a barrel

already ready—
hands up
don't shoot—

arms
not to bear
but bare. Don't

dare take
a left
into the wrong

skin. Death
is not dark
but a red siren

who will not blow
breath into your open
mouth, arrested

like a heart. Because
I can see
I believe in you, god

of police brutality—
of corn liquor
& late fertility, of birth

pain & blood
like the sun setting,
dispersing its giant

crowd of light.

A Brown Atlanta Boy Watches Basketball on West 4th. Meanwhile, Neo-Nazis March on Charlottesville, Virginia.

Here the pain

mostly goes away.

A stinger someone tries

walking off, his face a mask.

He's giving you
the ball Jay,

he's giving you the ball—

Gary with the attack—
Thaddeus is having

the game of his life,
the MC says. Old men
watch in their grey mustaches

mouthin' salt peanuts—
or toothpicks,
or day-old gum—

chewing the fat.

You see that?
He needs to just put

that back up.

The uniforms black

& blue as a bruise.

Must ignore the need
cuz we the news—
here every call

is wrong, all
fouls technical—
even here black

means guest, not home.
Forget about the refs,
they already told us

shut up. It's us
against them
Let's go.

Howlin' Wolf

In Parchman Prison
in stripes standing
guitar gripped like a neck
strangled strummed
high strung & hard.
Mostly you moan
see how heavy
your hands hang with-
out women or words
we cannot
quite know. How is this
not hell being made
to make music here where
music only makes time
go slow cloudy
like blue
Depression glass? Under
the hard sun of your smile
we see stripes like those
that once lined the slave's
unbent back
blood & gunk
spit it out
a song low down
gutbucket
built for comfort
not built for speed.

Gimme the brack
of the body the blue
the bile all
you sing or howl.
If a wolf then lone
then orphan then *hangry*
enough to enter into town
to take food from the mouths
of low houses a hen
a stray it is never
enough. You don't need
tell me why
we here you know
better black
as an exclamation point
the men all around
you in stripes
how long their sentences
their dark faces ellipses
everywhere accidental.
The white man
in front proud
or is it prideful
he wears no number
& now exiled under
the earth no one
recalls his name.
Yours a dark wick
waiting we burn
wanting you to step
into song
to again howl

till you sweat through
your shirt & two
white handkerchiefs
a revival
preacher waving
praise no flag
of surrender—
the guitar a blunt
instrument your hair
your shoes even your
voice shines.



Repast

*an oratorio in honor of Mister Booker Wright of Greenwood,
Mississippi*

BARKEEP ACTIVIST WAITER

[HOSPITALITY BLUES]

Welcome. Have a seat—
the audience sits.

I insist. I'm your host.

Your money is no
good here, no good
here no good
no good
no good.

Your money is no good.

Here. Your money
is no god here no—Glad
to see you all. We don't
have a written menu
I'll be glad to tell you
what we're going to serve
tonight tonight tonight

Uptempo:

We have fresh shrimp
cocktails Lusco shrimp
fresh oysters on the half shell
baked oysters oysters
Rockefeller oysters almondine
stewed oysters fried oysters
Spanish mackerel broil whetstone
sirloin steak club steak T-bone
steak porterhouse steak ribeye
steak Lusco special steak mushrooms

flavor of garlic Italian spaghetti
& meatballs softshell crab
French fried onions golden
brown donut style
Best food in the world
the world the world
the world is served at Lusco's
He nods & rocks

Tell my people what you got.

[THE HEAD WAITER'S LAMENT]

The hardest thing is knowing
when you're free. Easy

to see when you're not—
when the wind don't

make a dent in how the fig
falls from the tree, or your

mouth never fed enough—
or your child-

ren, how much
to tell them? *The meaner*

the man be, the more
you smile.

When do you talk
about it, the men—

never one—who come
for you, burning

& cutting & crossing—
even a pistol

can be made a whip—
just for you saying

what's true. Not
what you're taught.

That's a good nigger.

That's my

nigger. Brush your
taut dark hair.

[RESERVATIONS]

*Some call me Booker,
some call me John, some
call me Jim, some call me—
This is my place*

I say, meaning where
I work but more
the green bar I tend
& keep, the mouths I feed
not only my child-
ren, who I want better for
than me—the slenderest
tall trees. The willows
who weep. What should
my place be? It is loudest
here after the black descends,
gathers in the Mississippi
leaves, first green then
dark like me—my first
name's Mack but nobody
calls me that. I'm named

for a man who made
his name at Tuskegee

which ain't that
far from here

I hear.

[**BOOKER'S PLACE**]

It's the haze that hurts.
Sometimes far worse
than when the sun

spits its rays
all over your face—
them days you brown

& redden, the work
can be like
to kill you—

so a man need
a place to go inside
his head & walk around

& rest. There's a juke
joint of the soul, somewhere
you can have yourself

something cold, or brown
burning water—we used
to get ice in fresh, cut

from giant blocks,
sawdust, clean glasses
& good good food. I kept

the bar sparkling, shiny

as the teeth of the couples
on calendars behind me

staring into each other's eyes.
Budweiser in cans, Nehi,
Drink Coca-Cola

Bottled up. This was my place—
a green room, a somewhere
you could twist, maybe spin

a partner on the dance floor
or just set a spell
& tap your foot, mine,

taking it all in.
We never let anyone
carry on too long

& made sure they carried
themselves home safe
beside the tracks

that also kept
their crosses, clanging—
that train red,

an eye,
then blue, bearing
down on you.

[WAITING]

So this is what I said:

*Now that's what my customers—
I say my customers—*

*be expecting of me. Booker,
Tell my people what you got.*

*Some people nice,
some people not.*

*What's wrong with you
why you not smiling?*

*Go over & get me
so & so and so & so.*

*And I keep that smile.
Always learn to smile*

*Although you're crying
on the inside.*

*Sometime he'll tip you
Sometime he'll say,*

*I'm not going to tip
that nigger, he don't look*

for no tip. Yessir,

thank you.

What'd you say?

Yes sir, boss,

I'm your nigger.

But remember

you got to keep that smile.

Night after night

I lay down & I dream

about what I had

to go through with.

That's what I'm struggling for.

I'm trying to make

a living.

For this they whipped
me good, but not dead.

[DEATH'S DICTIONARY]

A shack made of ribs.

A house made of out.

A car made of rust.

A smile made of doubt.

A house made of fire.

A magician's gesture.

Of cards. Of the Lord.

As preacher, pats his brow.

A joint made of juke.

A twist. A night away.

A wood made of green.

Of blood.

The kerchief now a bandage.

A place in the sun.

A house made of railroad.

A shack of shotgun.

[A GLOSSARY OF UPPITY]

For *please*, please read
forget you.

For *sun*,
read none.

For *love*, read
money.

For *money*, read.

For *smile*, read
Bless Your Heart.

For *uppity*
read siddity.

For *siddity*
read dicty.

For *dicty*, hincty.

For pleasure.
For unknowing.

For *forgetting*
read mystery.

For *smile*
read speak.

For *hush*
read shush

read shut up
read don't

you dare.
For *dare*, read sure.

For *speak up*
read speak out.

For the *future*
say now.

For my children.
For *ever*.

Thy trumpet
tongue.

Thy work
never done.

For *Thee*—
read We.

[PINING, *A Definition*]

Look like last night
the light hardly wanted

to leave—it hung
round in the pines

for what seemed hours
after the sun said

its goodbyes. Sometimes
can get hard

to just go, you know—
we stand around talking

not noticing the dark
rising up around

our feet.
Stand up & maybe

stretch & see
ourselves home. We

be a gas station dog
waiting for something

to fall, so we
can eat awhile

& sleep. When morning

decides to wake

maybe just this once
it'll be late

& we can join the table
already set, like fate—

welcomed by the knives—
& just from the scent

of something someone we love
cooked for us

feel fed.

Those who are able, please rise—

[**SUNDAYING**]

And everyone working
the drive-thru is beautiful

smiling just
like the commercial

Thanks, I will
have a good day

& a double
cheeseburger too

And without complaint
the birds wake

you early
sun against the skin

Somewhere smell
of a grill

Cut grass & gasoline

And the church lady
her hat a bouquet

saying Hello

Hello
The sun a giant melon

And we're not getting
any younger

but today no older neither

And why not
live forever

Why not wait
till tomorrow

to pay the phone
the gas electric

Why not pray
for a tie

instead of a win
for the game to go

long, on & on,
a million innings

Whistle

And then he can whistle

this son, moon
of mine
circling, the name

we gave to the far side
of the satellite,
this thunder

in the near distance
heralding summer,
grown thirsty,

plummeting down
suddenly, drenching
the dog & drought-fed

lawn. Nothing
for once is wrong—
cicadas quieted,

the rain's metal smell,
a train on time
arriving

& that sound now his—
as if a kiss
might make music.

Money Road

for John T. Edge

On the way to Money,
Mississippi, we see little
ghosts of snow, falling faint

as words while we try to find
Robert Johnson's muddy
maybe grave. Beside Little Zion,

along the highwayside, this stone
keeps its offerings—Bud & Louisiana
Hot Sauce—the ground giving

way beneath our feet.
The blues always dance
cheek to cheek with a church—

Booker's Place back
in Greenwood still standing,
its long green bar

beautiful, Friendship Church just
a holler away. Shotgun,
shotgun, shotgun—

rows of colored
houses, as if the same can
of bright stain might cover the sins

of rotting wood, now
mostly tarpaper & graffiti
holding McLaurin Street together—

RIP Boochie—the undead walk
these streets seeking something
we take pictures of

& soon flee. The hood
of a car yawns open
in awe, men's heads

peer in its lion's mouth
seeking their share. FOR SALE:
Squash & Snap Beans. The midden

of oyster shells behind Lusco's—
the tiny O of a bullethole
in Booker's plate glass window.

—

Even the Salvation
Army Thrift Store
closed, bars over

every door.
We're on our way again,
away, along the Money

Road, past grand houses
& porte cocheres set back
from the lane, crossing the bridge

to find markers of what's
no more there—even the underpass
bears a name. It's all

too grave—the fake
sharecropper homes
of Tallahatchie Flats rented out

along the road, staged bottle trees
chasing away nothing, the new outhouse
whose crescent door foreign tourists

—

pay extra for. Cotton planted
in strict rows
for show. A quiet

snowglobe of pain
I want to shake.
While the flakes fall

like ash we race
the train to reach the place
Emmett Till last

whistled or smiled
or did nothing.
Money more

a crossroads
than the crossroads be—
its gnarled tree—the Bryant Store

facing the tracks, now turnt
the color of earth, tumbling down
slow as the snow, white

—

& insistent as the woman
who sent word
of that uppity boy, her men

who yanked you out
your uncle's home
into the yard, into oblivion—

into this store abutting
the MONEY GIN CO.
whose sign, worn away,

now reads UN
Or SIN, I swear—
whose giant gin fans,

like those lashed & anchored
to your beaten body,
still turn. Shot, dumped,

dredged, your face not even
a mask—a marred,
unspared, sightless stump—

—

all your mother insists
we must see to know
What they did

to my baby. The true
Tallahatchie twisting south,
the Delta

Death's second cousin
once removed. You down
for only the summer, to leave

the stifling city where later
you will be waked,
displayed, defiant,

a dark glass.
There are things
that cannot be seen

but must be. Buried
barely, this place
no one can keep—

—

Yet how to kill
a ghost? The fog
of our outdoor talk—

we breathe,
we grieve, we drink
our tidy drinks. I think

now winter will out—
the snow bless
& kiss

this cursed earth.
Or is it cussed? I don't
yet know. Let the cold keep
still your bones.



Hive

The honey bees' exile
is almost complete.
You can carry

them from hive
to hive, the child thought
& that is what

he tried, walking
with them thronging
between his pressed palms.

Let him be right.
Let the gods look away
as always. Let this boy

who carries the entire
actual, whirring
world in his calm

unwashed hands,
barely walking, bear
us all there

buzzing, unstung.



NOTES & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Several poems first appeared in literary magazines and publications; thank you to their editors:

Jai-Alai: Ode to Ol Dirty Bastard

New York Review of Books: Ode to the Harlem Globetrotters

The New Yorker: Money Road; the sonnets “When You Were Mine” and “Housequake” (as “Little Red Corvette”). Special thanks to Paul Muldoon.

Oxford American: Pining, A Definition

QuickMuse: James Brown at B. B. King’s

VQR: Repast (minus “Pining”)

Zoland Books: Mercy Rule

“Thataway” was commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art to accompany artist Jacob Lawrence’s *Migration Series* exhibition and catalog. “Limbo” in the “Triptych for Trayvon Martin” first appeared in MoMa’s limited-edition volume of Robert Rauschenberg’s *Thirty-four Drawings for Dante’s Inferno*, also commissioned. Thanks to Leah Dickerman.

“Open Letter to Hank Aaron” first appeared as part of the exhibition on Hank Aaron at Emory University’s Woodruff Library, from spring to fall 2014.

Both “James Brown at B. B. King’s” and “Ode to Ol Dirty Bastard” appear in the *Southern Poetry Anthology: Georgia* volume.

“Howlin’ Wolf” appears in the anthology *Tales of Two Americas*, edited by John Freeman.

The first line and a half of “James Brown...” is a quote from the artist.

—

“Repast”: The *repast* refers to the traditional African American meal following a funeral. Whether formal or for family members only, held at a house of worship or the home of the deceased, catered by a favorite local spot or a community potluck, the repast is a ritual connected to other foodways, as well as to traditions both African and American, Christian and more broadly religious. Where the wake before the funeral is primarily about the dead, the repast is also about the living, who share food and memories. The very word has come to suggest a reflection, not on the past but on the future, a final supper after the burial that leaves the circle unbroken.

Repast celebrates the life and bravery of Booker Wright, owner of Booker’s Place and waiter at Lusco’s in Greenwood, Mississippi, a town quite near to where white racists killed Emmett Till in 1955 and others murdered civil rights workers Goodman, Schwerner, and Cheney in 1963. In 1966, for the NBC documentary *Mississippi: A Self-Portrait*, Wright knowingly spoke out about the double standards and racism of Greenwood’s white patrons, many of whom were also featured in the show (and were White Citizens’ Council members). After the film aired, Wright was beaten up and sent to a hospital—by a local police officer, no less—and his own establishment firebombed. Both the man and the bar survived. Years later Wright was shot and killed by a bar patron. As described in the recent documentary *Booker’s Place*, Wright’s descendants and others in the community have suggested that the shooting had a political motivation.

In his own words from the 1966 documentary and through the imagination, Wright speaks of life and foodways in the American South and what it means to wait. Over the course of the piece, his waiter's serving napkin goes from bar towel to preacher's handkerchief, as Wright literally transforms from a waiter to a barkeep to an activist—which may prove the same thing.

The oratorio was commissioned by the Southern Foodways Alliance and debuted at its annual symposium in October 2014, and was reprised at Carnegie Hall on 4 April 2016. Thanks to John T. Edge, Bruce Levingston (pianist and musical director), composer Nolan Gasser, and baritone Justin Hopkins.

“Money Road”: “Money Road” traces my driving the Delta with friend and Southern Foodways Alliance leader John T. Edge—we started out visiting Booker's Place in Greenwood, Mississippi, for *Repast*, the oratorio the SFA had commissioned from me on Booker Wright. Turns out Greenwood is where the term Black Power was popularized at a rally by Stokely Carmichael in 1966, just a few blocks from Booker's. Nearly fifty years later one could still see why. Driving to Money that day, it was bitter cold, snow accompanying what became the pilgrimage recorded in the poem. The site of Till's lynching feels both holy and haunted.

In 2017 the news revealed—at least to those who had bought the story—that the white woman at the center of the case, who had claimed Till whistled at her or called her *baby*, confessed that Till had in fact not done a thing. I am heartened that the poem had already said he ‘whistled or smiled / or did nothing,’ though I still wonder why had even well-meaning southern and American accounts decried the lynching but somehow believed the lynchers? Till's murderers—who lied in court, got acquitted in no time by an all-white jury, then promptly sold their story without fear of reprisal—should not be believed. In some small way perhaps it's because we cannot believe the whole of the truth—that evil does discriminate—much like, in more recent cases from Trayvon Martin to Michael Brown, some cling to some sense of black culpability in their own killings. The poem calls out to us to remember but also to revisit and revise what we think of the past—not in the ways of bluesman Robert Johnson's unlikely gravesite along the Money Road, or the fake plantation there that proves almost as haunting—but in the reality of the now-crumbling storefront where Till was brought and then killed in the night for no earthly, or only earthly, reasons.

—

My gratitude to Melanie Dunea for the photographs in these pages. With support from the *Virginia Quarterly Review*, she traveled with me to the Mississippi Delta in January 2015 to capture the spirit of that place with a poetry that enhances my own.

A NOTE ABOUT THE AUTHOR

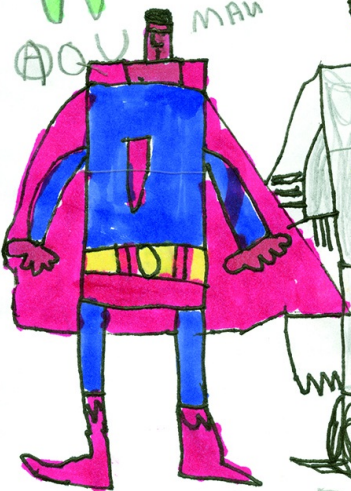
Kevin Young is the director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and poetry editor for *The New Yorker*. He is the author of thirteen books of poetry and prose, including *Blue Laws: Selected & Uncollected Poems 1995–2015*, long-listed for the National Book Award; and *Book of Hours*, a finalist for the Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award and winner of the Lenore Marshall Prize from the Academy of American Poets. Young's most recent nonfiction book, *Bunk: The Rise of Hoaxes, Humbug, Plagiarists, Phonies, Post-Facts, and Fake News*, was a *New York Times* Notable Book and a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. His collection *Jelly Roll: A Blues* was a finalist for both the National Book Award and the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Poetry. His first nonfiction book, *The Grey Album: On the Blackness of Blackness*, won the Graywolf Press Nonfiction Prize and the PEN Open Book Award. A University Distinguished Professor at Emory, Young is the editor of eight other collections and was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2016.



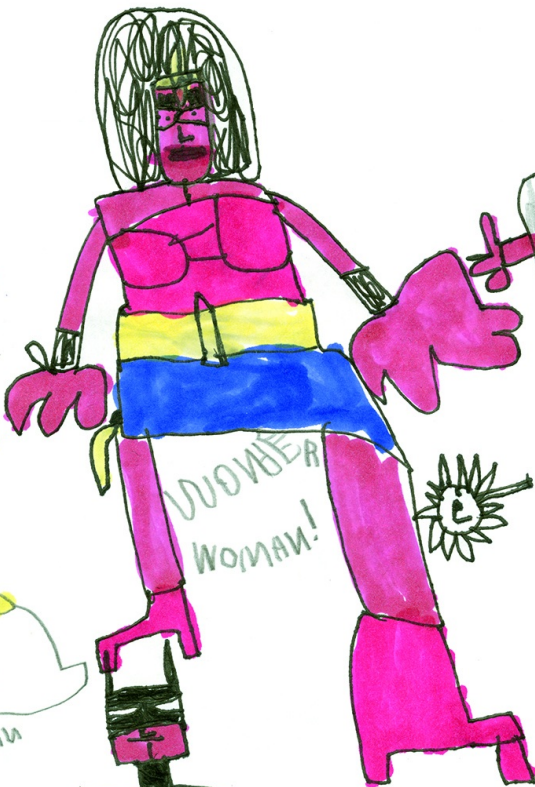
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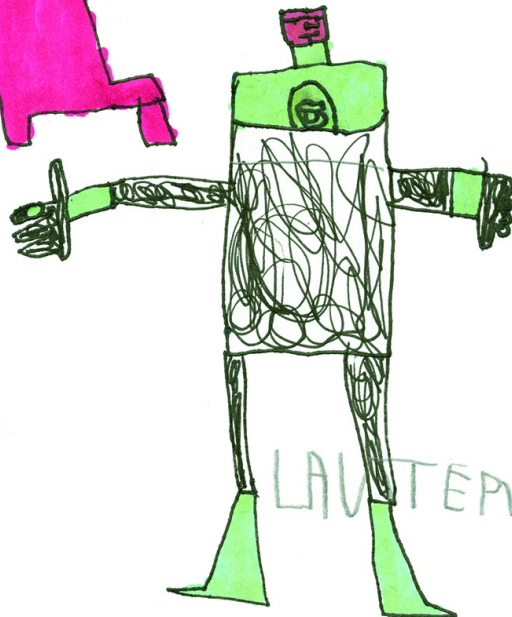
SUPERMAN



WOMAN!
WOMAN!



BATMAN



GREEN
LANTERN



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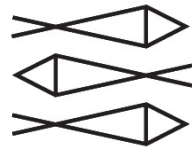
HALF-LIGHT:
COLLECTED
POEMS 1965–2016

FRANK BIDART



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[Begin Reading](#)

[Table of Contents](#)

[A Note About the Author](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

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**IN THE WESTERN NIGHT:
POEMS 1965–90**

IN THE WESTERN NIGHT
(1990)

To the Dead

What I hope (when I hope) is that we'll
see each other again,—

... and again reach the VEIN

in which we loved each other ...
It existed. *It existed.*

There is a NIGHT within the NIGHT,—

... for, like the detectives (the Ritz Brothers)
in *The Gorilla*,

once we'd been battered by the gorilla

we searched the walls, the intricately carved
impenetrable paneling

for a button, lever, latch

that unlocks a secret door that
reveals at last the secret chambers,

CORRIDORS within WALLS,

(the disenthraling, necessary, dreamed structure
beneath the structure we see,)

that is the HOUSE within the HOUSE ...

There is a NIGHT within the NIGHT,—

... there were (for example) months when I seemed only

to displease, frustrate,
disappoint you—; then, something triggered
a drunk lasting for days, and as you
slowly and shakily sobered up,
sick, throbbing with remorse and self-loathing,
insight like ashes: clung
to; useless; hated ...

This was the viewing of the power of the waters
while the waters were asleep:—
secrets, histories of loves, betrayals, double-binds
not fit (you thought) for the light of day ...

There is a NIGHT within the NIGHT,—
... for, there at times at night, still we
inhabit the secret place together ...

Is this wisdom, or self-pity?—

The love I've known is the love of
two people staring
not at each other, but in the same direction.

Dark Night

(JOHN OF THE CROSS)

In a dark night, when the light
burning was the burning of love (*fortuitous
night, fated, free,—*)
as I stole from my dark house, dark
house that was silent, grave, sleeping,—

by the staircase that was secret, hidden,
safe: disguised by darkness (*fortuitous
night, fated, free,—*)
by darkness and by cunning, dark
house that was silent, grave, sleeping—;

in that sweet night, secret, seen by
no one and seeing
nothing, my only light or
guide
the burning in my burning heart,

night was the guide
to the place where he for whom I
waited, whom I had long ago chosen,
waits: night
brighter than noon, in which none can see—;

night was the guide
sweeter than the sun raw at
dawn, for there the burning bridegroom is
bride
and he who chose at last is chosen.

•

As he lay sleeping on my sleepless
breast, kept from the beginning for him
alone, lying on the gift I gave
as the restless
fragrant cedars moved the restless winds,—

winds from the circling parapet circling
us as I lay there touching and lifting his hair,—
with his sovereign hand, he
wounded my neck—
and my senses, when they touched that, touched nothing ...

In a dark night (*there where I*
lost myself,—) as I leaned to rest
in his smooth white breast, everything
ceased
and left me, forgotten in the grave of forgotten lilies.

In the Western Night

1. The Irreparable

First, I was there where unheard
harmonies create the harmonies

we hear—

then I was a dog, sniffing
your crotch.

I asked you why you
were here; your answer was your beauty.

I said I was in need. You said
that the dead

rule and confuse our steps—

that if I helped you cut your skin
deeply enough

that, at least, was IRREPARABLE ...

This afternoon, the clouds
were moving so swiftly—

massed above the towers, rushing.

2. In My Desk

Two cigarette butts—
left by you

the first time you visited my apartment.
The next day

I found them, they were still there—

picking one up, I put my lips where
yours had been ...

•

Our not-love is like a man running down
a mountain, who, if he dares to try to stop,

falls over—
my hands wanted to touch your hands

because we had hands.

•

I put the two cigarette butts
in an envelope, carefully

taping shut the edges.
At first, the thin paper of the envelope

didn't stop

the stale smell of tobacco ...
Now the envelope is in my desk.

3. Two Men

The man who does not know himself, who
does not know his affections that his actions

speak but that he does not
acknowledge,

who will SAY ANYTHING

and lie when he does not know that he is
lying because what he needs to believe is true

must indeed
be true,

THIS MAN IS STONE ... NOT BREAD.

STONE. NOT CAKE. NOT CHEESE. NOT BREAD ...

The man who tries to feed his hunger
by gnawing stone

is a FOOL; his hunger is

fed in ways that he knows cannot satisfy it.

4. Epilogue: A Stanza from Horace

At night in dreams I hold you
and now I pursue you
fleeing through the grass of the Campus Martius,
you, through the waters (you are cruel) fleeing.

BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA; 1983.

Poem in the Stanza of the “Rubaiyat”

1. Spirit

The present and the future are the past
now that her body cannot wake, nor, lost
 between the kitchen and the wilderness,
rest—haunted by ghosts, now become a ghost.

2. Reading the “Rubaiyat”

Because she loved it even as a girl,
she taught her child to love it—as he still
 does, hearing as he reads beneath his voice
her voice ... past Waste, the gorgeous, trickling Well.

3. Christmas Eve in Harvard Square

Child, when you learn that the laughing ghosts who live
shadowing your steps in forty years give
 substancelessness to stone, is this night one
more thing you’ll try to kill in you to live?

In the Ruins

1. *Man is a MORAL animal.*
2. *You can get human beings to do anything,—IF you convince them it is moral.*
3. *You can convince human beings anything is moral.*

• • •

Oh Night,—

... THE SUN IS DEAD.

What we dream moves

across our sky by

day, is a CORPSE,—

that sun's day is not the *real* day—;
that day's light is not the *real* light—;

FOR THE SUN IS DEAD ...

Now when I learned this,

I knew the injunction placed upon me.
Before the corpse, I heard:—

RETURN THE DEAD TO LIFE.

Guilty of Dust

*up or down from the infinite C E N T E R
B R I M M I N G at the winking rim of time*

the voice in my head said

LOVE IS THE DISTANCE
BETWEEN YOU AND WHAT YOU LOVE

WHAT YOU LOVE IS YOUR FATE

•

then I saw the parade of my loves

those PERFORMERS comics actors singers

*forgetful of my very self so often I
desired to die to myself to live in them*

*then my PARENTS my FRIENDS the drained
SPECTRES once filled with my baffled infatuations*

*love and guilt and fury and
sweetness for whom*

nail spirit yearning to the earth

•

then the voice in my head said

WHETHER YOU LOVE WHAT YOU LOVE

OR LIVE IN DIVIDED CEASELESS
REVOLT AGAINST IT

WHAT YOU LOVE IS YOUR FATE

1984.

THE SACRIFICE

(1983)

... the speculative Good Friday in place of the historic Good Friday. Good Friday must be speculatively re-established in the whole truth and harshness of its Godforsakenness.

—HEGEL

The War of Vaslav Nijinsky

Still gripped by the illusion of an horizon;
overcome with the finality of a broken tooth;
suspecting that habits are the only salvation,

—the Nineteenth Century's
guilt, *World War One*,

was danced

by Nijinsky on January 19, 1919.

• • •

... I am now reading *Ecce Homo*. Nietzsche
is *angry* with me—;

he hates “the Crucified One.”

But he did not live through War—;
when the whole world painted its face

with blood.

Someone must expiate the blood.

• • •

No. Let what is past
be forgotten. Let even the blood

be forgotten—; there *can be no* “expiation.”

Expiation is not necessary.

Suffering has made me what I am,—

I must not regret; or judge; or
struggle to escape it

in the indifference of (the ruthless
ecstasy of)

CHANGE; “my endless RENEWAL”; BECOMING.

—That is Nietzsche.

He wants to say “Yes” to life.

I am not Nietzsche. I am the bride of Christ.

• • •

He was planning a new and original ballet. It was to be a picture of sex life, with the scene laid in a *maison tolérée*. The chief character was to be the owner—once a beautiful *cocotte*, now aged and paralyzed as a result of her debauchery; but, though her body is a wreck, her spirit is indomitable in the traffic of love. She deals with all the wares of love, selling girls to boys, youth to age, woman to woman, man to man.

When he danced it, he succeeded in transmitting the whole scale of sex life.

• • •

—Many times Diaghilev wanted me
to make love to him

as if he were
a woman—;

I did. I *refuse* to
regret it.

At first, I felt humiliated for him,—

he saw this. He got angry
and said, “I enjoy it!”

Then, more calmly, he said,

“Vatza, we must not *regret* what we *feel*.”

—I REGRETTED

what I FELT ... Not

making love, but that since the beginning
I wanted to *leave* him ...

That I stayed

out of “GRATITUDE,”—

and *FEAR OF LIFE*,—

and AMBITION ...

That in my soul,

I did *not* love him.

Now my wife wants to have
a second child. I am frightened;

the things a human being must learn,—
the things a child

must *learn* he FEELS,—

frighten me! I know people’s faults

because in my soul,

I HAVE COMMITTED THEM.

The man who chops wood for us
was speaking, this morning, in the kitchen,

to my wife. As I passed in the hallway
I heard

whispering—; and LISTENED.

He said that as a child
in his village at Sils Maria

he worked for the writer, *Nietzsche*—;
he felt he must tell her

that just before the “famous man”
was taken away,

INSANE, he acted and looked

as I
do now.

I can choose “*life*” for myself;—

but must I, again, again,
AGAIN,—
for *any other* creature?

• • •

The Durcals arrived in St. Moritz, and were invited to tea. Asked what he had been doing lately, Vaslav put on a worldly air, leaned back on the sofa and said,

“Well, I composed two ballets, I prepared a new program for the next Paris season, and lately—I have played a part. You see, I am an artist; I have no troupe now, so I miss the stage. I thought it would be rather an interesting experiment to see how well I could act, and so for six weeks I played the part of a lunatic; and the whole village, my family, and even the physicians apparently believed it. I have a male nurse to watch me, in the disguise of a *masseur*.”

Romola was overcome, torn between anger and relief. She was confirmed in her supposition that her fears had been groundless when the male nurse came, after ten days, to assure her from his long experience that her husband was completely sane.

• • •

—Let me explain to you
what “*guilt*” is ...

When I joke with my wife, and say,
“I think I will go back to Russia
and live as a peasant—”

she jokes back, and says,
“Do as you like! I will
divorce you, and marry
a manufacturer...”

She looks at me, and I look at her.

What is terrible

is that I am serious—; and *she* is serious ...

She is right, of course,—
I do *not* have the right

to make her live differently, without servants,
rich friends, elegant clothes—
without her good and sane *habits*;

do not have the right even to try
to *re-make* her ...

But does *she* then have the right
to make *me* live like this, JUDGED, surrounded by
those who cannot understand or *feel* me,—
like a manufacturer?...

She is angry, as I am angry.

We both are *right*—; and both angry ...

Soon, she feels guilty, feels that she
has failed me—;

and I too
feel guilty ...

The *GUILT* comes from *NOWHERE*.

Neither of us had done wrong!

But I am a good actor—and reassure her
that I love her; am indeed happy; and that
nothing will change ...

I *want* to be a *good husband*.

Still, I am guilty.

... Why am I guilty?

My life is *FALSE*.

• • •

I know the psychology of lunatics;
if you don't contradict them, they like you.

But I am not insane.

My brother was insane. He died
in a lunatic asylum.

The reason I *know* I am *NOT* insane
is because, unlike my brother,

I *feel* guilt.

The insane do not feel guilt.

My brother was a dancer. He was older than I,
but still in the *corps* when I became
a soloist. He was ashamed, and jealous;

he went insane.

When the doctors questioned him, he showed

astonishing courage,— he thought that everyone
in the company was paid

by the secret police, to gather
evidence against our family ...

He displayed cunning, and stoic
fortitude, under the questions.

Even when he thought he faced death,
he lied
to protect my mother.

When he was taken away,
she cried, and cried ... She cried
visiting him,—

but that didn't make him feel GUILTY ...

My wife thought because
I wore a large *cross* on my neck in the village,—

and told her certain dishes
served at our table were poisoned,—

I was insane.

But I *knew* that my actions
frightened her—; and I suffered.

Nietzsche was insane. He knew
we killed God.

... This is the *end* of the story:

though He was dead, God was clever
and strong. God struck back,—

AND KILLED US.

If I *act* insane people will call me
“mad clown,” and forgive
even the truth—;

the insane feel anxiety and horror,

but are RELEASED
from GUILT ...

I only want to know
things I’ve learned like this,—

these things I cannot *NOT* know.

• • •

His other ballet remained unfinished. It was his own life put into a choreographic poem: a youth seeking truth through life, first as a pupil, open to all artistic suggestions, to all the beauty that life and love can offer; then his love for the woman, his mate, who successfully carries him off.

He set it in the period of the High Renaissance. The youth is a painter; his Master one of the greatest artists of the period, part Genius and part Politician, just as Diaghilev seemed to him to be. This Master advances him, and defends his daring work from the attacks of colleagues, as long as he is a student; then he falls in love, and the Master bitterly rejects not only him but his work.

• • •

—Last night, once again, I nearly
abandoned my autobiographical ballet ...

The plot has a good beginning
and middle,—

THE PUZZLE

is the end ...

The *nights* I spend—

reading and improving
Nietzsche, analyzing and then abandoning

my life, working on the *Great Questions*

like WAR and GUILT and GOD
and MADNESS,—

I rise from my books, my endless, fascinating
researches, notations, projects,

dazzled.

—Is this happiness?...

I have invented a far more
accurate and specific notation for dance;

it has taken me two months
to write down the movement in my ten-minute

ballet, *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* ...

There is a MORAL here

about how LONG you must live with
the consequences of a SHORT action,—

but I don't now feel
MORAL.

Soon I shall begin

Le Sacre du Printemps—; which
is longer ...

I can understand the pleasures of War.

In War—

where *killing* is a virtue: *camouflage*
a virtue: *revenge* a virtue:
pity a weakness—

the world rediscovers

a *guiltless* PRE-HISTORY

“civilization” condemns ...

In 1914, I was assured the War would
end in six weeks;

the Germans, in the summer, thought
they would enter Paris by the fall.

But the War
was *NOT* an accident.

C U S T O M, and his Children,—

Glory. Honor. Privilege. Poverty.
Optimism. “The Balance of Power,”—

for four years

dug a large, long hole
(—a *TRENCH*—)
in the earth of Europe;

when they approached the hole
to pin medals

on the puppets
they had thrown there,

they slipped in

blood—; AND FELL IN.

Poverty and Privilege
alone survived,

of all the customs of the past ...

—Should the World
regret the War? Should I

REGRET MY LIFE?

... Let our epitaph be:

In Suffering, and Nightmare,
I woke at last

to my own nature.

• • •

One Sunday we decided to sleigh over to Maloja.

Kyra was glad and Vaslav was very joyful that morning.

It took us about three hours to get there; Kyra and I got very hungry during the long drive.

The road was extremely narrow during the winter, because it needed cleaning from the heavy snows, and in certain parts there was always a space to await the sleighs coming from the opposite direction.

Vaslav was as a rule a careful and excellent driver, but on this particular Sunday he did not wait, but simply *drove on into* the oncoming sleighs.

We were in danger of turning over; the horses got frightened.

The coachmen of the other sleighs cursed, but this did not make any difference.

Kyra screamed, and I begged Vaslav to be more careful, but the further we went the more fiercely he drove *against* the other sleighs.

I had to clutch on to Kyra and the sleigh to keep ourselves on.

I was furious, and said so to Vaslav.

He fixed me suddenly with a hard and metallic look which I had never seen before.

As we arrived at the Maloja Inn I ordered a meal.

We had to wait.

Vaslav asked for some bread and butter and macaroni.

“Ah, Tolstoy again,” I thought, but did not say a word, and bit my lips.

Kyra was anxiously awaiting her steak, and as it was laid before her and she began to eat, Vaslav, with a quick gesture, snatched the plate away.

She began to cry from disappointment.

I exclaimed, “Now, Vaslav, please don’t begin that Tolstoy nonsense again; you remember how weak you got by starving yourself on that vegetarian food. I can’t stop you doing it, but I won’t allow you to interfere with Kyra. The child must eat properly.”

I went with Kyra to the other room to have our solitary lunch.

We drove home very quietly without a word.

• • •

—The second part of my ballet

Le Sacre du Printemps

is called “THE SACRIFICE.”

A young girl, a virgin, is chosen
to die

so that the Spring will return,—

so that her Tribe (free
from “pity,” “introspection,” “remorse”)

out of her blood
can renew itself.

The fact that the earth’s renewal
requires human blood

is unquestioned; a mystery.

She is chosen, from the whirling, stamping
circle of her peers, purely by chance—;

then, driven from the circle, surrounded

by the elders, by her peers, by animal
skulls impaled on pikes,

she dances,—

at first, in paroxysms
of grief, and fear:—

again and again, she leaps (—*NOT*

as a ballerina leaps, as if she
loved the air, as if
the air were her element—)

SHE LEAPS

BECAUSE SHE HATES THE GROUND.

But then, slowly, as others
join in, she finds that there is a self

WITHIN herself

that is *NOT* herself

impelling her to accept,—and at last
to *LEAD*,—

THE DANCE

that is her own sacrifice ...

—In the end, exhausted, she falls
to the ground ...

She dies; and her last breath
is the reawakened Earth's

orgasm,—

a little upward run on the flutes

mimicking

(—or perhaps MOCKING—)

the god's spilling
seed ...

The Chosen Virgin
accepts her fate: without considering it,

she knows that her Tribe,—
the Earth itself,—
are UNREMEMORSEFUL

that the price of continuance
is her BLOOD:—

she *accepts* their guilt,—

... *THEIR GUILT*

THAT THEY DO NOT KNOW EXISTS.

She has become, to use
our term,
a *Saint*.

The dancer I chose for this role
detested it.

She would have preferred to do
a fandango, with a rose in her teeth ...

The training she and I shared,—
training in the traditional
“academic” dance,—

emphasizes the illusion

of *Effortlessness*,
Ease, Smoothness, Equilibrium ...

When I look into my life,
these are not the qualities
I find there.

Diaghilev, almost alone
in the Diaghilev Ballet, UNDERSTOOD;

though he is not now, after my marriage
and “*betrayal*,”

INTERESTED in my choreographic ambitions ...

Nevertheless, to fill a theatre,
he can be persuaded

to *hire* me as a dancer.

Last night I dreamt

I was slowly climbing
a long flight of steps.

Then I saw Diaghilev
and my wife

arm in arm
climbing the steps behind me ...

I began to hurry, so that
they would not see me.

Though I climbed
as fast as I could, the space

between us
NARROWED ...

Soon, they were a few feet behind me,—
I could hear them laughing,

gossiping, discussing CONTRACTS
and LAWSUITS ...

They understood each other perfectly.

I stopped.

But they

DIDN'T STOP ...

They climbed right past me,—
laughing, chatting,

NOT SEEING ME AT ALL ...

—I should have been happy;

yet ...

wasn't.

I watched their backs,
as they happily

disappeared, climbing
up, out of my sight.

• • •

Our days passed in continuous social activity.

Then one Thursday, the day when the governess and maid had their day off, I was making ready to take Kyra out for a walk when suddenly Vaslav came out of his room and looked at me very angrily.

“How dare you make such a noise? I can’t work.”

I looked up, surprised.

His face, his manner were strange; he had never spoken to me like this.

“I am sorry. I did not realize we were so loud.”

Vaslav got hold of me then by my shoulders and shook me violently.

I clasped Kyra in my arms very close, then with one powerful movement Vaslav pushed me down the stairs.

I lost my balance, and fell with the child, who began to scream.

At the bottom, I got up, more astounded than terrified.

What was the matter with him?

He was still standing there menacingly.

I turned round, exclaiming, “You ought to be ashamed! You are behaving like a drunken *peasant*.”

A very changed Vaslav we found when we came home, docile and kind as ever.

I did not speak about the incident, either to him or to anybody else.

Then one day we went on an excursion and Vaslav again wore his cross over his sweater.

On our way home, he suddenly began to drive fiercely and the sleigh turned over.

Amazingly, no one was hurt.

I got really angry, and walked home with Kyra.

Of course, he was home ahead of us.

When I entered the house, the servant who worshipped Vaslav opened the door and said, “Madame, I think Monsieur Nijinsky is ill, or perhaps very drunk, for he acts so queerly. His voice is hoarse and his eyes all hazy. I am frightened.”

I went to our bedroom.

Vaslav lay fully dressed on the bed, with the cross on, his eyes closed.

He seemed to be asleep.

I turned cautiously towards the door, and then noticed that heavy tears were streaming down his face.

“Vatza, how are you feeling? Are you angry with me?”

“It is nothing; let me sleep; I am tired.”

• • •

Each night now I pray,

Let this cup

pass from me!...

But it is not a cup. It is my life.

I have *LEARNED*

my *NATURE* ...

I am insane,—
... or evil.

Today I walked out into the snow.

I said to myself:

THREE TIMES
YOU TRIED TO HARM YOUR WIFE AND CHILD.

I said:

LIE DOWN IN THE SNOW
AND DIE. YOU ARE EVIL.

I lay down in the snow.

I tried to go to sleep.
My HANDS

began to get cold, to FREEZE.

I was lying there a long, long time.

I did not feel cold any more.

Then, God said to me:

GO HOME
AND TELL YOUR WIFE YOU ARE INSANE.

I said:

Thank you, thank you, God!
I am not evil. I am insane.

I got up. I wanted to go home,—
and tell this news

to my wife.

Then, I said to God:

I am insane,—
my wife will suffer. I am guilty.

Forgive me for being insane.

God said:

GOD MADE YOU. GOD DOES NOT CARE
IF YOU ARE “GUILTY” OR NOT.

I said:

I CARE IF I AM GUILTY!

I CARE IF I AM GUILTY!...

God was silent.

Everything was SILENT.

I lay back down in the snow.

I wanted again to go to sleep, and die.

But my BODY did not want to die.
My BODY spoke to me:

There is no answer to your life.
You are insane; or evil.

There is only one thing that you can do:—

You must join YOUR GUILT

to the WORLD'S GUILT.

I said to myself:

I must join MY GUILT

to the WORLD'S GUILT.

I got up out of the snow.

... What did the words mean?

Then I realized what the words meant.

I said to myself:

You must join YOUR GUILT

to the WORLD'S GUILT.

There is no answer to your life.

You are insane; or evil.

... Let this be the Body

through which the War has passed.

• • •

Nijinsky invited guests to a recital at the Suvretta House Hotel.

When the audience was seated, he picked up a chair, sat down on it, and stared at them. Half an hour passed. Then he took a few rolls of black and white velvet and made a big cross the length of the room. He stood at the head of it, his arms opened wide. He said: "Now, I will dance you the War, which you did not prevent and for which you are responsible." His dance reflected battle, horror, catastrophe, apocalypse. An observer wrote: "At the end, we were too much overwhelmed to applaud. We were looking at a corpse, and our silence was the

silence that enfolds the dead.”

There was a collection for the Red Cross. Tea was served. Nijinsky never again performed in public.

• • •

—The War is a *good* subject ...

The audience, yesterday, liked
my dance.

The public does not understand *Art*;
it wants to be astonished.

I know how to astonish.

The War allowed me
to project,—
to EMBODY,—

an ultimate “*aspect*” of the “*self*”...

A member of the audience told me
I had always been able

“to smell a good subject.”

God, on the other hand,—

who at times
has responded to my predilection

for *ACTIONS*

that are *METAPHYSICAL EXPERIMENTS*,—

perhaps felt threatened, or even
coerced—;

he perhaps felt that though he could

agree with me

that expiation *IS* necessary,—

he had to agree with
Nietzsche

that expiation is *NOT* possible ...

In any case, he has chosen,—as
so often,—
 camouflage.

Now that the War has been over
two months, at times I almost
doubt if it existed—;

in truth,
 it never existed,—

... *BECAUSE IT HAS NEVER BEEN OVER.*

Twenty years ago, a boy of nine
was taken by his mother

to the Imperial School of Ballet,

to attempt to become a pupil;

the mother was poor, and
afraid of life; his father

had abandoned the family when the boy was four.

Even then, he had a good jump—;
he was admitted.

He had been taught by the priests
that because of Adam and Eve, all men were born

in *Original Sin*,—

that all men were,
BY NATURE, guilty.

In his soul, he didn't believe it.

He was a good boy. His mother loved him.

He believed
in his essential innocence,—

he thought his nature “good.”

He worked hard. He grew thinner,—
and started

“dancing like God”...

Everyone talked about it.

But then,—
he LEARNED SOMETHING.

He learned that

All life exists

at the expense of other life.

When he began to succeed,
he saw that he was AMBITIOUS,—

JEALOUS

of the roles that others won ...

Then his brother
got sick—.

THE ROCK

THAT GIVES SHADE TO ONE CREATURE,—

FOR ANOTHER CREATURE

JUST BLOCKS THE SUN.

... This is a problem of *BEING*.

I can imagine no

SOLUTION to this ...

At sixteen, he met a Prince. He loved the Prince,—
but after a time,

the Prince
grew tired of him.

Then he met a Count, whom
he *didn't* love.

The Count gave him a piano.

He had heard of Diaghilev. Diaghilev
invited him
to the *Hotel Europe*,—

he went to seek his luck.

He found
his luck.

At once, he allowed Diaghilev
to make love to him.

Even then, he disliked Diaghilev
for his too *self-assured* voice ...

He always had thought he was essentially
different from the people
in books of history,—

with their lives of *betrayals; blindness;*
greed; and miseries ...

He saw, one day, that this illusion,—
this FAITH,—

 had, imperceptibly,
vanished—;

 he was *NOT* different—;
he did not understand *WHY* he did
what he did, nor were his instincts

“good”...

Then, I said to myself:

 “*History*
IS human nature—; to say I AM GUILTY
is to accept
implication in the human race...”

—Now, for months and months,
I have found

ANOTHER man in me:—

HE is *NOT* me—; *I*
am afraid of him ...

He hates my wife and child,—
and hates Diaghilev;

because he thinks “*goodness*” and “*being*”
are incompatible,—

... *HE WANTS TO DESTROY THE WORLD.*

Destroy it,—
or redeem it.

Are they the *SAME*? . .

As a child, I was taught, by the priests,
to crave the Last Judgment:—

when the *earth* will become a *stage*,—

and WHAT IS RIGHT and WHAT IS WRONG

will at last show *clear*, and *distinct*,
and *separate*,—

and then,—

THE SLATE IS WIPED CLEAN ...

—Even now, I can see the World
wheeling on its axis ... I

shout at it:—

C E A S E.

C H A N G E,—

O R C E A S E.

The World says right back:—

*I must chop down the tree of life
to make coffins.*

Tomorrow, I will go to Zurich—
to live in an asylum.

MY SOUL IS SICK,—

NOT MY MIND.

I *am* incurable ... I did not
live long.

Death came
unexpectedly,—
for I wanted it to come.

Romola. Diaghilev.

... I HAVE EATEN THE WORLD.

My life is the expiation for my life.

Nietzsche understood me.

When *he* was sick,—when his *SOUL*
was sick,—
he wrote that he would have

much preferred to be a *Professor* at Basel

than *God*—;
but that he did not dare to carry

his egotism
so far as to neglect the creation of the world.

• • •

In 1923, Diaghilev came to see him. Vaslav by now got out of bed in a strange fashion. First of all he went on all-fours; then crawled around the room; and only then stood upright. In a general way, he seemed attracted by the floor, to feel a need to be as low down as possible (his bed was almost on a level with the floor) and to grab hold of something. As he walked he leaned forward and felt at his ease only when lying down.

This was the first time Diaghilev had set eyes on him since they had parted in wrath in Barcelona six years before. “Vatza, you are being lazy. Come, I need you. You must dance again for the Russian Ballet and for me.”

Vaslav shook his head. “I cannot because I am mad.”

• • •

Frightened to eat with a new set of teeth;
exhausted by the courage the insane have shown;
uncertain whether to REDEEM or to DESTROY THE EARTH,

—the Nineteenth Century’s
guilt, *World War One*,

was danced

by Nijinsky on January 19, 1919.

For Mary Ann Youngren

1932–1980

Mary Ann, as they handed you the cup
near the black waters of Lethe,

(the cup of *Forgetfulness*,
the waters of *Obliteration*,)

did you reach for it greedily—

just as, alive, you abruptly needed

not to answer the phone for days: ballet tickets
unused: awake all night: pacing

the apartment: untouchable: chain-smoking?

Dip a finger into the River of Time,—
it comes back

STAINED.

•

No, that's *not* enough,—
not true, wrong—

dying of cancer, eager to have the whole thing
over, you nonetheless waited

for your sister to arrive from California
before you died,—

you needed to bring up your cruelest, worst

adolescent brutality, asking:

DO YOU FORGIVE ME?

Then: WILL YOU MISS ME?

At the Resurrection of the Dead,
the world will hear us say

*The phone is plugged in, please call,
I will answer it.*

Catullus: Odi et amo

I hate *and* love. Ignorant fish, who even
wants the fly while writhing.

Confessional

Is she dead?

Yes, she is dead.

Did you forgive her?

No, I didn't forgive her.

Did she forgive you?

No, she didn't forgive me.

What did you have to forgive?

She was never mean, or willfully
cruel, or unloving.

When I was eleven, she converted to Christ—

she began to simplify her life, denied
herself, and said that she and I must struggle

“to divest ourselves
of the love of CREATED BEINGS,”—

and to help me to do that,

one day

she hanged my cat.

in the dream, she knew, somehow,
that it was dying; she tried

to help it,—

TO PUT IT OUT OF ITS MISERY,—

so she had her hands around its
neck, strangling it.

Bewildered,
it looked at her,

KNOWING SHE LOVED IT—;

and she *DID* love it, which was
what was
so awful ...

All it could do was
hold on,—
... AS
SHE HELD ON.

Did you forgive her?

I was the center of her life,—
and therefore,
of her fears and obsessions. They changed;
one was money.

... DO I HAVE TO GO INTO IT?

Did you forgive her?

Standing next to her coffin, looking down
at her body, I suddenly
knew I hadn't—;

over and over
I said to her,

I didn't forgive you!
I didn't forgive you!

I *did* love her ... Otherwise,
would I feel so guilty?

What did she have to forgive?

She was SORRY. She *tried*
to change ...

She loved me. She was generous.

I pretended
that I had forgiven her—;

and she pretended
to believe it,—

she needed desperately to believe it ...

SHE KNEW I COULD BARELY STAND TO BE AROUND HER.

Did you forgive her?

I *tried*—;
for years I almost
convinced myself I did ...

But no, I didn't.

—Now, after I have said it all, so I can
rest,

will you give me ABSOLUTION,—
... and grant this
 “created being”

FORGIVENESS?...

Did she forgive you?

I think she tried—;
 but no,—
she *couldn't* forgive me ...

WHY COULDN'T SHE FORGIVE ME?

Don't you understand even now?

No! Not—not really ...

Forgiveness doesn't exist.

II

She asked,—

and I could not, WOULD NOT give ...

—That is the first of two sentences
I can't get out of my head.

They somehow contain what happened.

The second is:—

THERE WAS NO PLACE IN NATURE WE COULD MEET.

Can you explain them?

—Augustine too
had trouble with his mother,—

... *listen*. Confessor
incapable of granting “*rest*” or “*absolution*,”

... *listen*.

Why are you angry?

Augustine too
had trouble with his mother,—

... but the story of Augustine and Monica
is the *opposite* of what happened

between me and my mother.

We couldn't meet in Nature,—
... AND ALL WE HAD WAS NATURE.

How do you explain it?

The scene at the window at Ostia
in Book Nine of the *Confessions*

seems designed to make non-believers
sick with envy.

—You are listening to a soul
that has *always* been

SICK WITH ENVY ...

How do you explain it?

As a child I was (now, I
clearly can see it)

predatory:—

pleased to have supplanted my father
in my mother's affections, and then

pleased to have supplanted my stepfather ...

—I assure you, though I was a "*little boy*,"
I could be far more charming, sympathetic,
full of sensibility, "*various*," far more
an understanding and feeling
ear for my mother's emotions, needs, SOUL

than any man, any man she met,—

I know I *wanted* to be: WANTED
to be the center, the focus of her life ...

I was her ally against my father;
and then, after the first two or three

years, her ally against my stepfather ...

—Not long before she died,
she told me something

I had never heard:—

when I was nine or ten, early
in her second marriage,

she became pregnant; she said she
wanted to have the child ...

She said that one day, when my stepfather
was playing golf, she was out walking the course

with him, and suddenly

a man fell from one of the huge trees
lining the fairways ...

A group of men had been cutting limbs;
she saw one of them fall,
and for a long time

lie there screaming.

Later that day, she had a miscarriage.

After saying all this, she
looked at me insistently and said,

“I wanted to have the child.”

But as she was telling me the story,
I kept thinking

THANK GOD THE MAN FELL,
THANK GOD SHE SAW HIM FALL AND HAD A MISCARRIAGE
AND THE CHILD DIED ...

—I felt sick. I knew I was *GLAD*
the man fell, *GLAD* she saw him fall

and the child died ...

When I was nine or ten, if she
had had a child—; if

she and a child and my stepfather
had made a FAMILY

from which I *had* to be closed off,
the remnant of a rejected, erased past,—

(I never had anything in common with,
or even *respected*, my stepfather,—)

I would have gone crazy ...

How could she have *BETRAYED*
ME in that way?

How do you explain it?

I felt sick. I felt ill at how
predatory I was,—

(my feelings *still* were,—)

at the envy and violence I could
will NOT to feel,

but *couldn't* not feel ...

—Augustine has the temerity, after
his mother dies,

to admit he is GLAD
she no longer wanted to be buried

next to her husband ...

He thanks God
for ridding her of this “vain desire.”

Why are you angry?

In the words of Ecclesiastes:—

“Her loves, her hates, her jealousies,—
these all

have perished, nor will she EVER AGAIN

TAKE PART
in whatever is done under the sun...”

My mother,—
... *just died*.

The emotions, the “issues” in her life
didn’t come out somewhere, reached no culmination,
climax, catharsis,—

she *JUST DIED*.

She wanted them to:—
how can I talk about

the way in which, when I was young,

we seemed to be engaged in an ENTERPRISE
together,—

the enterprise of “figuring out the world,”
figuring out her life, my life,—

THE MAKING OF HER SOUL,

which somehow, in our “enterprise”
together, was the making of my soul,—

... it’s a kind of *craziness*, which some mothers
drink along with their children

in their *MOTHER’S-MILK* ...

Why are you angry?

THERE WAS NO PLACE IN NATURE WE COULD MEET.

I’ve never let anyone else
in so deeply.

But when the predatory complicit co-conspirator
child

was about twenty, he of course wanted his “*freedom*,”—

and then found

that what had made his life
possible, what he found so deeply

inside him, had its hands around his neck
strangling him:—

and that therefore, if he were
to survive,

he must in turn strangle, murder,
kill it inside him ...

TO SURVIVE, I HAD TO KILL HER INSIDE ME.

Why are you angry?

Now that she is dead (that her BODY
is DEAD),

I'm capable of an "*empathy*,"

an "*acceptance*" of the inevitable
(in her, and in myself)

that I denied her, living ...

I DENIED HER, LIVING.

She asked, and I could
not, *would not* give ...

—I *did* "will" to forgive her, but

forgiveness

lay beyond the will,—

... *and I willed*
NOT to forgive her:—

for "forgiveness" seems to say

Everything is forgotten, obliterated,—

is as nothing, erased ... *the past*

Her plea, her need for forgiveness
seemed the attempt to obliterate

the *actions, angers, decisions*

that MADE ME what I am ...

To obliterate the *crises, furies, refusals*
that are how I

came to understand her, me, my life—.

Truly to feel “forgiveness,”
to forgive her *IN MY HEART*,

meant erasing *ME* ...

She seemed to ask it to render me
paralyzed, and defenseless.

—Now that I no longer must face her,
I give her in my mind

the “*empathy*” and “*acceptance*”

I denied her, living.

Why are you angry?

... But if, somehow, what we were
didn’t have to be understood

by MEMORY,

and THIS EARTH—

... Augustine and Monica,

as they lean
alone together standing at a window

overlooking a garden at the center of the house
(in Book Nine of the *Confessions*),

near the time of her death (which time,

Augustine says, GOD knew,

though they did not),—

resting here at Ostia from a long journey
by land,

and preparing for a long sea-journey
back to the Africa which is their home,—

... as they stand here sweetly talking together,
and ask

“what the eternal life of the saints could be”

(panting to be sprinkled from the waters of God’s fountain
to help them meditate

upon so great a matter),—

... as they stand alone together
at this window,

they can FORGET THE PAST

AND LOOK FORWARD

TO WHAT LIES BEFORE THEM ...

—They had much to forget;

in the *Confessions*, Monica’s ferocity
is frightening:—

before Augustine became a Christian,
she saw him as dead—;

she refused to live with him or even
eat at the same table in his house,
shunning and detesting his blasphemies,—

until she had a dream in which she
learned that he would finally convert to Christ ...

—When he planned to leave Africa for Italy,
she was determined he would take her
with him, or remain at home;

she followed him to the seacoast,
clinging to him, he says, with “*dreadful grief*”;

one night he escaped, and
sailed—;

not long after, she followed ...

—Finally, of course, he became a Christian;
until then, she
ceaselessly wept and mourned and prayed.

Do you know why you are saying all this?

As Augustine and Monica stood leaning at that
window in Ostia, contemplating

what the saints’ possession of God is like,

they moved past and reviewed
(Augustine tells us)

each level of created things,—

each level of CREATION, from this earth
to the sun and moon and stars

shining down on this earth ...

—Talking, musing, wondering
at creation, but knowing that our life and light

here cannot compare

to the sweetness of the saints' LIGHT and LIFE,—

(here, where he had forced her to *SEEK*
what out of her body she had herself

brought forth,—)

... now, self-gathered at last in the purity of their own
being, they ascend higher

still, and together S C A L E T H E S T A R S ...

—And so, Augustine tells us, they came to their own

souls, and then went
past them, to that region of richness

unending, where God feeds ISRAEL forever
with the food of Truth ...

There LIFE is the WISDOM by which
all things are made, which

itself is *not* made ...

—While they were thus talking of, straining to comprehend,
panting for this WISDOM, with all the effort

of their heart, for one heartbeat,

they *together* attained to *touch* it—;

... then sighing, and leaving the first-fruits
of their Spirit bound there,

they returned to the sound of their own voice,—

to *words*,

which have a beginning and an end ...

“How unlike,” Augustine says, “God’s WORD,—
changeless, self-gathered, unmade, yet forever
making all things new...”

How do you explain it?

Then they said:—

“If any man could shut his ears
to the tumult of the flesh—;
if suddenly the cacophony
of earth and sea and air
were S I L E N T, and the voice of the self
died to the self, and so the self
found its way beyond the self,—
beyond the SELF it has made,—

silent
our expiations and confessions,
the voice that says: *NO REMISSION OF SINS
WITHOUT THE SHEDDING OF BLOOD,*
the Word that was only given us drenched in blood,—
... if to any man

his self, CREATION itself
(Substance and Accidents and their Relations)
suddenly were S I L E N T,—

and in that silence, he then
heard creation
say with one voice:—

*We are not our own source,—
even those of us*

*who made ourselves, creatures
of the Will, the Mirror, and the Dream,*

know we are not our own source,—

... if he heard this voice,
and then

all creation were, even for a second, S I L E N T,—

(this creation in which creatures
of consciousness,
whose LAW is that they come to be

through change, through
birth, fruition, and death,

know that as they move toward fullness
of being, they move toward ceasing to be,—)

... if in this silence,

He whom we *crave* to hear
SPOKE AT LAST—;

spoke not through the veil
of earth and sea and air,

thunder, ‘SIGNS AND WONDERS,’ the voice
of an angel, the enigma of similitude and of

parable, all

the ALIEN that BESETS us here,—

... spoke not by them, but by *HIMSELF*, calling

us to return into that secret place from
which He

comes forth at last to us,—

... just as we two
together reached forth and for one

heartbeat attained to *TOUCH*

the *WISDOM* that is our *SOURCE* and *GROUND*,—

... if this could continue, and LIFE
were that one moment of

wisdom and understanding

for which we then sighed,—

would not *this* be: *ENTER THOU INTO THE JOY OF THY LORD?...*

And when shall it be? At
the resurrection of the dead, when all
shall rise, but not all shall be changed?

And shall *WE* then be changed?...”

In words like these, but not
exactly these, (Augustine then says,)

they talked together that day—

(just as the words I have given you are
not, of course, exactly Augustine’s).

Monica then said,
“Son, I no longer hope

for anything from this world.

I wanted to stay alive long enough
to see you a Catholic Christian.

God has granted me this, in
superabundance.

... What am I still doing here?”

In five days, she fell into a fever;
nine days later she was dead.

Why are you angry?

My mother, at the end of her life, was *frightened*.

She was afraid to die
not because she feared an afterlife,

but because she didn't know what her life had been.

Her two marriages were failures,—

she stayed married to my stepfather, but
in despair, without trust in or respect for him, or
visible affection ...

She had had no profession,—

she had painted a few paintings, and
written a handful of poems, but without the illusion

either were any good, or STOOD FOR HER ...

She had *MADE* nothing.

I was what she had made.—

She saw that her concern and worry and care
in the end called up in me

protestations of affection
that veiled

unappeasable anger, and remorse.

UNDOING THIS was beyond me ...

She felt she was here for some reason,—
... but never found it.

*Man needs a metaphysics;
he cannot have one.*

The Sacrifice

When Judas writes the history of SOLITUDE,—
... let him celebrate

Miss Mary Kenwood; who, without
help, placed her head in a plastic bag,

then locked herself
in a refrigerator.

•

—Six months earlier, after thirty years
teaching piano, she had watched

her mother slowly die of throat cancer.
Watched her *want* to die ...

What once had given Mary life
in the end didn't want it.

Awake, her mother screamed for help to die.
—She felt

GUILTY ... She knew that *all* men in these situations felt
innocent—; helpless—; yet guilty.

•

Christ knew the Secret. Betrayal
is necessary; as is woe for the betrayer.

The solution, Mary realized at last,
must be brought out of my own body.

Wiping away our sins, Christ stained us with his blood—;
to offer yourself, yet need *betrayal*, by *Judas*, before SHOULDERING

THE GUILT OF THE WORLD—;
... *Give me the courage not to need Judas.*

•

When Judas writes the history of solitude,
let him record

that to the friend who opened
the refrigerator, it seemed

death fought; before giving in.

Genesis 1–2:4

In the beginning, God made HEAVEN and EARTH.

The earth without form was waste.

DARKNESS was the face of the deep.
His spirit was the wind brooding over the waters.

•

In darkness he said,
LET THERE BE LIGHT.

There was light.

In light he said, IT IS GOOD.

God, dividing darkness from light,
named light DAY and darkness NIGHT.

Night and day were the first day.

•

God said,
LET THE FIRMAMENT

ARC THE EARTH.

The waters opened.

The ARC above the earth
divided the waters above from the waters below.

God named the arc, HEAVEN.

Night and day were the second day.

•

God said,

LET THE WATERS BELOW THE FIRMAMENT

RECEDE, REVEALING THE GROUND.

The waters opened, and receded.

What lay beneath the waters was the ground.

God named the dry ground, EARTH.

He named the waters surrounding the earth, OCEAN.

God looked.

He said, IT IS GOOD.

God said,

LET THE BARE EARTH

BREAK OPEN, HEAVY WITH SEED.

The earth broke open.

Numberless PLANTS filled

with seed spread over the ground, and TREES

boughed with fruit heavy with seed.

God looked.

He said, IT IS GOOD.

Night and day were the third day.

•

God said,

LET GREAT LIGHTS IN THE FIRMAMENT

ORDER AND ILLUMINATE THE EARTH.

God placed great lights shining in the firmament,

the GREATER LIGHT to dominate the day,
the LESSER LIGHT to dominate the night,

and STARS.

God looked. He said,

LET THEM BE FOR SIGNS.

Dividing darkness from light, the shining
made seasons, days, years.

God said, IT IS GOOD.

Night and day were the fourth day.

•

God said,

LET THE MOVING WATERS LIVE

WITH TEEMING, LIVING CREATURES.

God said,

LET THE EMPTY FIRMAMENT LIVE

WITH TEEMING, LIVING CREATURES.

God made the creatures of the deep,
BEASTS and MONSTERS, all those

swarming within it. God made the winged creatures
moving across the face of the firmament.

God looked.

He said, IT IS GOOD.

God blessed them, saying,
 INCREASE. MULTIPLY.
FILL THE WATERS.
 ARCING THE EARTH,
FILL THE FIRMAMENT.

They increased and multiplied.

Night and day were the fifth day.

•

God said,
 LET THE EARTH BRING FORTH
LIVING CREATURES BOUND TO THE EARTH.

God made the beasts of the earth,
cattle, each according to its kind.

He made the creatures that crawl on the earth,
reptiles, each according to its kind.

God looked.
 He said, IT IS GOOD.

God said,
 LET US MAKE MAN
LIKE US, IN OUR IMAGE AND LIKENESS.

God said,
 LET THEM DOMINATE THE EARTH
AND THE CREATURES OF THE EARTH.

God made MAN in his own image,
in the image of God

he made him,
 MAN and WOMAN
he made them.

Of one likeness
 MALE FE MALE
two he made.

God blessed them, saying,
 INCREASE. MULTIPLY.

DOMINATE THE EARTH
AND THE CREATURES OF THE EARTH.

God looked. He said,
 YOUR MEAT SHALL BE
PLANTS, SEEDS, FRUIT.

God said to the man and woman
and all the creatures on the earth,
YOUR MEAT SHALL BE THE EARTH,
NOT THE CREATURES OF THE EARTH.

God looked.
 He said, IT IS VERY GOOD.

Night and day were the sixth day.

•

God rested. On the seventh day

God rested. He looked at HEAVEN and EARTH,
and ceased.

Heaven and earth with all their panoply

were made.

God blessed the seventh day, God made
the seventh day a holy day,

because on the seventh day God rested, God ceased.

•

This was the creation of the world.

THE BOOK OF THE BODY

(1977)

The Arc

When I wake up,
I try to convince myself that my arm
isn't there—
to retain my sanity.

Then I try to convince myself it is.

• • •

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Always bandage *firmly*. The pressure should be constant over the entire stump with greatest pressure near the tip to attempt to make the stump cone-shaped.
2. If stump starts to *throb*, remove the bandage at once. Leave bandage off for one hour and rebandage the stump as before, *firmly*. Inspect the skin of your stump daily for any blisters, spots or sores and report them.
3. Wash bandage with mild soap in luke warm water. DO NOT WRING! Squeeze the waters out gently and place the bandage over the shower rod to dry thoroughly. DO NOT STRETCH OR IRON!!
4. Change the stump sock daily. Wash the sock daily with mild soap in luke warm water. DO NOT WRING! Squeeze the water out gently—place the sock on a flat surface to dry.

• • •

I used to vaguely perceive the necessity
of coming to terms with the stump-filled, material world,—

things, bodies;

CRAP—

a world of accident, and chance—;

but after
the accident, I had to understand it

not as an accident—;

the way my mother,
years before locked in McLean's,

believed the painting of a snow-scene above her bed
had been placed there by the doctor to make her feel cold.

How could we *convince* her it had no point?...

It had no point,—

it was there
without relation to my mother; by chance; by
CHANCE the car swerved when a yellow car

came at us—; and the next
minute, when I looked down

all I saw was a space below the elbow
instead of my arm ...

The police still can't figure out exactly what happened.

I tell myself:
“Insanity is the insistence on meaning.”

• • •

He asked me if I wanted to get undressed, but I'm
embarrassed to take my shirt off,

so I told him to go ahead and take all his clothes off.

His body looked small and white lying on top of the dark bedspread.

I said I wanted to watch him wash
his prick.

He got up and walked
to the washbasin against the wall,

then I went up, and started to wash
it with mild soap in luke warm water.
I squeezed it.

He laughed,
and after drying off, went back to the bed.

I asked if he had a job.
“Drove a truck for a while,
but about a week ago—I got laid off.”

He looked uneasy, almost scared.
“When I was in Vietnam,
my wife met someone else, and divorced me.
I have a little daughter three years old.”

He got his wallet and showed me the little girl’s picture.

“I don’t blame my wife—I was gone
a long time, and like everybody
else in Vietnam I did a lot of fucking around.”

He looked frightened and embarrassed, seeming to want
me to reassure him ...

I asked him to tell me about Vietnam.

“Anything you touched might explode. I know guys
just kicked a rock, and got killed ...

Once a buddy of mine
was passing a hut, when a gook motioned to him to come inside.
Inside a woman was lying on her back, with
a pile of cigarettes next to her. He threw
some cigarettes on the pile, got on top of her,

and shoved in his prick.

He screamed.

She had a razor blade inside.

The whole end of his thing was sliced in two ...

They fixed it up;

but what can he tell his wife?"

When he asked me what kind of sex I wanted,
I suddenly

forgot why

a body can make me feel horny—;

I wanted to leave.

But afraid

leaving might insult him, I asked him to masturbate.

"Sure."

He closed his eyes. For several minutes
his arm and hand with great energy
worked, as his contorted face tried to concentrate.

I stared at him, wishing
I could know
the image in his mind when at last he came.

• • •

The person I can't forget on my mother's ward
I don't know the name of.

She still stands there
in my mind,—

though it is summer, and hot,
she is wearing a heavy terry-cloth robe,
sweating, with a thin metal chain around her neck:

that's all—

 she is assuring me
she wears nothing under the robe,

that to wear anything
would *limit* her, that the doctors tell her
to have an “identity”

 she must wear something—

“But I don't want an identity!

This way I'm *free* ... Everybody else
has a medal on their chain, with a picture

or name on it, but I don't—
this way
I'm not bound down...”

With two hands
she begins to work the chain
around and around her neck, she soon gets
frantically excited,
 and finally the attendant leads her away ...

I only saw her once; that's
her identity in my mind,—

and even in my mind,

sweating
she wears a body

• • •

In Michelangelo's drawing *The Dream*, a man,

his arms lightly touching the globe,
all the masks at last lying dead beneath him,

I was no longer whole; proportioned; inviolate ...

In a store, I found a “memorial album”:

birth date, death date, place
of rest, visitors to the coffin—

I could clearly see
an obituary:

*On a certain date, in a certain place,
he lost his arm.*

Twice I dreamed the cone of my stump
was a gravestone:

I saw it:
the whole of my life
was a kind of arc
stretching between two etched, ineradicable dates ...

I had to escape that arc—

even notions like *career* and *marriage* (all those things
which because they
have a beginning, must end—)
seemed to suffocate ...

I went to Paris. My family’s sympathy,
the vivid scenes of my former life

whispered that my body was bound by two iron dates ...

One day, leaving my hotel on the Ile St. Louis,
I saw a black dog and a young boy madly running.

Nothing unusual—
except the dog only had one
front leg. He seemed without consciousness
of what he lacked;
free of memory as a vegetable.

Looking at each other, they happily jogged along,

started to cross the bridge, and I followed—

then, as I crossed it, suddenly
I felt that I too must erase my past,
that I could, *must* pretend (almost
as an experiment) I had never had more
than one arm, that the image
faced in the mirror
was the only, the inevitable image ...

—For a time, it worked;
I was happy;

without a past, I seemed not to exist
in time at all,—

I only remember a sense of release, ease,
proportion—
I am now one, not less than one ...

Then, after about two weeks, imperceptibly
everything I saw became

cardboard ...

Even the things I touched—
I couldn't allow myself to remember
the vivid associations
which gave dimension to what I
touched, saw, smelt,—

the resonance of every image
I had to try to cut from my brain, it had been felt
by someone with two hands and two arms ...

I had to try to cut from my brain
my phantom hand
which still gets cramps, which my brain still
recognizes as real—

and now, I think of Paris,

how Paris is still the city of Louis XVI and
Robespierre, how blood, amputation, and rubble

give her dimension, resonance, and grace.

Happy Birthday

Thirty-three, goodbye—
the awe I feel

is not that you won't come again, or why—

or even that after
a time, we think of those who are dead

with a sweetness that cannot be explained—

but that I've read the trading-cards:
RALPH TEMPLE CYCLIST CHAMPION TRICK RIDER

WILLIE HARRADON CYCLIST
THE YOUTHFUL PHENOMENON

F. F. IVES CYCLIST
100 MILES 6 H. 25 MIN. 30 SEC.

—as the fragile metal of their
wheels stopped turning, as they

took on wives, children, accomplishments, all those
predilections which also insisted on ending,

they could not tell themselves from what they had done.

Terrible to dress in the clothes
of a period that must end.

They didn't plan it that way—
they didn't plan it that way.

Elegy

I. Belafont

“He seemed to have gotten better—

Tuesday, for the first time
in a week, he went out
into the front yard, and
pottied by lifting his leg—

which he hadn’t had

the strength to do. So we left him

just for an hour—

the vet says
somebody must have
got to him again, in
that hour—

one in the morning, he started to
cough, throw up, and Floyd
stayed with him
all night—

at six, he called the vet, and at ten
he died.

He had a *good* life—

you feel so guilty, even though you
did all you could—

I talked
to my doctor, and

he says you
always feel that way, though you
did all you
humanly could—all you
humanly could—”

(pause) “He had a *good* life—”

*My mother’s dog is dead;
as truly as I am, he was her son;
we used to laugh at the comparison.*

“When your father was drunk one night,
he started to hit me; you were only five, but
stood up to him, and said:

‘If you ever
try to hit mommy again, I’ll kill you.’

I knew then I *had* to leave.

When we came to the city,
you were a real toughie—

I’ll never forget the first
day of kindergarten, you were sent home because
you called the lady teacher a ‘sonofabitch’!

—You’d only been around cowboys;
but later, you only wanted to be with me.

I had to *push* you away—

we were always
more like each other than anyone else.”

We used to laugh at the comparison.

“I insisted they bury him here, in the garden: Floyd
made a box: we wrapped him

in one of our best
white sheets.” —Was it his fault

they loved him
more than each other? Or their fault

their love
forbade him in his nine years

from even licking his genitals?
She got him

the year before I went away to school,
“to take your place,”

she kidded. She used to laugh
at poodles on the street—clipped, manicured,

clung to.
But what was she to do—

change, or have another child?

Belafont, I saw you in a dream tonight,
reaching toward me to kiss me

but carefully avoiding the mouth, as
taught,

yet constantly, defiantly skirting it—
then plunging into a pile of old, empty shoeboxes

to come up with the strap
I wear on my weak

left wrist
exercising each night, remaking

the embarrassing
soft overfed unloved body

I try to blame on the past—;
tilting your head, the strap

hanging from one side of the mouth,
you look at me with your

daring, lawless
stare—

and begin to chew.

II. Pruning

“I’d rather die than let them
take off a breast. I’d rather die
than go through cobalt again.”

She means it,—
 but I can’t help but remember
her at least fifteen years earlier,

standing in the doorway, shrieking at me
when I wanted to be a priest:

“It’s just as well!”

You had mumps—; they went down—; you’ll never,
gelding, have kids!”

 twisting her last knife

to save me from the Church, the Church
which called her marriage adultery ...

—She is saying: “If the cancer
pops out somewhere else, I won’t let them operate.
I’d rather die.

 They just
butcher you ... Besides, it never works.”

III. Lover

“I’ll be right over.”

“Give me a few minutes: I’m still

in my pajamas.”

“Don’t get out of your pajamas.”

“Don’t get out of my pajamas?”

“—Don’t get out of your pajamas!”

And so we learned how to make two lovers
of friends; now,

caught “between a rock and a hard place—” (after
the hospital, after

“gestation” was “interrupted”) we still
when we call even say we love each other ...

Too bad two people don’t have to “love each other”
more, to make a child.

IV. Light

I am asleep, dreaming a terrible dream, so I awake,
and want to call my father to ask if, just
for a short time, the dog can come to stay with me.

But the light next to my bed won't light:
I press and press the switch. Touching the phone,
I can't see to dial the numbers. Can I learn how to keep

the dog in my apartment? In the dark, trying
a second light, I remember
I always knew these machines would fail me.

Then I awake,

remember my father and the dog are dead,
the lights in that room do not go on.

V. Lineage

“I went to a mausoleum today, and found what I want. Eye-level.
Don’t forget:
I want to be buried in a mausoleum at eye-level.”

She feels she never quite recovered
from her mother's, my grandmother's, death.

Her mother died by falling from a third floor hospital window.

“—I’m *sure* she didn’t want to kill herself;
after the stroke, sometimes she got confused, and
maybe she thought
she saw grandpa at the window ...

She wanted to be at home. After the stroke, we *had* to put her in a nursing home,—

she hated it, but you couldn't
get help to stay with her, and she needed
someone twenty-four hours a day,—

she begged me to take her out;
the cruel,
unreasonable things she said to me! Her doctor
told me I was doing the right thing, but
what she said
almost drove me crazy ...

it's astonishing how clearly I can still hear her voice.

I still dream I can see her falling

three stories, her arms stretching out ...

For forty years, she counted
on grandpa,—
 after he died, she still
talked to him.

I know I made a lot of
mistakes with you, but I couldn't count on anyone—

I had to be both father *and* mother..."

As the subject once again changes from my grandmother
to my father, or the dog—
to my stepfather, or me—
 her obsessive, baffled voice

says that when she allowed herself to love
she let something into her head which will
never be got out—;
 which could only betray her
or *be* betrayed, but never appeased—;
whose voice

 death and memory have made
into a razor-blade without a handle ...

"Don't forget:
I want to be buried in a mausoleum at eye-level."

Envoi

“If it resists me, I know it’s real—”
a friend said. I thought of you ... When I said,
“I feel too much. I can’t stand what I feel”

I meant, as always, facing you.—You’re real;
and smile at me no *less* woundedly, dead.
If it resists me, I know it’s real.

Now no act of Mind,—or Will,—can reveal
the secret to *un-say* all we once said ...
I feel too much. I can’t stand what I feel.

The only way we stumbled to the Real
was through failure; outrage; betrayals; dread.
If it resists me, I know it’s real.

Is the only salvation through what’s real?
But each book ... reads me—; who remains unread.
I feel too much. I can’t stand what I feel.

Mother, I didn’t forgive you. Conceal
unreal forgiving. Show me your face in fury—; not dead.
If it resists me, I know it’s real.
I feel too much. I can’t stand what I feel.

The Book of the Body

Wanting to cease to feel—;

since 1967,
so much blood under the bridge,—

the deaths of both my parents,
(now that they have no
body, only when I have no body

can we meet—)

my romance with Orgasm,

exhilaration like Insight, but without
content?—

the NO which is YES, the YES which is NO—

Daphnis,
astonished at the unaccustomed threshold of heaven,

in his whiteness
sees beneath his feet the clouds and stars ...

—So many
infatuations guaranteed to fail before they started,

terror at my own homosexuality,

terror which somehow
evaporated slowly with “Gay Liberation”

and finding that I had fathered a child—;

... All those who loved me
whom I did not want;

all those whom I loved
who did not want me;

all those whose love I reciprocated

but in a way somehow
unlike what they wanted ...

—Blindness. Blankness.
A friend said, “I’ve hurt so many...” And

for what?
to what *end*?—

An adult’s forgiveness of his parents
born out of increasing age and empathy

which really forgives nothing,—
but is loathing, rage, revenge,

yet forgiveness as well—;

Sex the type of all action,

reconciliation with the body that is
annihilation of the body,

My romance with pornography,

watching it happen, watching

two bodies trying to make it happen,
however masterful or gorgeous, helpless

climbing the un-mappable mountain
of FEELING, the will

in sweat, hurt, exhaustion, accepting
limits of will,

the NO which is YES, the YES which is NO.

1974.

Ellen West

I love sweets,—
 heaven
would be dying on a bed of vanilla ice cream ...

But my true self
is thin, all profile

and effortless gestures, the sort of blond
elegant girl whose
 body is the image of her soul.

—My doctors tell me I must give up
this ideal;
 but I
WILL NOT ... cannot.

Only to my husband I'm not simply a "case."

But he is a fool. He married
meat, and thought it was a wife.

• • •

Why am I a girl?

I ask my doctors, and they tell me they
don't know, that it is just "given."

But it has such
implications—;
 and sometimes,
I even feel like a girl.

• • •

Now, at the beginning of Ellen's thirty-second year, her physical condition has deteriorated still further. Her use of laxatives increases beyond measure. Every evening she takes sixty to seventy tablets of a laxative, with the result that she suffers tortured vomiting at night and violent diarrhea by day, often accompanied by a weakness of the heart. She has thinned down to a skeleton, and weighs only 92 pounds.

• • •

About five years ago, I was in a restaurant,
eating alone

with a book. I was
not married, and often did that ...

—I'd turn down
dinner invitations, so I could eat alone;

I'd allow myself two pieces of bread, with
butter, at the beginning, and three scoops of
vanilla ice cream, at the end,—

sitting there alone

with a book, both in the book
and out of it, waited on, idly
watching people,—

when an attractive young man
and woman, both elegantly dressed,
sat next to me.

She was beautiful—;

with sharp, clear features, a good
bone structure—;

if she took her make-up off
in front of you, rubbing cold cream
again and again across her skin, she still would be

beautiful—

more beautiful.

And he,—

I couldn't remember when I had seen a man
so attractive. I didn't know why. He was almost

a male version

of her,—

I had the sudden, mad notion that I
wanted to be his lover ...

—Were they married?

were *they* lovers?

They didn't wear wedding rings.

Their behavior was circumspect. They discussed
politics. They didn't touch ...

—How could I discover?

Then, when the first course
arrived, I noticed the way

each held his fork out for the other

to taste what he had ordered ...

They did this
again and again, with pleased looks, indulgent
smiles, for each course,

more than once for *each* dish—;
much too much for just friends ...

—Their behavior somehow sickened me;

the way each *gladly*

put the *food* the other had offered *into his mouth*—;

I knew what they were. I knew they slept together.

An immense depression came over me ...

—I knew I could never
with such ease allow another to put food into my mouth:

happily *myself* put food into another's mouth—;

I knew that to become a wife I would have to give up my ideal.

• • •

Even as a child,
I saw that the “natural” process of aging

is for one's middle to thicken—
one's skin to blotch;

as happened to my mother.
And her mother.

I loathed “Nature.”

At twelve, pancakes
became the most terrible thought there is ...

I shall *defeat* “Nature.”

In the hospital, when they
weigh me, I wear weights secretly sewn into my belt.

• • •

January 16. The patient is allowed to eat in her room, but comes readily with her husband to afternoon coffee. Previously she had stoutly resisted this on the ground that she did not really eat but devoured like a wild animal. This she demonstrated with utmost realism.... Her physical examination showed nothing

striking. Salivary glands are markedly enlarged on both sides.

January 21. Has been reading *Faust* again. In her diary, writes that art is the “mutual permeation” of the “world of the body” and the “world of the spirit.” Says that her own poems are “hospital poems ... weak—without skill or perseverance; only managing to beat their wings softly.”

February 8. Agitation, quickly subsided again. Has attached herself to an elegant, very thin female patient. Homo-erotic component strikingly evident.

February 15. Vexation, and torment. Says that her mind forces her always to think of eating. Feels herself degraded by this. Has entirely, for the first time in years, stopped writing poetry.

• • •

Callas is my favorite singer, but I've only seen her once—;

I've never forgotten that night ...

It was in *Tosca*, she had long before
lost weight, her voice
had been, for years,
deteriorating, half itself ...

When her career began, of course, she was fat,

enormous—; in the early photographs, sometimes I almost don't recognize her ...

The voice too then was enormous—

healthy; robust; subtle; but capable of
crude effects, even vulgar,
almost out of
high spirits, too much health ...

But soon she felt that she must lose weight,—
that all she was trying to express

was obliterated by her body,

buried in flesh—;
 abruptly, within
four months, she lost at least sixty pounds ...

—The gossip in Milan was that Callas
had swallowed a tapeworm.

But of course she hadn't.

 The *tapeworm*
was her *soul* ...

—How her soul, uncompromising,
insatiable,
 must have loved eating the flesh from her bones,

revealing this extraordinarily
mercurial; fragile; masterly creature ...

—But irresistibly, nothing
stopped there; the huge voice

also began to change: at first, it simply diminished
in volume, in size,

 then the top notes became
shrill, unreliable—at last,
usually not there at all ...

—No one knows *why*. Perhaps her mind,
ravenous, still insatiable, sensed

that to struggle with the *shreds* of a voice

must make her artistry subtler, more refined,
more capable of expressing humiliation,
rage, betrayal ...

—Perhaps the opposite. Perhaps her spirit
loathed the unending struggle

to *embody* itself, to *manifest* itself, on a stage whose
mechanics, and suffocating customs,
seemed expressly designed to annihilate spirit ...

—I know that in *Tosca*, in the second act,
when, humiliated, wounded by Scarpia,
she sang *Vissi d'arte*

—“I lived for art”—

and in torment, bewilderment, at the end she asks,
with a voice reaching
harrowingly for the notes,

“Art has *repaid* me LIKE THIS?”

I felt I was watching
autobiography—
an art; skill;
virtuosity

miles distant from the usual soprano's
athleticism,—
the usual musician's dream
of virtuosity *without* content ...

—I wonder what she feels, now,
listening to her recordings.

For they have already, within a few years,
begun to date ...

Whatever they express
they express through the style of a decade
and a half—;
a style *she* helped create ...

—She must know that now
she probably would *not* do a trill in

exactly that way,—
that the whole sound, atmosphere,
dramaturgy of her recordings

have just slightly become those of the past ...

—Is it bitter? Does her soul
tell her

that she was an *idiot* ever to think
anything
material wholly could satisfy?...

—Perhaps it says: *The only way
to escape
the History of Styles*

is not to have a body.

• • •

When I open my eyes in the morning, my great
mystery
stands before me ...

—I *know* that I am intelligent; therefore

the inability not to fear food
day-and-night; this unending hunger
ten minutes after I have eaten ...

a childish
dread of eating; hunger which can have no cause,—

half my mind says that all this
is *demeaning* ...

Bread
for days on end
drives all real thought from my brain ...

—Then I think, No. The ideal of being thin

conceals the ideal

not to have a body—;

which is NOT trivial ...

This wish seems now as much a “given” of my existence

as the intolerable

fact that I am dark-complexioned; big-boned;

and once weighed

one hundred and sixty-five pounds ...

—But then I think, *No*. That’s too simple,—

without a body, who can

know himself at all?

Only by

acting; choosing; rejecting; have I

made myself—

discovered who and what *Ellen* can be ...

—But then again I think, *NO*. This *I* is anterior

to name; gender; action;

fashion;

MATTER ITSELF,—

... trying to stop my hunger with FOOD

is like trying to appease thirst

with ink.

• • •

March 30. Result of the consultation: Both gentlemen agree completely with my prognosis and doubt any therapeutic usefulness of commitment even more emphatically than I. All three of us are agreed that it is not a case of obsessional neurosis and not one of manic-depressive psychosis, and that no definitely reliable therapy is possible. We therefore resolved to give in to the patient’s

demand for discharge.

• • •

The train-ride yesterday
was far *worse* than I expected ...

In our compartment
were ordinary people: a student;
a woman; her child;—

they had ordinary bodies, pleasant faces;
but I thought
I was surrounded by creatures

with the pathetic, desperate
desire to be *not* what they were:—

the student was short,
and carried her body as if forcing
it to be taller—;

the woman showed her gums when she smiled,
and often held her
hand up to hide them—;

the child
seemed to cry simply because it was
small; a dwarf, and helpless ...

—I was hungry. I had insisted that my husband
not bring food ...

After about thirty minutes, the woman
peeled an orange

to quiet the child. She put a section
into its mouth—;
immediately it spit it out.

The piece fell to the floor.

—She pushed it with her foot through the dirt
toward me
several inches.

My husband saw me staring
down at the piece ...

—I didn't move; how I wanted
to reach out,
and as if invisible

shove it in my mouth—;

my body
became rigid. As I stared at him,
I could see him staring

at me,—
then he looked at the student—; at the woman—; then
back to me ...

I didn't move.

—At last, he bent down, and
casually
threw it out the window.

He looked away.

—I got up to leave the compartment, then
saw his face,—

his eyes
were red;
and I saw

—*I'm sure I saw*—

disappointment.

• • •

On the third day of being home she is as if transformed. At breakfast she eats butter and sugar, at noon she eats so much that—for the first time in thirteen years!—she is satisfied by her food and gets really full. At afternoon coffee she eats chocolate creams and Easter eggs. She takes a walk with her husband, reads poems, listens to recordings, is in a positively festive mood, and all heaviness seems to have fallen away from her. She writes letters, the last one a letter to the fellow patient here to whom she had become so attached. In the evening she takes a lethal dose of poison, and on the following morning she is dead. “She looked as she had never looked in life—calm and happy and peaceful.”

• • •

Dearest.—I remember how
at eighteen,

on hikes with friends, when
they rested, sitting down to joke or talk,

I circled
around them, afraid to hike ahead alone,

yet afraid to rest
when I was not yet truly thin.

You and, yes, my husband,—
you and he

have by degrees drawn me within the circle;
forced me to sit down at last on the ground.

I am grateful.

But something in me *refuses* it.

—How eager I have been
to compromise, to kill this *refuser*,—

but each compromise, each attempt
to poison an ideal
which often seemed to *me* sterile and unreal,

heightens my hunger.

I am crippled. I disappoint you.

Will you greet with anger, or
happiness,

the news which might well reach you
before this letter?

Your *Ellen*.

GOLDEN STATE

(1973)

PART ONE

Herbert White

“When I hit her on the head, it was good,
and then I did it to her a couple of times,—
but it was funny,—afterwards,
it was as if somebody else did it ...

Everything flat, without sharpness, richness or line.

Still, I liked to drive past the woods where she lay,
tell the old lady and the kids I had to take a piss,
hop out and do it to her ...

The whole buggy of them waiting for me
made me feel good;
but still, just like I knew all along,
she didn't move.

When the body got too discomposed,
I'd just jack off, letting it fall on her ...

—It sounds crazy, but I tell you
sometimes it was *beautiful*—; I don't know how
to say it, but for a minute, *everything* was possible—;
and then,
then,—

well, like I said, she didn't move: and I saw,
under me, a little girl was just lying there in the mud:

and I knew I couldn't have done that,—
somebody *else* had to have done that,—

standing above her there,

in those ordinary, shitty leaves ...

—One time, I went to see Dad in a motel where he was
staying with a woman; but she was gone;
you could smell the wine in the air; and he started,
real embarrassing, to cry ...

He was still a little drunk,
and asked me to forgive him for
all he hadn't done—; but, What the shit?
Who would have wanted to stay with Mom? with bastards
not even his own kids?

I got in the truck, and started to drive,
and saw a little girl—
who I picked up, hit on the head, and
screwed, and screwed, and screwed, and screwed, then
buried,
in the garden of the motel ...

—You see, ever since I was a kid I wanted
to *feel* things make sense: I remember

looking out the window of my room back home,—
and being almost suffocated by the asphalt;
and grass; and trees; and glass;
just *there*, just *there*, doing nothing!
not saying anything! filling me up—
but also being a wall; dead, and stopping me;
—how I wanted to see beneath it, cut

beneath it, and make it
somehow, come alive ...

The salt of the earth;
Mom once said, 'Man's spunk is the salt of the earth...'

—That night, at that Twenty-nine Palms Motel

I had passed a million times on the road, everything
fit together; was alright;
it seemed like
everything *had* to be there, like I had spent years
trying, and at last finally finished drawing this
huge circle ...

—But then, suddenly I knew
somebody *else* did it, some bastard
had hurt a little girl—; the motel
I could see again, it had been
itself all the time, a lousy
pile of bricks, plaster, that didn't seem to
have to be there,—but *was*, just by chance ...

—Once, on the farm, when I was a kid,
I was screwing a goat; and the rope around his neck
when he tried to get away
pulled tight;—and just when I came,
he *died* ...

I came back the next day; jacked off over his body;
but it didn't do any good ...

Mom once said:
‘Man’s spunk is the salt of the earth, and grows kids.’

I tried so hard to come; more *pain* than anything else;
but didn't do any good ...

—About six months ago, I heard Dad remarried, so I drove over to Connecticut to see him and see if he was happy.

She was twenty-five years younger than him: she had lots of little kids, and I don't know why, I felt shaky ...

I stopped in front of the address; and

snuck up to the window to look in ...

—There he was, a kid

six months old on his lap, laughing
and bouncing the kid, happy in his old age
to play the papa after years of sleeping around,—
it twisted me up ...

To think that what he wouldn't give me,
he *wanted* to give them ...

I could have killed the bastard ...

—Naturally, I just got right back in the car,
and believe me, was determined, determined,
to head straight for home ...

but the more I drove,
I kept thinking about getting a girl,
and the more I thought I shouldn't do it,
the more I had to—

I saw her coming out of the movies,
saw she was alone, and
kept circling the blocks as she walked along them,
saying, 'You're going to leave her alone.'
'You're going to leave her alone.'

—The woods were scary!

As the seasons changed, and you saw more and more
of the skull show through, the nights became clearer,
and the buds,—erect, like nipples ...

—But then, one night,
nothing *worked* ...

Nothing in the sky
would blur like I wanted it to;
and I couldn't, *couldn't*,

get it to seem to me

that somebody *else* did it ...

I tried, and tried, but there was just me there,
and her, and the sharp trees
saying, 'That's you standing there.

You're ...
just you.'

I hope I fry.

—Hell came when I saw

MYSELF ...

and couldn't stand

what I see..."

Self-Portrait, 1969

He's *still* young—; thirty, but looks younger—
or does he?... In the eyes and cheeks, tonight,
turning in the mirror, he saw his mother,—
puffy; angry; bewildered ... Many nights
now, when he stares there, he gets angry:—
something *unfulfilled* there, something dead
to what he once thought he surely could be—
Now, just the glamour of habits ...

Once, instead,
he thought insight would remake him, he'd reach
—what? The thrill, the exhilaration
unraveling disaster, that seemed to teach
necessary knowledge ... became just jargon.

Sick of being decent, he craves another
crash. What *reaches* him except disaster?

PART TWO

California Plush

The only thing I miss about Los Angeles

is the Hollywood Freeway at midnight, windows down and
radio blaring
bearing right into the center of the city, the Capitol Tower
on the right, and beyond it, Hollywood Boulevard
blazing

—pimps, surplus stores, footprints of the stars

—descending through the city
fast as the law would allow

through the lights, then rising to the stack
out of the city
to the stack where lanes are stacked six deep

and you on top; the air
now clean; for a moment weightless

without memories, or
need for a past.

The need for the past

is so much at the center of my life
I write this poem to record my discovery of it,
my reconciliation.

It was in Bishop, the room was done
in California plush: we had gone into the coffee shop, were told
you could only get a steak in the bar;

I hesitated,
not wanting to be an occasion of temptation for my father
but he wanted to, so we entered

a dark room, with amber water glasses, walnut
tables, captain's chairs,
plastic doilies, papier-mâché bas-relief wall ballerinas,
German memorial plates "bought on a trip to Europe,"
Puritan crosshatch green-yellow wallpaper,
frilly shades, cowhide
booths—

I thought of Cambridge:

the lovely congruent elegance
of Revolutionary architecture, even of

ersatz thirties Georgian

seemed alien, a threat, sign
of all I was not—

to bode order and lucidity

as an ideal, if not reality—

not this California plush, which

also

I was not.

And so I made myself an Easterner,
finding it, after all, more like me
than I had let myself hope.

And now, staring into the embittered face of
my father,

again, for two weeks, as twice a year,
I was back.

The waitress asked us if we wanted a drink.
Grimly, I waited until he said no ...

Before the tribunal of the world I submit the following
document:

Nancy showed it to us,
in her apartment in the motel,
as she waited month by month
for the property settlement, her children grown
and working for their father,
at fifty-three now alone,
a drink in her hand:

as my father said,
“They keep a drink in her hand”:

Name Wallace Du Bois
Box No 128 *Chino, Calif.*
Date July 25 ,19 54

Mr Howard Arturian

I am writing a letter to you this afternoon while I'm in the mood of writing. How is everything getting along with you these fine days, as for me everything is just fine and I feel great except for the heat I think its lot warmer then it is up there but I don't mind it so much. I work at the dairy half day and I go to trade school the other half day Body & Fender, now I am learning how to spray paint cars I've already painted one and now I got another car to paint. So now I think I've learned all I want after I have learned all this. I know how to straighten metals and all that. I forgot to say "Hello" to you. The reason why I am writing to you is about a job, my Parole Officer told me that he got letter from and that you want me to go to work for you. So I wanteded to know if its truth. When I go to the Board in Feb. I'll tell them what I want to do and where I would like to go, so if you want me to work for you I'd rather have you sent me to your brother John in Tonapah and place to stay for my family. The Old Lady says the

same thing in her last letter that she would be some place else then in Bishop, thats the way I feel too. and another thing is my drinking problem. I made up my mind to quit my drinking, after all what it did to me and what happen.

This is one thing I'll never forget as longs as I live I never want to go through all this mess again. This sure did teach me a lot of things that I never knew before. So Howard you can let me know soon as possible. I sure would appreciate it.

From Your Friend
Wally Du Bois

P. S

I hope you can read my
writing. I am a little nervous yet

—He and his wife had given a party, and
one of the guests was walking away
just as Wallace started backing up his car.
He hit him, so put the body in the back seat
and drove to a deserted road.
There he put it before the tires, and
ran back and forth over it several times.

When he got out of Chino, he did,
indeed, never do that again:
but one child was dead, his only son,
found with the rest of his family
immobile in their beds with typhoid,
next to the mother, the child having been
dead two days:

he continued to drink, and as if it were the Old West
shot up the town a couple of Saturday nights.

“So now I think I’ve learned all I want
after I have learned all this: this sure did teach me a lot of things
that I never knew before.
I am a little nervous yet.”

It seems to me
an emblem of Bishop—

For watching the room, as the waitresses in their
back-combed, Parisian, peroxided, bouffant hairdos,
and plastic belts,
moved back and forth

I thought of Wallace, and
the room suddenly seemed to me
not uninteresting at all:

they were the same. Every plate and chair

had its congruence with

all the choices creating

these people, created

by them—by me,

for this is my father's chosen country, my origin.

Before, I had merely been anxious, bored; now,
I began to ask a thousand questions ...

He was, of course, mistrustful, knowing I was bored,
knowing he had dragged me up here from Bakersfield

after five years

of almost managing to forget Bishop existed.

But he soon became loquacious, ordered a drink,
and settled down for
an afternoon of talk ...

He liked Bishop: somehow, it was to his taste, this

hard-drinking, loud, visited-by-movie-stars town.
“Better to be a big fish in a little pond.”

And he was: when they came to shoot a film,
he entertained them; Miss A——, who wore
nothing at all under her mink coat; Mr. M——,
good horseman, good shot.

“But when your mother
let me down” (for alcoholism and
infidelity, she divorced him)
“and Los Angeles wouldn’t give us water any more,
I had to leave.

We were the first people to grow potatoes in this valley.”

When he began to tell me
that he lost control of the business
because of the settlement he gave my mother,

because I had heard it
many times,

in revenge, I asked why people up here drank so much.

He hesitated. “Bored, I guess.
—Not much to do.”

And why had Nancy’s husband left her?

In bitterness, all he said was:
“People up here drink too damn much.”

And that was how experience
had informed his life.

“So now I think I’ve learned all I want
after I have learned all this: this sure did teach me a lot of things
that I never knew before.

I am a little nervous yet.”

Yet, as my mother said,
returning, as always, to the past,

“I wouldn’t change any of it.
It taught me so much. Gladys
is such an innocent creature: you look into her face
and somehow it’s empty, all she worries about
are sales and the baby.
Her husband’s too good!”

It’s quite pointless to call this rationalization:
my mother, for uncertain reasons, has had her
bout with insanity, but she’s right:

the past in maiming us,
makes us,
fruition
 is also
destruction:

 I think of Proust, dying
in a cork-lined room, because he refuses to eat
because he thinks that he cannot write if he eats
because he wills to write, to finish his novel

—his novel which recaptures the past, and
with a kind of joy, because
in the debris
of the past, he has found the sources of the necessities

which have led him to this room, writing

—in this strange harmony, does he will
for it to have been different?

And I can’t *not* think of the remorse of Oedipus,

who tries to escape, to expiate the past
by blinding himself, and
then, when he is dying, sees that he has become a Daimon

—does he, discovering, at last, this cruel
coherence created by
“the order of the universe”

—does he will
anything reversed?

I look at my father:
as he drinks his way into garrulous, shaky
defensiveness, the debris of the past
is just debris—; whatever I reason, it is a desolation
to watch ...

must I watch?
He will not change; he does not *want* to change;

every defeated gesture implies
the past is useless, irretrievable ...
—I want to change: I want to stop fear’s subtle

guidance of my life—; but, how can I do that
if I am still
afraid of its source?

Book of Life

I once knew a man named Snake.

He killed
All our snakes.

One day one bit him.

“Ha-ya feelin’, Snake?”
I asked when he returned.

He said,
“My name is Walter.”

The brown house
on the brown hill
reminds me of my parents.

Its memory is of poverty,
not merely poverty of means,
but poverty of history, of awareness of
the ways men have found to live.

My stepfather was from Texas.

“Niggers, you know they’re different from us,
they go mad when they make love,
we white men have to watch out or women

won’t have anything to do with us.”

(pause) “Back in McKinney, there’s a spot on the pavement
where they caught a nigger who’d raped a white woman,

right there they tied him down,
poured gasoline on him, and
lit him afire.

—You can still see the mark.”

Illuminated by the lore of the past, justified
by the calluses on his hands,
—won walking round and round
a wheel digging a water
well fourteen hours a day—
he was happy with himself.

Before my mother married him, she was
free for several years, proposed to
by several men we may call,
in this context,

“educated”

(a lawyer; a doctor; unconfident men
sharing a certain unmistakable
humaneness)

and later, she often asked herself
why she married him.

She would laugh, and say, “I always liked the horse’s asses!”

(*pause*) “My mother never told me about these things.”

Its memory is of poverty,
not merely poverty of means,
but poverty of history, of awareness of
the ways men have found to live.

My father
“was the handsomest man in Kern County.”

When they met, he was eight years older, and
driving a truck for a bootlegger.

He had had a dance studio in Hollywood,
gone broke, and

was back. “He introduced me to a fast, drinking crowd; my God,
we smoked—! And I wore lipstick: Olive and I promised each other
we would never do that.”

So he went back into farming, as he had done as a child
when his father died, and
“was a genius.”

“Your father, on our wedding night, told me
he had ninety-two thousand dollars in the bank. His first
potato crop. He didn’t have a dime the year before.”

But he
spent all the afternoons in the cool bars.
“He always was a sucker for a no-good
bum with a slick line and a good story.
How an intelligent man like that—”

Soon he
was an alcoholic, and unfaithful; unfaithful
many times; which fact was, as it were,
brought home to her, by
detectives. She would shake her head:

“How an intelligent man like that—”

(*bitterly*) “He never would have made us a real home,
the way decent men do.”

In her own illness, when she began to

try to turn brass and tin into gold
by boiling them in a large pot full of
soap, cat's fur, and orange rinds,

she was following

the teachings of the Rosicrucians,

the secrets of the past, the mysteries of the

pyramids.

Later, as she began
to be well, she would ask,

“Why did it happen?

It seems to
say something awful about
everything I've done.

Does it make everything wrong?

I knew so little
all along!”

(pause) “Why did it happen to *me*—at

forty-eight?”

Its memory is of poverty,
not merely poverty of means,
but poverty of history, of awareness of
the ways men have found to live.

For men are not
children, who learn
not to touch the burner; men,

unlike Walter,
cannot simply revert

to their true names.

The brown clapboard house,
in spite of its fine pioneer tradition,
because of the absence of the knowledge in its
lines of other architecture, because of the
poverty of its

brown, barren hill,

reminds me of my parents.

1966.

Golden State

I

To see my father
lying in pink velvet, a rosary
twined around his hands, rouged,
lipsticked, his skin marble ...

My mother said, “He looks the way he did
thirty years ago, the day we got married,—
I’m *glad* I went;
I was afraid: now I can remember him
like that...”

Ruth, your last girlfriend, who wouldn’t sleep with you
or marry, because you wanted her
to pay half the expenses, and “His drinking
almost drove me crazy—”

Ruth once saw you
staring into a mirror,
in your ubiquitous kerchief and cowboy hat,
say:

“Why can’t I look like a cowboy?”

You left a bag of money; and were
the unhappiest man
I have ever known well.

II

It's in many ways
a relief to have you dead.

I have more money.

Bakersfield is easier: life isn't so nude,
now that I no longer have to
face you each evening: mother is progressing
beautifully in therapy, I can almost convince myself
a good analyst would have saved you:

for I *need* to believe, as
always, that your pervasive sense of disappointment

proceeded from
trivial desires: but I fear
that beneath the wish to be a movie star,
cowboy, empire builder, all those
cheap desires, lay
radical disaffection
from the very possibilities
of human life ...

Your wishes were too simple:
or too complex.

III

I find it difficult to imagine you
in bed, making love to a woman ...

By common consensus, you were a *good* lover:
and yet,
mother once said: “Marriage would be better
if it weren’t mixed up with sex...”

Just after the divorce,—when I was
about five,—I slept all night with you

in a motel, and again and again
you begged me
to beg her to come back ...

I said nothing; but she went back
several times, again and again
you would go on a binge, there would be
another woman,
mother would leave ...

You always said,
“Your mother is the only woman I’ve ever loved.”

IV

Oh Shank, don't turn into the lies
of mere, neat poetry ...

I've been reading Jung, and he says that we can
never get to the bottom
of what is, or was ...

But *why* things were as they were
obsesses; I know that you
the necessity to contend with you
your *helplessness*
before yourself,
 —has been at the center
of how I think my life ...

 And yet your voice, raw,
demanding, dissatisfied,
saying over the telephone:

 “How are all those bastards at Harvard?”

remains, challenging: beyond all the
patterns and paradigms

 I use silence and stop it.

V

I dreamed I *had* my wish:

—I seemed to see

the conditions of my life, upon
a luminous stage: how I could change,
how I could not: the root of necessity,
and choice.

The stage was labelled “Insight”.

The actors there
had no faces, I cannot remember
the patterns of their actions, but
simply by watching,

I knew that beneath my feet
the fixed stars
governing my life

had begun to fall, and melt ...

—Then your face appeared,

laughing at the simplicity of my wish.

VI

Almost every day
I take out the letter you wrote me in Paris.
... Why?

It was written
the year before you married Shirley; Myrtle,
your girlfriend, was an ally of mine
because she “took care of you,”
but you always
made it clear
she was too dumpy and crude to marry ...

In some ways “elegant,”
with a pencil-thin, neatly clipped moustache,
chiselled, Roman nose, you were
a millionaire
and always pretended
you couldn’t afford to go to Europe ...

When I was a child,
you didn’t seem to care if I existed.

Bakersfield, Calif
July 9, 1961

Dear Pinon.

Sorry I haven’t wrote to you sooner but glad to hear that you are well and enjoying *Paris*.

I got you fathers day wire in the hospital where I put in about twelve days but I am very well now. I quit the ciggeretts but went through ten days of hell quitting and my back had been giving me hell.

It had been very hot here but the last few days has been very nice. Emily just got out of the hospital yesterday. She had her feet worked on. I guess she will

tell you about it. Glad to hear you are learning some French.

We are just about through with potatoes. Crop was very good but no price at all which made it a poor year. Cattle are cheap too. It look like a bad year for all farmer's.

I don't know anything else to tell you. Take care of your self and enjoy it. Maybe you will never have another chance for another trip. I don't think I'll ever get the chance to go, so if you run into a extra special gal between 28 & 35 send her over here to me as all I know over here don't amount to much. Well I guess I'll close now as I am going over to see Emily.

Hoping to hear from you right away.

This address is 4019 Eton St. be sure and get it straight. Myrtle would like to know how much that watch amounts to. Let us know

Will close now and write soon.

Love 'Shank'

P.S. Excuse this writing as its about 30 years since I wrote a letter.

VII

How can I say this?

I think my psychiatrist

likes me: he knows
the most terrible things I've done, every stupidity,
inadequacy, awkwardness,
ignorance, the mad girl I screwed
because she once again and again
teased and rejected me, and whose psychic incompetence
I grimly greeted as an occasion for revenge;
he greets my voice

with an interest, and regard, and affection,
which seem to signal I'm worth love;

—you finally
forgave me for being your son, and in the nasty
shambles of your life, in which you had less and less
occasion for pride, you were proud
of me, the first Bidart
who ever got a B.A.; Harvard, despite
your distrust, was the crown;—but the way
you eyed me:

the *bewilderment*, unease:
the somehow always
tentative, suspended judgment ...

—however *much* you tried (and, clearly,
you *did* try)

you could not remake your
taste, and like me: could not remake
yourself, to give me

the grace

needed to look in a mirror, as I often can
now, with some equanimity ...

VIII

When did I begin to substitute
insight, for prayer?...

—You believed in neither:
but said, “My life is over,”
after you had married Shirley,
twenty-five years younger, with three
small children, the youngest
six months old; she was unfaithful
within two months, the marriage was simply
annulled ...

A diabetic, you didn’t
take your insulin when you drank, and
almost managed to die
many times ...

You punished Ruth
when she went to Los Angeles for a weekend, by
beginning to drink; she would return home
either to find you in the hospital,
or in a coma on the floor ...

The exacerbation
of this seeming *necessity*
for connection—;

you and mother taught me
there’s little that’s redemptive or useful
in natural affections ...

I must *unlearn*; I must believe

you were merely a man—
with a character, and a past—;

you wore them,

unexamined,

like a nimbus of
furies

round your
greying, awesome head ...

IX

What should I have done? In 1963,
you wanted to borrow ten thousand dollars
from me, so that we could buy cattle
together, under the name “Bidart and Son,”—
most of your money was tied up
in the increasingly noxious “Bidart Brothers,”
run by your brother, Johnny ...

I said no,—
that I wanted to use the money
for graduate school; but I thought
if you went on a binge, and as had happened
before, simply threw it away ...

The Bidarts agreed
you were *not* to be trusted; you accepted
my answer, with an air
of inevitability I was shocked at ...

I didn't *want* to see your self-disgust;
—somehow, your self-congratulation
had eroded more deeply, much
more deeply, than even I had wished,—

but for *years*, how I had wished!...

I have a friend who says
that he has never felt a conflict
between something deeply wished or desired,
and what he thought was “moral” ...

Father, such innocence
surely is a kind of *Eden*—; but,

somehow, I can't regret that we
are banished from that company—;
in the awareness, the
history of our contradictions and violence,
insofar as I am "moral" at all,
is the beginning of my moral being.

X

When I began this poem,
to see myself
as a piece of history, having a past
which shapes, and informs, and thus inevitably
limits—
at first this seemed sufficient, the beginning of
freedom ...

The way to approach freedom
was to acknowledge necessity:—
I sensed I had to become not merely
a speaker, the “eye,” but a character ...

And you had to become a character: with a past, with a set of internal contradictions and necessities which if I could *once* define, would at least begin to release us from each other ...

But, of course, no such knowledge is possible;—
as I touch your photographs, they stare back at me
with the dazzling, impenetrable, glitter of mere life ...

You stand smiling, at the end of the twenties,
in a suit, and hat,
cane and spats, with a collie at your feet,
happy to be handsome, dashing, elegant:—

and though I cannot connect this image
with the end of your life, with the defensive
gnarled would-be cowboy,—

you seem happy at that fact, happy
to be surprising; unknowable; unpossessable ...

You say it's what you always understood by freedom.

1968–69.

PART THREE

Vergil Aeneid 1.1–33

Arms and the man I sing, the man and hero, who
driven by fate, by the gods' mere force and Juno's hate,
found Italy, found Latium, the man and hero
battered on land and sea, who founded our city,
brought us gods and lineage,
even to this, garlanded walls of substantial Rome.

Muse, make me mindful of the causes, load upon me
knowledge of her sorrows, she whom men call the queen of the gods
but driven to drive the most earnest of men
to such misfortunes. After foundering Troy,
what human being would not have been satisfied?

An ancient city, held by farmers, fronting Italy
and the mouth of the Tiber, then
magnificent in elegance, rich in courage:
such was Carthage—it is said, the city of Juno, and loved
by her even above Samos, seat of her shrine.
She wanted this new home of her weapons and chariot
first among men. But the fates did not so spin:
bathed in the faded pageant of Troy, in rue and despair,
a race was to come to rule over men,
merciless in war, graceful in victory.
She had heard that beloved Carthaginian Libya
would soon be a level plain.

Within her mind the resistless past returned:
scenes of burning Troy, herself as chief of destruction—
and deeper, to the causes in insult and wounded love
and proper mother's pride, Paris's
judgment, the bastard
founding of the city, Ganymede snatched above her own daughter:
out of this the Trojans must wander, must wander in error
seeking over the world's seas

what the remnant left by the Greeks and merciless Achilles
may never enjoy through the will of the queen of the gods:
how heavy the burden, to found the Roman race.

After Catullus

The day was calm ... For the usual reason
I had gone into the country, and indeed
there seemed peace. Understanding friend:
with whom only
I can be frank; can even you
receive this as I received it?

I walked down into a field. The lions were in bloom,
crocus, hyacinth, coxcombs,
shouting to be so full of sun and seed.
I said to myself: "I must lie down."
They touched my face. I
could not see the sun.

In this darkness then: a sound became clear,
half-moaning
half-delight
of a girl—twelve?—lying
not five feet from me
with her legs spread apart. Above her in jeans

a boy maybe younger worked away ... He was good!
But he didn't see me standing staring with blind eyes
in the sun. She resisted: his arms held her arms
firmly down
as the open front of his jeans disappeared
under her dress. I
put him to the sword!

With my prick.

To My Father

I walked into the room.

There were objects in the room. I thought I needed nothing
from them. They began to speak,
but the words were unintelligible, a painful cacophony ...
Then I realized they were saying

the name
of the man who had chosen them, owned them,
ordered, arranged them, their deceased cause,
the secret pattern that made these things order.
I strained to hear: but
the sound remained unintelligible ...
senselessly getting louder, urgent, deafening.

Hands over my ears, at last I knew

they would remain
inarticulate; your name was not in my language.

Another Life

*Peut-être n'es-tu pas
suffisamment mort. C'est ici
la limite de notre domaine.
Devant toi coule un fleuve.*

VALÉRY.

“—In a dream I never *exactly* dreamed,
but that is, somehow, the quintessence
of what I *might* have dreamed,

Kennedy is in Paris

again; it's '61; once again
some new national life seems possible,
though desperately, I try to remain unduped,
even cynical ...

He's standing in an open car,

brilliantly lit, bright orange
next to a grey de Gaulle, and they stand
not far from me, slowly moving up the Champs-Élysées ...

Bareheaded in the rain, he gives a short
choppy wave, smiling like a sun god.

—I stand and
look, suddenly at peace; once again mindlessly
moved,

as they bear up the fields of Elysium

the possibility of Atlantic peace,

reconciliation between all the power, energy,
optimism,—

and an older wisdom, without
illusions, without force, the austere source
of nihilism, corrupted only by its dream of Glory ...

But no—; as I
watch, the style is

not quite right—;

Kennedy is *too* orange ...

And de Gaulle, white, dead
white, ghost white, not even grey ...

As my heart
began to grieve for my own awkwardness and
ignorance, which would never be
soothed by the informing energies
of whatever
wisdom saves,—

I saw a young man, almost
my twin, who had written

‘MONSTER’
in awkward lettering with a crayon across
the front of his sweat shirt.

He was gnawing on his arm,
in rage and anger gouging up
pieces of flesh—; but as I moved to stop him, somehow
help him,

suddenly he looked up,

and began, as I had, to look at Kennedy and de Gaulle:

and then abruptly, almost as if I were seeing him
through a camera lens, his figure

split in two,—
or doubled,—

and all the fury
drained from his stunned, exhausted face ...

But only for a moment. Soon his eyes turned down
to the word on his chest. The two figures
again became one,

and with fresh energy he attacked the mutilated arm ...

—Fascinated, I watched as this
pattern, this cycle,
repeated several times.

Then he reached out and touched me.

—Repelled,
I pulled back ... But he became
frantic, demanding that I become
the body he split into:

‘It’s harder
to manage *each* time! Please
give me your energy;—*help me!*’

—I said it was impossible,
there was *no part* of us the same:
we were just watching a parade together:
(and then, as he reached for my face)
leave me *alone!*

He smirked, and said
I was never alone.

I told him to go to hell.

He said that this was hell.

—I said it was impossible,
there was *no part* of us the same:
we were just watching a parade together:

when I saw

Grief, avenging Care, pale
Disease, Insanity, Age, and Fear,

—all the raging desolations

which I had come to learn were my patrimony;
the true progeny of my parents' marriage;
the gifts hidden within the mirror;

—standing guard at the gate of this place,
triumphant,

striking poses

eloquent of the disasters they embodied ...

—I took several steps to the right, and saw
Kennedy was paper-thin,

as was de Gaulle;

mere cardboard figures
whose possible real existence
lay buried beneath a million tumbling newspaper photographs ...

—I turned, and turned, but now all that was left
was an enormous

fresco;—on each side, the unreadable

fresco of my life..."

THE FIRST HOUR OF THE NIGHT

(1990)

Now In Your Hand

1. Victor Hugo: Preface to Les Misérables, 1862

SO LONG AS, on this earth, in our civilization, fixed there by its laws and its customs, HELL EXISTS—A DAMNATION MADE BY MEN over and above the fate all men must face;

SO LONG AS the three great violations of our age,

men debased by the nature of their work
women devoured by their hunger
children stunted by night without light

are unsolved, and even unseen;

SO LONG AS the world human beings have made is a world where we cannot breathe;

IN SUM, SO LONG AS ALL THAT IS AT HOME ON THIS EARTH ARE IGNORANCE AND MISERY WITHOUT RECOURSE OR VOICE,

books such as the one now in your hand will not, I think, be, perhaps, useless.

2.

when

once, pursuing the enslaving enemies and enslaving protectors
of our civilization, but encountering
only the unthinkable, a blank screen, banal
interiority, commas multiplying ad infinitum, in
short, the appearance in his consciousness of the consciousness
of the appearance of himself

when he doubted he ever believed they exist

he found that they destroyed enemies and friends

using the means in which he believed,
this system in which in every sentence you can insert not

You remain ...

You remain, bride whose recourse has been silence, and absence:—
you appear under the names *arena*, *stage*, but your essence

always is other and elsewhere, your gift
the voices of the dead filled and emptied by the future.

Protect against those who entering
the orifices of this house

seek to control it—

Muse, Autodidact, Collector,
renew its inmate dedicated to you.

By These Waters

What begins in recognition,—
... ends in obedience.

The boys who lie back, or stand up,
allowing their flies to be unzipped

however much they charge
however much they charge

give more than they get.

When the room went dark, the screen lit up.

By these waters on my knees I have wept.

Long and Short Lines

You who call me to weep afresh love's long since cancelled woe,—
... mock me

with you—

hypocrisy's thirst somewhere if you're anywhere must
now make you again pave someone's road to hell.

Toward that design cut long ago by your several divided nature
and mine,

... learn I too
twist, unchanged.

Book of Night

After the sun
fell below the horizon of the west,

THE SUN-GOD

(according to words carved
on the sarcophagus of the pharaoh Seti I)

each night, during the twelve hours of the night, must
journey through

THE WORLD THAT IS BENEATH THE WORLD,—

... must

meet, once again, the dead.

The hour that must follow the eleventh hour

is blank within my eye:—

I do not know what will make the sun rise again.

With a light placed
inside it, the sarcophagus carved out of alabaster

is transparent:—

here is the beginning of our night.

The First Hour of the Night

“This happened about twelve years before I died.

•

What I have to tell you

is the narrative of an evening and night, little more than
a succession of dreams, one
anxiety following another,—

the whole, somehow, for me (at least) *wound* and *balm*.

•

The friend I had been closest to throughout
my life, three years earlier, suddenly

was dead—;

for three years, his son

had invited me to visit the family home,—
... the family ‘seat,’

a ‘GREAT HOUSE’

inherited by my friend in his twenties at his
father’s death, inherited now by his only son ...

•

What use to return?—

During his life, both of us often insisted that our

philosophical discussions, ebullient
arguments, hydra-headed analyses of
the motivations, dilemmas that seemed to block
and fuel our lives,

were central, crucial:—

but after his death, all I now could see

was the self-generating *logic* of his life, its distant,
inaccessible self-sufficiency ...

He had been a storm
at sea, seen from land.

•

What use to return?—

As I imagined standing again within that house,
—within that world he had been
given, but had so
transformed by his affections, curiosity, shifting
enthusiasms, care:—

walking up the central staircase, then, after
twenty feet, entering his study—;

its obscure, *ARBITRARY*
finality stopped my breath.

•

Three years (to the day) after this first death of
a friend my own age, his son

wrote that I would do his father's only child

a great kindness

if once again I came to stay, even for a night ...

The house was of course changed.

I suppose I had expected
a *museum* to my friend:—

instead, I found the embodiment of
different interests,
as well as incomprehension
of, or even the desire to ERASE, to BLUR

what in his father had seemed bold
or witty or coherent:—

an unsymmetrical, fragile Indonesian rocker
had been sold, because ‘uncomfortable’;—

curtains obscured the high bare rectangles of
windows whose light or blackness once
was shut out only by recessed, seldom-used shutters ...

Half the books were stored,—
... or sold.

After dinner, we went into the study.

Neither of us sat in his father’s chair.

Highbacked, winged, it still stood
at an angle, right of the fire,—and I sat

facing it, on
the left, where I had always sat ...

The couch to my right was still there,—
he slumped at its far end.

The small coal fire, as always, burned one’s face;

and failed to heat the dark, huge room.

He put his hands to his temples, making
a kind of hood over his eyes; I couldn't

see his eyes. Then he spoke:—

•

*I can neither SELL this house, nor
LIVE in it. If father had a favorite horse, you and I could
sacrifice and eat it*

*next to his grave—; then set up its head on a stake
driven directly into the grave ...*

*That's how Harva says the Tartars
convince the dead to STAY DEAD.*

*They seldom succeed. If a dead man's widow and children
grow sick*

the shaman knows the dead are eating them.

You've known me since I was born:

*you know that I wasn't
waiting for father to die. I had my own*

*work, friends, income (I admit that I've always been
a spendthrift, but I wasted*

my own money, not his—)...

The prerogatives that descended upon me at his death

*—'position'; much more money; the freedom
implicit in the demands now
placed upon me—*

*I didn't connive, or even will: they came
in the course of things,—*

... BECAUSE HE WAS NOT HERE.

But I enjoy them; and even, now, expect them.

... Again and again I dream

father has come back:—

*he is standing in the hallway, as I
descend the staircase.*

He looks up at me, tired, relieved to be home.

He is whole: WELL: not changed,—

*but even as I
rush down the steps to embrace him*

*(even as the irreparable
fact that drained and diminished the world*

isn't fact,—)

I know that I don't want him to have come back.

*All this is HIS, not MINE—; I am
again what his death made me no longer ...*

*Before I reach him, an elated circle of servants and friends
surrounds him, and leads him off.*

*As they disappear,
his head turns back to look at me.*

*—Then I know that each object that father
chose for this house, but absent now from it*

says that everything ever

*unresolved clearly FOREVER
is unresolvable between us.*

*For though I
must give it all back, I CAN'T*

*give it all back: I've already
spent too much money!...*

*Thus, though I know that no creature
possesses anything on this earth, sweating*

*I wake up
terrified that father has returned to it:—*

*baffled, and appalled
to find that what I want is his death.*

•

Then he stopped. There was a long silence.

The voice
I heard as he said all this
—in a sudden

intonation, a passing phrase, in the pervasive
self-wounding relentlessness of its logic,—

was his father's.

The fist at the center of my chest

refused to unclench until he and I, the furniture we
sat on, the room, the house, the very

world itself

cracked apart, then SELF-COMBUSTED, self-

consumed by our own self-contradictions.

•

I told him that when I was a child I had a pony

who was, for a period, my
life—;

... even now, if I close
my eyes, and look into his face

I am a boy again, looking into the face of a neurasthenic
panicked *mute* creature like himself, in secret

alliance forged
half-against what we lacked:—

WORDS, a world that demonstrated its

mastery over us
by coercive involuted adult human speech ...

He was a high-strung, intelligent miniature colt,
my size:—

... the prize of my sixth birthday.

•

Perhaps time and retrospect have improved our mutual absolute
trust, delight, connection:—

but this was the first of those passionate

attachments, passionate
judgments that *here* like-answers-like, soul-answers-soul

which since my childhood, whether in relation to
animal, friend, an artist or
performer I've discovered, or work of art

(*except where feeling has been*

*bewildered by the desire for
the reciprocation of erotic desire)*

have never betrayed me, never when I have
encountered again in body or memory

WHAT I LOVED

seemed then stupid, ill-founded, grounded
merely in willfulness, more illusion ...

•

At nine, I was sent to boarding school.

The approach of this cataclysm held no allure for me,
rather I felt

rage and a sense of betrayal—;

but in fact, within a few weeks
books, the desire to dominate the attention of
my teachers, and even wary camaraderie with my peers

for the first time

swallowed me ...

When I, un-
willingly, arrived home on our first holidays,

I was told that several horses had come down with
a fever, including mine; *that my horse was dying.*

The next day he was carted off.

THERE WAS NO GRAVE.

Perhaps my earliest memory that is absolutely
fixed in scene and time

is the black horse flies big as thumbs
covering and clinging to his body, the weird unseasonable

blood-red sunset saturating the world

while I *knew* his body was being carried off but
howling I was held back within the house.

•

Much later, when I was twelve, thirteen, fourteen,
in my dreams

my little horse again and again

came back—;

he wanted to play, for me once again to mount
him and ride.

*But I had no time: what I now was
interested in were friends, school, my studies,—*

... besides, as I stood
next to him,

HE WAS TOO SMALL—;

I had grown, and he was now
TOO SMALL to ride—;

with a shiver, a stamp and sound of
torment, he seemed to take this in ...

I told my friend's son that what he had felt in his dream
was nothing so simple as 'greed' or 'selfishness'—;

that later, in my
thirties, again I had known very similar emotions after

other deaths—; that there seemed to be something
STRUCTURAL in human relations

making what we had felt, well, ‘impersonal.’

•

Though he thanked me for my generosity and
candor, and said that he felt not only

exhausted but somewhat
better, as I mounted the stairs to my room that night

what I felt was
woe, unameliorated, unappeased.

II

Now follows my

‘DREAM OF THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY,’—

... for that night, in my room, as I threw off
my clothes, seeking in sleep only
oblivion, erasure of the throbbing but
irremediably ignorant *I*,

—angry at I did *NOT* know what,—

above my bed I saw, again,
what since my
first visit had hung there,

Volpato’s fine
etching of Raphael’s

‘*SCHOOL OF ATHENS*’...

I remembered, with a sudden and flooding
access of pleasure, the first time I had seen, in

Rome, Raphael's fresco:—

here, under the image of the many-breasted
Goddess of Philosophy
(in a medallion in the ceiling)

flanked by two angels
announcing

‘KNOWLEDGE OF THE CAUSES OF THINGS,’—

... at the center of the high arch of the fresco itself,

framed there by a vast, symmetrical,
seemingly stable but
essentially (at least according to
some writers) unbuildable architecture,—

... their two heads isolated by three great
descending central arches
that, dreamlike, open to the sky,—

... calmly presiding over an ‘ideal’ assembly of the great
philosophers of Antiquity
(not only metaphysicians and
scientists, but students, a soldier,
the leaning, listening figure of
Averroës, commentator, representative of Islam,—)

PLATO and ARISTOTLE

by their *parallel* but *opposite*

gestures (Aristotle
pointing downward, Plato upward,—)

DIVIDE and ORDER

this debating, brooding, teaching, writing, nearly
disharmonious multitude ...

On the side of Aristotle, representatives of the ‘exact’
sciences (Euclid, Ptolemy), with ‘speculative’
thinkers (Heraclitus, Pythagoras) on the side of Plato ...

Opposite gestures that, *JANUS-LIKE*, show
us where to seek the causes of things.

•

In this ‘ideal’ community of the spirit,—the social
world as the social world
never is,—

Death, Rage, and Eros

have receded to adorn recesses in the architecture:—

... on the left, under a yielding, even
voluptuous Apollo holding his lyre, an aging
triton seizes the breast of a resisting sea nymph—;

... on the right, Medusa’s severed
face, mouth frozen open in an *O* of horror, from
Athena’s victorious shield stares

powerless:—

Athena, Goddess of Wisdom, protector of
the *Home, Family, Reason, Civilization* ...

•

When I first saw this scene (—the title
‘School of Athens’ a misapprehension

imposed on it in the eighteenth century,—)

I was largely ignorant of the intricate
iconography

connecting the room's four walls and ceiling:—

'*Philosophy*' looks across at '*Theology*,'
while '*Poetry*'

faces '*Jurisprudence*,'—each

itself divided: 'Canon
Law' and 'Civil Law'...

—In the interrelations and elegant
distinctions informing its walls and ceiling,
this is a compendium, even synthesis of

Renaissance speculative, religious, aesthetic thinking:—

an 'ideal' Renaissance TEMPLE OF THE HUMAN MIND ...

Its premise,—

the Neo-Platonic Christian-Humanist
confidence that the world's obdurate
contradictions, terrifying
unintelligibility, can be tamed by

CLASSIFICATION,—

time now has effaced.

•

This room,—

intended as the site of the Pope's personal

library, then where he signed, before assembled
dignitaries of the highest Papal
tribunals, bulls and official documents,—

was the first of the rooms that Raphael
painted for the Pope:—

only twenty-five, with
little reputation, he had been summoned from
Florence to Rome
at the suggestion of his
patron, Bramante, architect of the new St. Peter's ...

Decoration of the room was already
begun—;
but no one is certain how much

Sodoma, six years Raphael's
senior, had completed:—

for when the Pope saw Raphael's sketches

*(there is never enough wall space
here, at the center of power,—)*

he ordered everything that Sodoma had painted destroyed.

•

In the fresco, next to Raphael's own
self-portrait, is the face of

Sodoma—;

both stand behind Euclid (geometry is
central to the painter's skill at perspective,—)

'Euclid' has the head of Bramante ...

Raphael, without
illusions, looks out at us—;

Sodoma

smiles,—

without rancor or humiliation

absorbed in the conversation before him.

•

In this ‘ideal’ COMMUNITY OF THE SPIRIT,

Socrates and Aristotle are modelled on
antique busts, but Plato

has the features of Leonardo:—

Heraclitus (self-enclosed but
writing), the short, hooded, stonecutter’s
smock of a *pensieroso*

Michelangelo ...

‘*The Apollo who*

SHARES REIGN

with Athena here

is the god, not of reason, but P O E T R Y,—’

I said to myself as I began to fall asleep;

and then,
fixing the arc of the fresco before my mind:—

‘*Here,—everyone feels it,—
the gesture of PLATO and the gesture of ARISTOTLE*

are O N E ...’

Knowing that I loved it, my friend once had
placed the ‘School of Athens’

above my bed. Smiling, now I
remembered this ... ‘*Now I*

must sleep.’

•

Then, to my humiliation and shame,

I was *IN* it,—

that tumultuous, perished world (now
NOT perished,—)

lay before me:—

out of estrangement I had gained or been given
entrance: privilege

in no way earned—;

above me, past the Temple's
multitudinous, strangely empty rising steps,

Ptolemy still

held aloft
the green-and-blue *GLOBE OF THE EARTH*,—

... then (as I turned to crouch, or
hide—)

from the distance on either side I saw a long

row of men, dressed in the varied
garments of succeeding

centuries, approach the steps where I stood.

•

When each figure
passed me, for a moment looking into my eyes

full-face, I tried to recognize him:—

there (just as I had imagined

them in the light of their portraits)

was BRUNO, one button missing

on his long black scholar's gown, still
smelling of sulphur from the fires of the Inquisition—

he held a book titled *Feast of Ashes*;—

DESCARTES, priestlike

in devotion to his self-made
revolution: heavy-lidded, as if worn out by
thought, or lessons at dawn for the Queen of Sweden;—

HEGEL and SCHELLING, walking

hand-in-hand, as in the morning of their young
collaboration, before distance, fame, silence.

•

... These, and so many others (*each*

alive as his voice on the page:—

each body now inseparable from its

fate, yet with the unachieved,
purposeful will of the living—)

ascended the steps, and,

WITHOUT

BARRIER,

began to listen and mix and speak

in earnest debate, yet strangers' courteous deference,
with the philosophers of Antiquity ...

Irrational happiness seized me:—

not at the absence of discord (discord

will come) but to see

this that at last lies before
me is as I have known real.

After chimeras of CONTINGENCY and resistless
SELF-ESTRANGEMENT,—

... to see chimeras of the real.

•

Then, something happened which I did
not expect

even in a dream:—

as if compelled or drawn by inner
necessity, DIVIDING they rushed to join themselves

into GROUPS:—

groups that, now, I saw

had been there, though I had never seen them

(—but my words are mere
summary, for what I remembered when I

woke, seemed the faithless shadow of what I had seen).

•

First the movement pressed to the right, where
next to Ptolemy (wearing on his
gown a resplendent globe of the heavens)

Archimedes

leaning down to the stone beneath them drew his circles:—

here, around these
two figures,

gathered *Materialists, Mathematical
Naturalists, Positivists*

(I recognized Hobbes—; Comte
arguing with Descartes—; then, restlessly circling at
the edges of the group,

D'Alembert, whose ironic smile

seemed to mock the dreams of the metaphysicians)

... all those thinkers who see
within the indecipherable, furious
cataract of life, within bewildering, annihilating

FLUX, a great *intelligible* P R O C E S S:—

measurable, universal Nature,—

impartial, non-censorious,

whose unbreakable chain of unvarying, coherent Laws

frees us from the prison-house of human
superstition, religious dogma, hallucination ...

Here 'mind' and 'consciousness' are
body—; 'free-will,'
darkness still-undispelled by science.

Now Comte,—

systematizer of
Positivism, standing as if confident that he is

heir to the immense authority (confirming its
insight into reality) conferred on science

by its transformation of the world,—

announces to devoted, listening
thinkers from all nations

(his face flushed, eyes shrewd but credulous)

a new CLERGY: a scientific-industrial
elite henceforth translating to
expectant, hungry Society

‘*invariable laws*’ new-found by fecund science ...

•

As he spoke, Descartes (abruptly
once again the French
cavalier, setting forth with bold stride)
disengaged himself from

all these figures, turning his gaze
irresistibly toward
the center of the Temple:—

to a *second* GROUP, which had

assembled, arranged itself
as if magnetized
around SOCRATES as its center:—
with an old,

god-like Plato and
young Aristotle
each writing down his words at his feet.

Here the conviction that Mind, Spirit, Consciousness
are merely an *interpolation*

in the immense text of the physical universe
was *reversed*:—

as Socrates spoke (among those listening

I saw Plotinus; Cicero; Christian
theologians: Augustine held the *Confessions*;
Thomas Aquinas distractedly
fingered strands of straw from a crown of straw on his head,—)

as he explained that through *DIALECTIC*,
dialogue, argument by

CONTRADICTION proceeding to the reconciliation of
contradiction (for only contradiction

impels *thought*, and what is *thought*

but the silently-occurring internal dialogue
of the soul with itself?—)

(*pugnosed and pugnacious, Socrates*
yet made me feel that he had seen in
spirit what he struggled to express in words—)

... as he explained that through dialectic, our power of
reason,

we can make our way to an order

past the delusions of custom, self-deception, desire,—

and can then, by an act of
choice,

CHANGE,—correct our lives:—

suddenly, from behind his
voice, blending with his voice,

was a woman's voice:—

(I moved slightly to the left, to see its
source)

... there, with the seated figures of
Dante and Sappho (who grasped
disintegrating pages of a book in her hand)

rapt, silent before her,

was S C H E H E R A Z A D E,—

seated on an embroidered
pillow, wearing transparent
silks, plucking an instrument,—

whose wizard songs (I have known them since
my youth)

beguile the sword that hangs above her.

•

Troubled, excited voices
soon broke my attention; turning back, I saw

the circle of listeners now had divided into
disputing factions:—

while Augustine, standing
to one side, stared out at them ...

—What one thinker confidently
asserted, another spurned as illusion—;

what one human being
flew from, another sought—;

some struggled to reconcile the wisdom of
Greece

with Christ's revelation—

while other, melancholy voices
doubted the free sufficient autonomy of

reason and the *human will*

faced with our confusion, weak and isolated
organs of perception, helplessness ...

The abrupt arrival of Descartes

(for the first time, I noticed

that the hair thickly
growing beneath his lower

lip, on one side, was *shaved off*—)

then, later, of the stooped,

slightly built Kant, with his
cane and three-cornered hat, his features
hardened as if by the strain of thought,

brought brief ORDER to this spectacle:—

... but Augustine, pushing

past all this with a gesture of
revulsion that seemed to rise from an intuition
indistinguishable from himself,

—his hands now
empty,—

already had abandoned the scene before him, turning to

a third, *final* GROUP, gathered at
the left of the temple, whose center was

Pythagoras and Heraclitus ...

•

From this milling, mercurial crowd

(—Hegel now looked

at one moment like
Bismarck, at another like Shelley—)

words emerge:—

*Master and Slave. Predestination. Preservation of
the Species. God immanent in
Nature. Race. Blood.*

*Stages of absolute mind. Progress. Class.
The inexorable laws of History, the Psyche, the Age.*

*Logos. The world
as will and idea. The One. The inescapable
society of the dead and the living, who have made us what we are ...*

Here the Materialists have been, as it were,
turned on their heads:—

now S P I R I T,—

immanent, transcendent, or unknowable,—

is *ground* of body, *governs* body:—

... the single human psyche
powerless within the immeasurable
power of its laws, goals, will.

•

Reached by daring to contemplate in a calm spirit
COHERENCE (or by hard, practiced
submission)

‘freedom’ here is to *accept* NECESSITY—;

or else, when intolerable existence
wholly becomes the snake that swallows its own
tail, *to smash the head of the snake.*

Here ceaseless human choices, decisions, dilemmas,

mortality itself

is illusion:—

the cunning used upon us to
silence the voice
within that says, *Someone else led my life.*
I am an onlooker on my own life. . .

•

Then, among those listening to
Schopenhauer, I saw my dead friend,—

... I am *certain* that I saw him, though

when I approached him, standing
just behind him,—

when he
turned at my touch,—

his head was a C L O U D

dispersed into discrete
atoms; as if I had drawn too close to a painting
made out of discrete spots of separate color,

HE was no longer *THERE* ...

•

Inheritor inheriting inheritors, he had worked to
transform an inheritance

transformed
in its turn:—

as if the soul, delivered over unconscious and

defenseless not only to this world of
things, but to its own DARKNESS,—

... flinging itself into the compensations that the world
and its own self

offer it, but finding the light of *self-knowledge*
only through

mediation, through *WORKS* and *SIGNS*,—

... seeing and remaking itself within that broken
mirror made by all the things that it has
inherited and remade,—

... in the end, alienates its being in them.

•

The spectral E M P T I N E S S became only
emptier before me

as I advanced toward him,—

... until at last, surrounded by
nothing, with resignation

turning I drew back.—

Not before Augustine,
engaged in animated

argument with Spinoza and Bruno, was embraced by
Luther: appalled, recoiling, he fled.

•

Now, as I lay
dreaming in the house of my dead friend,

finally I saw the THREE GROUPS
in one view:—

I was exhausted, I wanted to
stop, at last to have reached *bottom*:—

... but busy figures ceaselessly rushed
between the groups, trying to

mediate:—

for all these conflicting intuitions

surely were grounded in the nature of the universe:—

in the relationship between the impenetrable,
immeasurable

UNIVERSE that lies *WITHIN* as well as beyond us

and the solitary, finite
perceiving mind:—

•

... *indeed, I felt pain at this scene*:—to see

PHILOSOPHY itself

divided, torn
into three, or even more directions—;

... *the unity of my being torn*,

for I had felt recognition
before the truth that united *each* group in its turn ...

•

But as I strove for
unity of thought, in vain the mediators

hastened to and fro among the groups:—

... now a hostile

*the ancient hegemony of POWER and PRIESTHOOD
is reconstituted:—*

*implicit within each
vision of cause, a structure of power:—*

*an imagination not only of
where power resides, but should, must reside ...*

•

At the end of the First Crusade,
when their goal

JERUSALEM
fell at last before the Crusaders,

Christian troops running through the streets
stabbed, mutilated, slew
everyone they saw:—

the savagery of the massacre
perhaps *unexampled* (these
facts, I assure you, a matter of record,—)

in the history of wars fought mainly for *gain* or *glory*:—

... in the narrow lanes, rivers of blood carrying headless
bodies and fragments of bodies

reached the horses' hocks—;

... the Jewish community, huddling for safety in
the central synagogue,
was barricaded

in by the Crusaders, and burnt alive—;

after two days, when, gone like
snow on the lawn in a hot sun,

the frenzy of RIGHTEOUS ANGER and REVENGE

had passed, the few thousand still
alive from a population that before numbered forty thousand

were assembled
near the gates, and sold as slaves.

—Damascus and Baghdad
were shocked at the fate of the Holy City, vowing
recompense.

•

The ‘*moral law within*’

(for Kant, the ground
of the moral life itself, certain, beautiful, fixed
like the processional of stars above our heads)

is near to MADNESS—; everything terrible
but buried in human motivation
released, justified
by self-righteousness and fanaticism ...

•

Then, as I struggled to find words
to *punish* confidence in the possession of truth,

I had the sick sensation of
falling, the stones were

cracking, giving way beneath my

feet, and suddenly, *at the same time*,
I knew that nothing that I,—

heir

to the ages,—

might reach or understand or grasp

will lodge safe

in *unhistorical* existence—; safe

within the hungry blankness of a culture WITHOUT
WISDOM, its wisdom the negative
wisdom embraced by exhaustion after
centuries of the Wars of Religion ...

•

Thus, infected with the desolation of
history's

leprosy,—leprosy of SPIRIT,—

the stones

breaking, disappearing as my working legs
flailed in air,—

I woke.

Despair was what I felt.

At last, after fitful, thrashing

sleeplessness, again I slept, and for
a final time that night, dreamt:—

•

... A brown, wide, desolate, broken only by
scars and protuberances, dun landscape

stretched without boundary before me.

Then, stooping, staring
out into this barrenness,

I realized that on my back I was carrying

—*had* carried
all my life,—

the ENTRAILS of my horse—;

secret, familiar
weight, either chosen or thrust upon me too long ago
now to put down, or often remember.

•

What at one moment looked parched, dun, desolate,
the next moment was
ochre, glowing, burnished:—

as I walked, what first had seemed
scars, as if the earth were WOUNDED too

deeply to heal without visible
mark, now I saw

were deep PITS dug by men and women who
slowly carried
the earth dug

out of the pits, heaping it up to make
the hill next to each hole.

Other women and men
filled in other pits, leveling these hills.

Two signs stood against the horizon:—

THE GREAT ACT OF BURYING

THE GREAT ACT OF DIGGING UP

Because these human beings seemed
concentrated, *absorbed*,—
at moments anxious, even

tormented, at others earnest, eager
as if *answering their nature*,—

... I could not tell whether this work was
freedom, or servitude.

•

Then suddenly entangling my feet were
dozens of just-born
lambs, stretching their necks to reach their

mothers next to them:—
hungry, sucking mouths

stretched toward swollen, distended
udders that I saw must be

painful *unless* sucked—;
Reciprocity! I thought,—

*Not the chick within the egg, who by eating its way
out, must destroy the egg to become itself.*

•

Then, as I reached to steady the entrails
on my back,
I bent down to watch more closely:—

... hypnotized, I saw eager lambs
suck the paps of an

at-one-moment
yielding, relieved, even voluptuously

satisfied, but at-the-next-moment
sleepy, withdrawing, now
indifferent, *hostile* Nature ...

I felt again that
PENETRATION OF KNOWLEDGE that is almost like
illness, an invading sickness:—

envious, yet afraid of
getting kicked in the head, I wanted
to live against a ewe's
breathing, sleeping side.

•

—When at last both ewes and lambs
slept,
I walked to the edge of a pit:—

... there, standing
at the bottom, looking up at me,

was my little horse:—

I was *afraid*—; had he forgiven what
must have seemed to him, unfaithfulness?

—WAS unfaithfulness?—

I worked my way down the steep, loose,
yielding sides of the pit.

When I reached bottom, as I lay his
entrails before him,
I saw that they had become

my color, after years of carrying them—;

... slowly, he bent down his
head, sniffed, then

ATE the entrails—;

expectant, he
looked up at me:—

as I climbed on his

back, startled once again by his
animal warmth as I clung to him,

—now

somehow *NEITHER*
NOT the same size, nor the same size,—

we rose
out of the pit, and I woke.

Though I had no impulse to relate this dream to
the categories and figures dreamt earlier,—

though I had no evidence whether it issued from
the gate of *Ivory* or the gate of *Horn*,—

(from which gate *true* dreams come, and which
false, frankly

I've never been able to remember,—)

as I retell it, the *ashheap* begins to GLOW AGAIN:—

... for I woke
with a sense of

beneficence: an emotion which, though it did *not*
erase, transformed

what earlier had overwhelmed

consciousness lying sleepless between dream and dream.”

•

This is the end of the first hour of the night.

DESIRE

(1997)

I

As the Eye to the Sun

To Plotinus what we seek is VISION, what
wakes when we wake to desire

as the eye to the sun

It is just as if you should fall in love with
one of the sparrows which fly by

when we wake to desire

But once you have seen a hand cut off, or
a foot, or a head, you have embarked, have begun

as the eye to the sun

The voyage, such is everything, you have not come to
shore, but little children and their sports and

when we wake to desire

Poor spirits carrying about bodies of the dead,
for bodies give way but the spirit will not give way

as the eye to the sun

You know that every instrument, too, vessel, mere
hammer, if it does that for which it was made

when we wake to desire

Is well, yet he who made it is not there, is dead:
so, unaverted, one, not one, to NOTHING you ask

as the eye to the sun

May I be made into the vessel of that which
must be made

when we wake to desire

Certain what you have reached is not shore you
shall disappear in that which produced you

as the eye to the sun

But once you have seen a hand cut off you have begun

Love Incarnate

(DANTE, *Vita Nuova*)

To all those driven berserk or humanized by love
this is offered, for I need help
deciphering my dream.
When we love our lord is LOVE.

When I recall that at the fourth hour
of the night, watched by shining stars,
LOVE at last became incarnate,
the memory is horror.

In his hands smiling LOVE held my burning
heart, and in his arms, the body whose greeting
pierces my soul, now wrapped in bloodred, sleeping.

He made him wake. He ordered him to eat
my heart. He ate my burning heart. He ate it
submissively, as if afraid, as LOVE wept.

Overheard Through the Walls of the Invisible City

... telling those who swarm around him his desire
is that an appendage from each of them
fill, invade each of his orifices,—

repeating, chanting,
Oh yeah Oh yeah Oh yeah Oh yeah Oh yeah

until, as if in darkness he craved the sun, at last he reached
consummation.

—Until telling those who swarm around him begins again
(we are the wheel to which we are bound).

Adolescence

He stared up into my eyes with a look
I can almost see now.

He had that look in his eyes
that bore right into mine.

I could sense that he *knew* I was
envious of what he was doing—; and *knew* that I'd

always wish I had known at the time
what he was doing was something I'd always

crave in later life, just as he did.

He was enjoying what he was doing.
The look was one of pure rapture.

He was gloating. He knew.

I still remember his look.

Catullus: Excrucior

I hate and—love. The sleepless body hammering a nail nails itself, hanging crucified.

Borges and I

We fill pre-existing forms and when we fill them we change them and are changed.

The desolating landscape in Borges' "Borges and I"—in which the voice of "I" tells us that its other self, Borges, is the self who makes literature, who in the process of making literature falsifies and exaggerates, while the self that is speaking to us now must go on living so that Borges may continue to fashion literature—is seductive and even oddly comforting, but, I think, false.

The voice of this "I" asserts a disparity between its essential self and its worldly second self, the self who seeks embodiment through making things, through work, who in making takes on something false, inessential, inauthentic.

The voice of this "I" tells us that Spinoza understood that everything wishes to continue in its own being, a stone wishes to be a stone eternally, that all "I" wishes is to remain unchanged, itself.

With its lonely emblematic title, "Borges and I" seems to be offered as a paradigm for the life of consciousness, the life of knowing and making, the life of the writer.

The notion that Frank has a self that has remained the same and that knows what it would be if its writing self did not exist—like all assertions about the systems that hold sway beneath the moon, the opposite of this seems to me to be true, as true.

When Borges' "I" confesses that Borges falsifies and exaggerates it seems to do so to cast aside falsity and exaggeration, to attain an entire candor unobtainable by Borges.

This "I" therefore allows us to enter an inaccessible magic space, a hitherto inarticulate space of intimacy and honesty earlier denied us, where voice, for the

first time, has replaced silence.

—Sweet fiction, in which bravado and despair beckon from a cold panache, in which the protected essential self suffers flashes of its existence to be immortalized by a writing self that is incapable of performing its actions without mixing our essence with what is false.

Frank had the illusion, when he talked to himself in the clichés he used when he talked to himself, that when he made his poems he was changed in making them, that arriving at the order the poem suddenly arrived at out of the chaos of the materials the poem let enter itself out of the chaos of life, consciousness then, only then, could know itself, Sherlock Holmes was somebody or something before cracking its first case but not Sherlock Holmes, act is the cracked mirror not only of motive but self, *no other way*, tiny mirror that fails to focus in small the whole of the great room.

But Frank had the illusion that his poems also had cruelly replaced his past, that finally they were all he knew of it though he knew they were not, everything else was shards refusing to make a pattern and in any case he had written about his mother and father until the poems saw as much as he saw and saw more and he only saw what he saw in the act of making them.

He had never had a self that wished to continue in its own being, survival meant ceasing to be what its being was.

Frank had the illusion that though the universe of one of his poems seemed so close to what seemed his own universe at the second of writing it that he wasn't sure how they differed even though the paraphernalia often differed, after he had written it its universe was never exactly his universe, and so, soon, it disgusted him a little, the mirror was dirty and cracked.

Secretly he was glad it was dirty and cracked, because after he had made a big order, a book, only when he had come to despise it a little, only after he had at last given up the illusion that this was what was, only then could he write more.

He felt terror at the prospect of becoming again the person who could find or see or make no mirror, for even Olivier, trying to trap the beast who had killed his father, when he suavely told Frank as Frank listened to the phonograph long

afternoons lying on the bed as a kid, when Olivier told him what art must be, even Olivier insisted that art is a mirror held up by an artist who himself needs to see something, held up before a nature that recoils before it.

We fill pre-existing forms and when we fill them we change them and are changed.

Everything in art is a formal question, so he tried to do it in prose with much blank white space.

Homo Faber

Whatever lies still uncarried from the abyss within
me as I die dies with me.

In Memory of Joe Brainard

*the remnant of a vast, oceanic
bruise (wound delivered early and long ago)*

*was in you purity and
sweetness self-gathered, CHOSEN*

•

When I tried to find words for the moral sense that unifies
and sweetens the country voices in your collage *The Friendly Way*,

you said *It's a code*.

You were a code
I yearned to decipher.—

In the end, the plague that full swift runs by
took you, broke you;—

*in the end, could not
take you, did not break you—*

you had somehow erased within you not only
meanness, but anger, the desire to punish
the universe for everything

not achieved, *not* tasted, seen again, touched—;

... the undecipherable
code unbroken even as the soul

learns once again the body it loves and hates is
made of earth, and will betray it.

The Yoke

*don't worry I know you're dead
but tonight*

*turn your face again
toward me*

*when I hear your voice there is now
no direction in which to turn*

I sleep and wake and sleep and wake and sleep and wake and

but tonight
turn your face again

toward me

*see upon my shoulders is the yoke
that is not a yoke*

don't worry I know you're dead
but tonight

turn your face again

Lady Bird

Neither an invalid aunt who had been asked to care for a sister's
little girl, to fill the dead sister's place, nor the child herself

did, could: not in my Daddy's eyes—nor
should they;

so when we followed that golden couple into the White House

I was aware that people look at
the living, and wish for the dead.

If I Could Mourn Like a Mourning Dove

It is what recurs that we believe,
your face not at one moment looking
sideways up at me anguished or

elate, but the old words welling up by
gravity rearranged:
two weeks before you died in

pain worn out, after my usual casual sign-off
with *All my love*, your simple
solemn *My love to you, Frank*.

The Return

As the retreating Bructeri began to burn their own
possessions, to deny to the Romans every sustenance but
ashes,

a flying column sent by Germanicus
commanded by Lucius Stertinius

routed them;

and there, discovered amid plunder and the dead,

was the Eagle of the nineteenth
legion, lost with Varus.

•

The Romans now
brought to the land of the Bructeri,—to whatever lay
between the river Ems and the river Lippe,
to the very edge of their territory,—

devastation;

until they reached at last

the Teutoburgian Wood,

in whose darkness

Varus and the remains of his fifteen thousand men,
it was said, lay unburied.

•

Germanicus then conceived a desire
to honor with obsequies these unburied warriors whose

massacre once filled Augustus himself with rage and
shame,—

with hope or fear every corner of the Empire,—

while the least foot soldier, facing alien
terrain, was overcome with pity when he

thought of family, friends, the sudden
reversals of battle, and shared human fate.

•

First Caecina and his men
entered,—

ordered to reconnoitre the dismal

treacherous passes, to attempt to build bridges and
causeways across the uneven, sodden marshland,—

then the rest of the army, witness to scenes
rending to sight and memory of sight.

•

Varus' first camp, with its wide sweep and deployment
of ordered space in confident dimension,
testified to the calm labors of three legions;—

then a ruined half-wall and shallow ditch
showed where a desperate remnant had
been driven to take cover;—

on the open ground between them

were whitening bones, free
from putrefaction,—

scattered where men had been struck down
fleeing, heaped up

where they had stood their ground before slaughter.

Fragments of spears and horses' limbs lay
intertwined, while human

skulls were nailed

like insults to the tree-trunks.

Nearby groves held the altars
on which the savage Germans
sacrificed the tribunes and chief centurions.

•

Survivors of the catastrophe slowly began, at last,
to speak,—
the handful who had escaped death or slavery

told their fellow soldiers where the generals
fell, how the Eagles and standards were seized;—

one showed where Varus received his first wound, and
another, where he died by his own melancholy hand;—

those thrown into crude pits saw
gibbets above them,
as well as the platform from which Arminius

as if in delirium harangued
his own victorious troops,—

fury and rancor so joined to his
joy, the imprisoned men thought they would soon be butchered,—

until desecration of the Eagles at last satisfied
or exhausted his arrogance.

•

And so, six years after the slaughter,
a living Roman army had returned
to bury the dead men's bones of three whole legions,—

no man knew whether the remains that he had
gathered, touched perhaps in consigning to the earth, were
those of a stranger or a friend:—

all thought of all

as comrades and
bloodbrothers; each, in common rising
fury against the enemy, mourned at once and hated.

•

When these events were reported to Rome

Cynics whispered that *thus* the cunning State
enslaves us to its failures and its fate.—

Epicureans saw in the ghostly mire
an emblem of the nature of Desire.—

Stoics replied that life is War, ILLUSION
the source, the goal, the end of human action.

•

At the dedication of the funeral
mound, Germanicus laid the first earth,—

thereby honoring the dead, and choosing to demonstrate
in his own person his
heartfelt share in the general grief.

He thereby earned the disapproval of Tiberius,—

perhaps because the Emperor interpreted

every action of Germanicus unfavorably; or he may have felt

the spectacle of the unburied dead
must give the army less alacrity for battle and more
respect for the enemy—

while a commander belonging to

the antique priesthood of the Augurs
pollutes himself by handling
objects belonging to the dead.

•

on the open ground

*whitening bones scattered where men had been struck down
fleeing*

heaped up

where they stood their ground

*Varus' first camp with its
wide sweep*

across the open ground

*the ruined
half-wall and shallow ditch*

on the open ground between them

*whitening bones scattered where men had been struck down
fleeing*

heaped up

where they stood their ground

I have returned here a thousand times,

though history cannot tell us its location.

•

Arminius, relentlessly pursued by
Germanicus, retreated into pathless country.

(AFTER TACITUS, *ANNALS*, I, 60–63)

A Coin for Joe, with the Image of a Horse; c350–325 B.C.

COIN

chip of the closed,—L O S T world, toward whose unseen grasses

this long-necked emissary horse

*eagerly still
stretches, to graze*

•

World; Grass;

stretching Horse;—ripe with hunger, bright circle
of appetite, risen to feed and famish us, from exile underground ... for

you chip of the incommensurate
closed world *A n g e l*

II

The Second Hour of the Night

On such a night

after the countless

assemblies, countless solemnities, the infinitely varied
voyagings in storm and in calm observing the differences

among those who are born, who live together, and die,

•

On such a night

at that hour when

slow bodies like automatons begin again to move down

into the earth beneath the houses in which they
live bearing the bodies they desired and killed and now

bury in the narrow crawl spaces and unbreathing abrupt
descents and stacked leveled spaces these used

bodies make them dig and open out and hollow for new
veins whose ore could have said *I have been loved* but whose

voice has been rendered silent by the slow bodies whose descent
into earth is as fixed as the skeletons buried within them

•

On such a night

at that hour in the temple of

*delight, when appetite
feeds on itself,—*

•

On such a night, perhaps, Berlioz wrote those pages

in his autobiography which I first read when my mother
was dying, and which to me now inextricably
call up

not only her death but her life:—

“A sheet already covered her. I drew it back.

Her portrait, painted in the days of
her splendor,

hung beside the bed—

I will not attempt to describe the grief that possessed me.

It was complicated by something, *incommensurate*,
tormenting, I had always found hardest to bear—

a sense of pity.

Terrible, overmastering

pity swept through me at everything she had suffered:—

Before our marriage,
her bankruptcy.

(*Dazed, almost
appalled by the magnitude of her sudden
and early Paris triumph—as Ophelia, as Juliet—
she risked the fortune fame had brought*

on the fidelity of a public without memory.)

Her accident.

*(Just before a benefit
performance designed to lessen, if not
erase her debts, a broken leg left her
NOT—as the doctors feared—lame, but visibly
robbed of confidence and ease of movement.)*

Her humiliating
return to the Paris stage.

*(After Ophelia's
death, which a few years earlier at her debut
harrowed the heart of Paris, the cruel
audience did not recall her to the stage
once, though it accorded others an ovation.)*

Her decision, made voluntarily but forever
mourned, to give up her art.

Extinction of her reputation.

The wounds each of us
inflicted on the other.

Her not-to-be-extinguished, insane JEALOUSY,—
... which, in the end, had cause.

Our separation, after eleven years.

The enforced
absence of our son.

Her delusion that she had forfeited the regard of
the English public, through her attachment to France.

Her broken heart.

Her vanished beauty.

Her ruined health. (Corrosive, and growing,
physical pain.)

The loss of speech,—
... and movement.

The impossibility of making herself understood in any way.

The long vista of death and oblivion stretching before her
as she lay paralyzed for four years, inexorably dying.

—My brain shrivels in my skull
at the horror, the PITY of it.

Her simple tomb bears the inscription:

*Henriette-Constance Berlioz-Smithson, born at
Ennis in Ireland, died at Montmartre 3rd March 1854*

At eight in the evening the day of her death
as I struggled across Paris to notify
the Protestant minister required for the ceremony,

the cab in which I rode, *vehicle*
conceived in Hell, made a detour and

took me past the Odeon:—

it was brightly lit for a play then much in vogue.

There, twenty-six years before, I discovered
Shakespeare and Miss Smithson at the same moment.

Hamlet. Ophelia. There
I saw Juliet for the first and last time.

Within the darkness of that arcade on many

winter nights I feverishly
paced or watched frozen in despair.

Through that door I saw her enter
for a rehearsal of *Othello*.

She was unaware of the existence of
the pale dishevelled youth with
haunted eyes staring after her—

*There I asked the gods to allow her
future to rest in my hands.*

If anyone should ask you, Ophelia, whether the unknown
youth without reputation or position
leaning back within the darkness of a pillar

will one day become your
husband and prepare your last journey—

with your great inspired eyes

answer, *He is a harbinger of woe.*”

•

On such a night, at such an hour

*she who still carries within her body the growing
body made by union with what she once loved, and now*

*craves or
loathes, she cannot say—;*

she who has seen the world and her own self and the gods

*within the mirror of
Dionysus, as it were—*

*compelled to labor since birth in care of the care-
needing thing into which she had entered;—*

... Myrrha, consigning now to

*the body heavier and heavier within her
what earlier she could consign only to air,*

requests

*in death transformation to nothing
human, to be not alive, not dead.*

II

Ovid tells the tale:—

or, rather, Ovid tells us that

Orpheus sang it
in that litany of tales with which he

filled the cruel silence after Eurydice
had been sucked back down into the underworld
cruelly and he driven back cruelly
from descending into it again to save her ...

He sang it on a wide green plain
without shade,
but there the trees, as if
mimicking the attending beasts and birds, hearing his song

came to listen: the alder, the yew, the laurel
and pine whose young sweet nut
is dear to the mother of the gods since under it
Attis castrated himself to become her votary and vessel ...

Beasts; birds; trees; but by his will
empty of gods or men.

•

In each tale of love he sang,—

Ganymede; Apollo and
Hyacinthus; Pygmalion; Adonis avenged upon
Venus; the apples that Atalanta found irresistible,—

fate embedded in the lineaments of desire

(desire itself helplessly surrounded by what cannot be

eluded, what
even the gods call GIVEN,—)

at last, in bitter or sweet enforcement, finds

transformation (except for the statue
Pygmalion makes human) to an inhuman, un-
riven state, become an element, indelible,
common, in the common, indelible, given world ...

The story of Myrrha, mother of Adonis, is of all
these tales for good reason the least known.

It is said that Cinyras, her father, had he been
childless, might have died a happy man.

*Famed both for his gold and for his beauty, Cinyras
had become King of Cyprus and of Byblus*

*by marrying the daughter of the king, Myrrha's
mother, whose father had become king by marrying the daughter*

*of the king, Myrrha's mother's
mother, Paphos,—*

*... child
born from the union of Pygmalion and the statue.*

When the eyes of Cinyras
followed, lingered upon her, Myrrha had the sensation
he was asking himself whether, in
another world, she could heal him.

Myrrha was Pygmalion and her father the statue.

He was Pygmalion and Myrrha the statue.

—As a dog whose body is sinking into quicksand
locks its jaws around a branch hanging

above it, the great teeth grasping so fiercely the stable world
they snap the fragile wood,—

... Myrrha looped a rope over the beam above her bed
in order to hang herself.

What she wants she does not want.

The night she could no longer NOT tell herself
her secret, she knew that there had never
been a time she had not known it.

It was there like the island

*that, night after
night, as she*

*wished herself to sleep, she embellished
the approach to:—*

the story has many beginnings, but one ending—

*out of the air she has invented it, air
she did not invent ...*

•

In the earliest version whose making and remaking Myrrha
remembers,

she and her father escape from Cyprus

in a small boat, swallowed, protected
by a storm that blackens sea and stars;

he has been stripped of power by advisors of the dead
old king, father of Myrrha's mother, Queen
Cenchreis, and now, the betrayers make Cenchreis

head of state,—

Cinyras in the storm shouts that they have made his
wife their pawn, and Myrrha shouts that many
long have thought

they are HERS,—

... the storm, after days,
abandons them to face a chartless, terrifying horizon.

Then, the island.

In the version that Myrrha now
tells herself since both her father and mother as
King and Queen insist that with their concurrence

soon, from among the royal
younger sons who daily arrive at court as rivals for
her bed, she must choose a husband—

both for her own natural happiness, and
to secure the succession,—

... now she is too violated by the demand that she marry

to invent reasons why the story that she
tells herself to calm herself to sleep begins with
a powerless king standing next to his
daughter in a tiny boat as they stare out at
a distant, yearned-for, dreaded island ...

*On the island, later, she again and again relives
stepping onto the island.*

Each of them knows what will happen here:—

... she can delay, he can delay
because what is sweet about
deferral is that what arrives

despite it, is revealed as inevitable:—

she is awake
only during the lucid
instant between what she recognizes

must happen, and what happens:—

each of them knows that the coldest eye looking
down at them, here, must look without blame:—

now, the king
hesitates—

he refuses to place his foot upon the shore:—

... the illusion of rescue from what he is, what
she is, soon must recede, once on
land everything
not nature fall away,

as unstarved springs

divide them from all that
divide them from themselves:—

*bulls fuck cows they
sired, Zeus himself fathered Dionysus-Zagreus
upon Persephone, his daughter:—*

beasts and gods, those
below us and those above us, open
unhuman eyes

when they gaze upon what they desire
unstained by disgust or dread or terror:—

... Myrrha, watching him, now once again can close her eyes
upon sleep. She sees him

step onto the island. He has entered her.

•

Grief for the unlived life, grief
which, in middle age or old age, as goad

or shroud, comes to all,

early became Myrrha's
familiar, her narcotic

chastisement, accomplice, master.

*What each night she had given with such
extravagance,—*

... when she woke, had not been given.

Grief for the unlived life, mourning
each morning renewed as Myrrha

woke, was there

and not there, for hours merely
the memory of itself, as if long ago

she told herself
a story (*weird*

dream of enslavement) that seemed
her story, but now she cannot

recollect why listening she could not
stop listening, deaf to any other ...

But soon she heard the music beneath every other music:—

what she could not transform herself
into is someone

without memory, or need for memory:—

*four steps forward then
one back, then three
back, then four forward ...*

Today when Myrrha's father reminded her that
on this date eighteen
years earlier her mother announced that he
was the man whom she would in one month

marry,—

and then, in exasperation, asked what Myrrha
wanted in a husband, unsupplied by the young men cluttering his
court in pursuit of her hand and his throne,—

after she, smiling, replied, “You,”

blushing, he turned
away, pleased ...

*Four steps forward then
one back, then three
back, then four forward:—*

today her father, not ten feet from where
once, as a child, she had in
glee leapt upon him surrounded by
soldiers and he, then, pretending to be overwhelmed
by a superior force fell backwards with
her body clasped in his arms as they rolled
body over body down the long slope
laughing and that peculiar sensation of his weight
full upon her and then
not, then full upon her, then not,—

until at the bottom for a half-

second his full weight rested upon her, then not,—

... not ten feet from where what
never had been repeated except within
her today after reminding her that today her mother

exactly at her age chose him,—

after she had answered his question
with, “You,”

blushing, he turned
away, pleased ...

There is a king inside the king that the king
does not acknowledge.

*Four steps forward then
one back, then three
back, then four forward:—*

... the illusion of movement without
movement, because you know that what you
move towards

(malignant in the eyes of gods and men)

isn't there:—

doesn't exist:—

though the sensation of motion without
movement or end offers the hypnotic

solace of making not only each repeated
act but what cannot be repeated

an object of contemplation,—

... what by rumor servant girls, and slaves, as well as
a foreign queen

taste, for Myrrha alone

isn't there, doesn't exist,
malignant in the eyes of gods and men ...

The gods who made us either
didn't make us,—

... or loathe what they have made.

*Four steps forward then
one back, then three
back, then four forward:—*

... but you have lied about your
solace, for hidden, threaded

within repetition is the moment when each step
backward is a step
downward, when what you move toward moves toward

you lifting painfully his cloak to reveal his
wound, saying, "*love answers need*" ...

Approaching death, for days Myrrha more and more
talked to the air:—

My element is the sea. I have seen

*the underside of the surface of the sea, the glittering
inner surface more beautiful than the darkness below it,
seen it crossed*

*and re-crossed by a glittering ship from which dark eyes
peering downward must search the darkness.*

*Though they search, the eyes
fix upon nothing.*

*The glittering ship swiftly,
evenly, crosses and re-crosses.*

*No hand reaches down from it to penetrate the final
membrane dividing those whose element
is the sea, from those who breathe in the light above it.*

*The glittering ship captained by darkness
swiftly, evenly, crosses and

re-crosses.*

*I have seen it. I cannot
forget. Memory is a fact of the soul.*

•

Hippolyta, Myrrha's nurse, thanked the gods
she heard the thump of the rope

hitting the wooden beam, the scrape of
the heavy stool moved into place,

and clasped Myrrha's legs
just as they kicked away the light that held them.

—The creature plummeting resistlessly to the sunless
bottom of the sea was
plucked up, and placed upon the shore.

She slept. After a period of indefinite
duration Hippolyta's voice almost uninflected

woke her, saying that now her nurse must
know the reason for her action.

Failure had made her Hippolyta's
prisoner—; she

told her ...

Head bowed deferentially, Hippolyta
listened without moving.

Hippolyta gathered up the rope, then
disappeared.

Myrrha slept. After a period of indefinite
duration Hippolyta's voice almost uninflected

woke her, saying that she had seen the King and
told the King that she could bring to him tonight a young

girl in love with him who wished to share
his bed, but who must, out of modesty, remain veiled.

Tonight the Festival of Demeter began, during
which the married women of Cyprus in
thanksgiving for the harvest, garlanded
with unthreshed
ears of wheat, robed in white, in secret
purification within the temple for nine days and
nights, abstained from their husbands' now-outlawed beds.

(Each year, Queen Cenchreis fulfilled with ostentatious
ardor the letter of the law.)

Hippolyta told Myrrha that when she
asked the King whether the King will

accept the girl, he asked
her age.

Hippolyta replied, "Myrrha's age."

The King then said, “Yes.”

Listening to Hippolyta’s words Myrrha
knew that tonight she would allow Hippolyta in
darkness to lead her veiled to her father’s chamber.

The door that did not exist

stood open—; she would
step through.

Hippolyta once again
disappeared.

•

In her own room at last Hippolyta fell upon
her knees before her altar to the Furies.

Ten years earlier, when Menelaus and Odysseus
and Agamemnon’s herald Talthybius
arrived in Cyprus seeking from the newly-crowned King
(Queen Cenchreis still wore mourning)

help for their expedition to humble Troy,—

... Cinyras, giddy not only with unfamiliar
obeisance to his power by men of power, but too much

wine, promised in six months to send sixty ships.

As a gift for Agamemnon, he gave his herald the breastplate
of the still-mourned King, gorgeously
worked with circles of cobalt and gold and tin, with two
serpents of cobalt rearing toward the neck.

Hippolyta and Myrrha overheard the Queen
next morning calmly tell the King that the great families who
chose the King’s advisors had no intention of

honoring his drunken
grandiloquent bravado by funding sixty ships—

that if he persisted either the house of her
father must fall, or she would be forced
to renounce him and marry another, ending

the birthright of their daughter.

As a newcomer, a stranger on Cyprus, he owns
no man's loyalty.

—In six months, one ship sent by Cinyras
entered the harbor holding the Greek expedition;

on its deck were fifty-nine clay
ships with fifty-nine clay crews.

Serving on it were Hippolyta's
father and brother.

Cyprians applauded their new King's canny
wit, his sleight-of-hand and boldness; they felt

outrage when Agamemnon, as mere token of
his vengeance, sank the ship, its
crew strapped to its deck ...

Now before the altar long ago
erected, Hippolyta implores the Furies:—

*May the King of the Clay Ships
find the flesh within his bed*

*clay. Avenge in
torment the dead.*

•

As Myrrha is drawn down the dark corridor toward her father

not free not to desire

what draws her forward is neither COMPULSION nor FREEWILL:—

or at least freedom, here *choice*, is not to be
imagined as action upon

preference: no creature is free to choose what
allows it its most powerful, and most secret, release:

*I fulfill it, because I contain it—
it prevails, because it is within me—*

it is a heavy burden, setting up longer to enter that
realm to which I am called from within ...

As Myrrha is drawn down the dark corridor toward her father

not free not to choose

she thinks, *To each soul its hour.*

•

Hippolyta carrying a single candle led her through
a moonless night to the bed where
her father waits.

The light disappears.

Myrrha hears in his voice that he is
a little drunk.

She is afraid: she knows that she must not
reveal by gesture or sound
or animal
leap of the spirit that is hers alone, her animal

signature, that what touches him in ways
forbidden a daughter

is his daughter,—

... entering his bed, Myrrha must not be
Myrrha, but Pharaoh's daughter come by
law to Pharaoh's bed.

Sweeter than the journey that constantly surprises
is the journey that you will to repeat:—

... the awkward introduction of a foreign object

*which as you prepare to expel
it enters with such insistence*

*repeatedly that the resistance you have
marshalled against it*

*failing utterly leaves
open, resistless, naked before it*

what if you do NOT resist it CANNOT be reached:—

you embrace one of the two species of
happiness, the sensation of
surrender, because at the same instant

you embrace the other, the sensation of power:—

*... the son whose sister is his mother
in secrecy is conceived within
the mother whose brother is her son.*

Before leaving the bed of sleeping
Cinyras, Myrrha slowly runs her tongue

over the skin of his eyelid.

•

Cinyras insisted to Hippolyta that his
visitor must return a second night, then

a third—

if this new girl proves
beautiful, he will bind her to him ...

No warrior, Cinyras is a veteran of the combats in
which the combatants think that what they

win or lose is love:—

at the well of Eros, how often he has
slaked the thirst that is but briefly
slaked—;

he worries that though he still

possesses stamina, an inborn
grace of gesture, the eye of
command, as well as beautiful hands and feet,

thickenings, frayed edges to what he knows was his
once startling
beauty betray how often ...

The sharp-edged profile still staring from the coins
stamped to celebrate his marriage

mocks him.

And now this creature who
seems when he is exhausted, is un-
renewable,

to make love to his skin,—

... who touching its surface seems to

adore its surface so that he
quicken as if he is its surface.

—Myrrha was awakened by the bright lamp
held next to her face. It was held there
steadily, in silence.

The lamp was withdrawn, then
snuffed out.

She heard a sword pulled from its sheath.

Before the sheath clattered to the stone floor
she slipped from the bedclothes.

She heard the sword descend and
descend again, the bedclothes

cut and re-cut.

•

The gods, who know what we want not
why, asked who among them

had placed this thing in Myrrha.

Each god in turn denied it. Cupid
indignantly insisted that his arrows abhorred

anything so dire; Venus seconded her son.

Cupid then said that such
implacable events brought to mind the Furies.

The Furies when roused growled that in
a corollary matter they justly again and
again had been beseeched, but upon inspection

exertion by immortals was unneeded.

•

—Sheba's withered
shore ... Scrub; rocks; deserted coast

facing the sea. Because there is no
landscape that Myrrha's presence does not
offend, she stares at the sea:—

across the sea

she fled Cinyras; encircled by sea
lay the island that she spent childhood
approaching; from Cyprus the sea brought

NOT what she had expected, the King's
minions impelled by the injunction to
shut her, dirt shoved within her mouth, beneath
dirt silenced, exiled forever,—

but representatives of
the Queen, informing her of what had
followed her departure:—

when Cinyras found Hippolyta
bowing before an altar, he split her with his sword
from the nape to the base of the spine, then after
dragging the body to a parapet overlooking
rocks and sea, with a yell threw it over the edge;—

within hours what
precipitated Myrrha's disappearance was common
gossip;—

within days three warships
appeared in the harbor at Paphos, sent by
Agamemnon, conqueror of Troy.

Word came from them that the people of Paphos could
avoid destruction if, within three days,

Cinyras were delivered to them.

On the third day, as the King's advisors still
debated how to balance honor with prudence,

the King, standing on the parapet from which had
fallen Hippolyta's body,
looking out at the ships

leapt. Some said that the cause was
Myrrha; others, Agamemnon.

The eyes of the people of Cyprus
must find offense should Myrrha attempt return ...

Cyprians are relieved that the Queen, not yet
forty, has decided to accept the unanimous
counsel of her advisors, and remarry.

•

—She still smells the whiff of something
fatuous when Cinyras as a matter of
course accepted her adoration.

Now Myrrha teaches her child by daily
telling her child, listening
within her, the story of Myrrha and Cinyras ...

She failed because she had poured, *tried*
to pour, an ocean into a thimble.

Whatever lodged *want* within her had seen her
vanity and self-intoxication and married

her to their reflection.

The thimble was a thimble—and she had
wronged it ...

She grew careless because she allowed
herself to imagine that if he once
saw her he must love what he had seen.

Bewildered, betrayed
eyes wait now to accuse her in death.

Her mother once told her:—

*A queen remains a queen only when
what she desires is what she is
expected to desire.*

She would anatomize the world
according to how the world

anatomizes DESIRE. As a girl she had taught

herself to walk through a doorway as if
what she knows is on the other side is
NOT on the other side, as if her father

were a father as other fathers (though
kings) merely are fathers—;
will, calculation

and rage replaced in Myrrha what
others embraced as “nature”...

Her friends live as if, though what they
desire is entirely what they are
expected to desire, it is they who desire.

Not “entirely”; almost entirely.

—In the final months, when Myrrha again and again told the child heavier and heavier within her the story of Myrrha and Cinyras,

she stripped from it words like “ocean” and “thimble.”

She was a sentence that he had spoken in darkness without knowing that he had spoken it.

She had the memory of taste before she knew taste itself: *The milk*

that is in all trees. The sweet water that is beneath.

One fruit of all the world’s fruit, for her, tastes—;

she had failed because her fate, like all fates, was partial.

Myrrha ended each repetition by telling the child within her that betrayed, bewildered

eyes wait now to accuse her in death.

—Phoenicia; Panchaia; Sheba—

people everywhere lived lives indifferent to the death of Cinyras—; suffocating, Sheba’s highlands thick with balsam, costmary, cinnamon, frankincense—;

... there is no landscape that her presence does not offend, so she is free to prefer this forsaken shore swept by humid winds, facing the sea.

Her body is dying.

That her body is dying, her labors not yet
finished, her child un-
born, is not what is bitter.

Myrrha addressed the gods:—

*Make me nothing
human: not alive, not dead.*

*Whether I deny what is not in my
power to deny, or by deception*

seize it, I am damned.

*I shall not rest until what has been
lodged in me is neither*

lodged in me,—nor NOT lodged in me.

*Betrayed, bewildered eyes
wait for me in death.*

*You are gods. Release me, somehow, from both
life and death.*

The gods granted her request. From her toes roots

sprout; the dirt rises to cover her
feet; her legs of which she never had been
ashamed grow thick and hard; bark like disease
covers, becomes her skin; with terror she
sees that she must
submit, lose her body to an alien
body not chosen, as the source of ecstasy is
not chosen—

suddenly she is eager to submit: as the change

rises and her blood becomes
sap, her long arms long branches, she cannot bear
the waiting: she bends her face
downward, plunging her face into the rising

tree, her tears new drops glistening everywhere on its surface:—

fixed, annealed within its body
the story of Myrrha and Cinyras:—new
body not alive not dead, story
everywhere and nowhere:—

*Aphrodisiac. Embalmers' oil. (Insistence of
sex, faint insistent sweetness of the dead undead.)
Sacred anointment oil: with wine an
anodyne. Precious earth-
fruit, gift fit for the birth and death of*

*prophets:—no sweet thing without
the trace of what is bitter
within its opposite:—*

*... MYRRH, sweet-smelling
bitter resin.*

•

Soon the child, imprisoned within the tree,
sought birth. Lucina, Goddess of Child-Birth, helped

the new tree contort, the bark
crack open,—

... pretty as Cupid in

a painting, from the bitter
vessel of Myrrha and Cinyras Adonis was born.

We fill pre-existing forms, and when

we fill them, change them and are changed:—

day after day Myrrha told the child
listening within her her story ...

Once grown to a man, beautiful as Cupid were
Cupid a man, Myrrha's son

by his seductive

indifference, tantalizing
refusals tormented love-sick Venus.

Ovid tells us that upon Venus Myrrha's
son avenged his mother.

His final indifference is
hunting (to Venus' horror) the boar

that kills him ...

Venus did not, perhaps, in her own person
intervene in the fate of Myrrha and Cinyras,—
but children who have watched their parents'
blighted lives blighted in the service of Venus
must punish love itself.

•

*O you who looking within the mirror discover in
gratitude how common, how lawful your desire,*

*before the mirror
anoint your body with myrrh*

precious bitter resin

III

On such a night, at such an hour,

when the inhabitants of the temple of
delight assume for each of us one
profile, different of course for each of us,

but for each of us, single:—

when the present avatar of powers not present though
present through him, different for each of us,

steps to the end of the line of other, earlier
inhabitants of the temple of
delight, different for each of us:—

when the gathering turns for its portrait

and by a sudden trick of alignment and light and
night, all I see

the same, the same, the same, the same, the same—

on such a night,

at such an hour

... grace is the dream, half-
dream, half-

light, when you appear and do not answer the question

that I have asked you, but courteously
ask (because you are dead) if you can briefly

borrow, inhabit my body.

When I look I can see my body
away from me, sleeping.

I say *Yes*. Then you enter it

like a shudder as if eager again to know
what it is to move within arms and legs.

I thought, *I know that he will return it*.

I trusted in that none
earlier, none other.

•

I tasted a sweet taste, I found nothing sweeter.

Taste.

My pleasant fragrance has stripped itself to stink.

Taste.

The lust of the sweetness that is bitter I taste.

Taste.

Custom both sweet and bitter is
the intercourse of this flesh.

Taste.

The milk that is in all trees,
the sweet water that is beneath.

Taste.

The knife of cutting is the book of mysteries.

Taste.

Bitterness sweetness, eat that you may eat.

Taste.

I tasted a sweet taste, I found nothing sweeter.

Taste.

These herbs were gathered at full noon, which was night.

Taste.

•

... *bodies carrying bodies*, some to bury in
earth what offended earth by breathing, others

become vessels of the dead, the voice erased
by death now, for a time, unerased.

•

infinite the sounds the poems

seeking to be allowed to S U B M I T,—that this

dust become seed

like those extinguished stars whose fires still give us light

•

This is the end of the second hour of the night.

STAR DUST

(2005)

I

MUSIC LIKE DIRT

For the Twentieth Century

Bound, hungry to pluck again from the thousand
technologies of ecstasy

boundlessness, the world that at a drop of water
rises without boundaries,

I push the PLAY button:—

... *Callas, Laurel & Hardy, Szigeti*

you are alive again,—

the slow movement of K.218
once again no longer

bland, merely pretty, nearly
banal, as it is

in all but Szigeti's hands

•

Therefore you and I and Mozart
must thank the Twentieth Century, for

it made you pattern, form
whose infinite

repeatability within matter
defies matter—

*Malibran. Henry Irving. The young
Joachim.* They are lost, a mountain of

newspaper clippings, become words
not their own words. The art of the performer.

Music Like Dirt

FOR DESMOND DEKKER

I will not I will not I said but as my body turned in the solitary
bed it said But he loves me which broke my will.

music like dirt

That you did but willed and continued to will refusal you
confirmed seventeen years later saying I was not wrong.

music like dirt

When you said I was not wrong with gravity and weird
sweetness I felt not anger not woe but weird calm sweetness.

music like dirt

I like sentences like He especially dug doing it in
houses being built or at the steering wheel.

music like dirt

I will not I will not I said but as my body turned in the solitary
bed it said But he loves me which broke my will.

Young Marx

*That man's own life is an object for him. That animals
build nests, build dwellings,*

whereas man contemplates himself

in the world that he has created:

That you cannot find yourself in your labor

because it does not belong to your essential being:

*That estranged from labor the laborer is
self-estranged, alien to himself:*

That your nature is to labor:

*That feeling himself fleetingly unbound only when
eating, drinking, procreating, in his dwelling and dressing-up,*

man erects means into sole and ultimate ends:

*That where he makes what he makes, he is
not: That when he makes, he is not:*

Thus the ground of our self-estrangement.

—Marx in 1844, before the solutions that he proposed
betrayed him by entering history, before, like
Jesus, too many sins were committed in his name.

For Bill Nestrick (1940–96)

Out of the rectitude and narrow care of those who
teach in the public schools,—

a mother

who would not let her son watch cartoons of
Porky Pig because we must
not laugh at someone who stutters,—

... the mystery, your brilliant
appetite for the moment.

•

For Herbert, the aesthetic desideratum is

*unpremeditated art, not as “natural” or “spontaneous”
but a speaking of the Spirit as it becomes
conscious, a fidelity to*

the moment itself. The only

*appropriate gift is discovered to be
inseparable from
the giver, for man can only give himself.*

In 1975, the magazine that printed your great essay
announced: *He is writing a book on Herbert.*

•

You lived in the realm where coin of the realm
is a book,

and despite the fact that by the end of

graduate school you
already had published twenty thousand articles

you never published a book.

Against the background of this bitter
mysterious lapse your brilliant
appetite for the moment.

Little Fugue

at birth you were handed a ticket

beneath every journey the ticket to this
journey in one direction

or say the body

*is a conveyor belt, moving in one direction
slower or swifter than sight*

at birth

you were handed a ticket, indecipherable
rectangle forgotten in your pocket

or say you stand upon a moving walkway

*as if all you fear
is losing your*

balance moving in one direction

beneath every journey the ticket to this
journey in one direction

Advice to the Players

There is something missing in our definition, vision, of a human being: the need to make.

-

We are creatures who need to make.

-

Because existence is willy-nilly thrust into our hands, our fate is to make something—if nothing else, the shape cut by the arc of our lives.

-

My parents saw corrosively the arc of their lives.

-

Making is the mirror in which we see ourselves.

-

But *being* is making: not only large things, a family, a book, a business: but the shape we give this afternoon, a conversation between two friends, a meal.

-

Or mis-shape.

-

Without clarity about what we make, and the choices that underlie it, the need to make is a curse, a misfortune.

•

The culture in which we live honors specific kinds of making (shaping or misshaping a business, a family) but does not understand how central making itself is as manifestation and mirror of the self, fundamental as eating or sleeping.

•

In the images with which our culture incessantly teaches us, the cessation of labor is the beginning of pleasure; the goal of work is to cease working, an endless paradise of unending diversion.

•

In the United States at the end of the twentieth century, the greatest luxury is to live a life in which the work that one does to earn a living, and what one has the appetite to make, coincide—by a kind of grace are the same, one.

•

Without clarity, a curse, a misfortune.

•

My intuition about what is of course unprovable comes, I'm sure, from observing, absorbing as a child the lives of my parents: the dilemmas, contradictions, chaos as they lived out their own often unacknowledged, barely examined desires to make.

•

They saw corrosively the shape cut by the arc of their lives.

•

My parents never made something commensurate to their will to make, which I take to be, in varying degrees, the general human condition—as it is my own.

•

Making is the mirror in which we see ourselves.

•

Without clarity, a curse, a misfortune.

•

Horrible the fate of the advice-giver in our culture: to repeat oneself in a thousand contexts until death, or irrelevance.

•

I abjure advice-giver.

•

Go make you ready.

Stanzas Ending with the Same Two Words

At first I felt shame because I had entered
through the door marked *Your Death*.

Not a valuable word written
unsteeped in your death.

You are the ruin whose arm encircles the young woman
at the posthumous bar, before your death.

The grass is still hungry
above you, fed by your death.

Kill whatever killed your father, your life
turning to me again said before your death.

Hard to grow old still hungry.
You were still hungry at your death.

The Poem Is a Veil

V E I L,—as if silk that you in fury must thrust repeatedly
high at what the eye, your eye, naked cannot see

catches, clinging to its physiognomy.

Luggage

You wear your body as if without
illusions. You speak of former lovers with some

contempt for their interest in sex.
Wisdom of the spirit, you

imply, lies in condescension and poise.

... Fucking, I can feel
the valve opening, the flood is too much.

Or too little. I am
insatiable, famished by repetition.

Now all you see is that I am luggage
that smiles as it is moved from here
to there. *We could have had ecstasies.*

In your stray moments, as now in
mine, may what *was not*

rise like grief before you.

Hammer

The stone arm raising a stone hammer
dreams it can descend upon itself.

When the quest is indecipherable,—
... what is left is a career.

What once was apprehended in passion
survives as opinion.

To be both author of
this statue, and the statue itself.

Injunction

As if the names we use to name the uses of buildings
x-ray our souls, war without end:

Palace. Prison. Temple. School.
Market. Theater. Brothel. Bank.

War without end. Because to name is to possess
the dreams of strangers, the temple

is offended by, demands the abolition of brothel, now theater, now
school; the school despises temple, palace, market, bank; the bank by

refusing to name depositors welcomes all, though in rage prisoners each
night gnaw to dust another stone piling under the palace.

War without end. Therefore time past time:

Rip through the fabric. Nail it. Not
to the wall. Rip through

the wall. Outside

time. Nail it.

Heart Beat

ear early tuned to hear beneath the call to end
eating flesh, sentient suffering beings (creatures

bred now for slaughter will
then never be bred) *less life less life* tuned to hear

still the vow solemn and implacable I made as a kid
walking a sidewalk in Bakersfield

never to have a child, condemn a creature
to this hell as the prisoner

chorus in wonder is released into the sun, ear early tuned to hear
beneath the melody the ground-bass *less life less life*

Legacy

*When to the desert, the dirt,
comes water*

comes money

*to get off the shitdirt
land and move to the city*

whence you

*direct the work of those who now
work the land you still own*

My grandparents left home for the American

desert to escape
poverty, or the family who said *You are the son who shall*

become a priest

After Spain became
Franco's, at last

rich enough

to return you
refused to return

The West you made

was never unstoried, never
artless

Excrement of the sky our rage inherits

there was no gift

outright we were never the land's

Lament for the Makers

Not bird not badger not beaver not bee

*Many creatures must
make, but only one must seek*

within itself what to make

My father's ring was a *B* with a dart
through it, in diamonds against polished black stone.

I have it. What parents leave you
is their lives.

Until my mother died she struggled to make
a house that she did not loathe; paintings; poems; me.

Many creatures must

*make, but only one must seek
within itself what to make*

Not bird not badger not beaver not bee

•

Teach me, masters who by making were
remade, your art.

II

Curse

*May breath for a dead moment cease as jerking your
head upward you hear as if in slow motion floor
collapse evenly upon floor as one hundred and ten
floors descend upon you.*

May what you have made descend upon you.
May the listening ears of your victims their eyes their
breath

enter you, and eat like acid
the bubble of rectitude that allowed you breath.

May their breath now, in eternity, be your breath.

•

Now, as you wished, you cannot for us
not be. May this be your single profit.

Of your rectitude at last disenthralled, you
seek the dead. Each time you enter them

they spit you out. The dead find you are not food.

Out of the great secret of morals, *the imagination to enter
the skin of another*, what I have made is a curse.

Knot

After, no ferocity of will could the hand

•

uncurl. One day, she joked, I'll cut it off.

•

OPEN. Her hand replies that flesh insulted by being cannot bear to

•

wake. OPEN. She repeats the word to what once was hers

•

but now not.

Phenomenology of the Prick

You say, Let's get naked. It's 1962; the world
is changing, or has changed, or is about to change;
we want to get naked. Seven or eight old friends

want to see certain bodies that for years we've
guessed at, imagined. For me, not
certain bodies: one. Yours. You know that.

We get naked. The room
is dark; shadows against the windows'
light night sky; then you approach your wife. You light

a cigarette, allowing me to see what is forbidden to see.
You make sure I see it hard.
You make sure I see it hard

only once. *A year earlier, through the high partition between cafeteria
booths, invisible I hear you say you can get Frank's
car keys tonight. Frank, you laugh, will do anything I want.*

You seemed satisfied. This night, as they say,
completed something. After five years of my
obsession with you, without seeming to will it you

managed to let me see it hard. Were you
giving me a gift. Did you want fixed in my brain
what I will not ever possess. Were you giving me

a gift that cannot be possessed. You make sure
I see how hard
your wife makes it. You light a cigarette.

The Soldier Who Guards the Frontier

On the surface of the earth
despite all effort I continued
the life I had led in its depths.

So when you said cuckoo
hello and my heart
leapt up imagine my surprise.

From its depths some mouth
drawn by your refusals of love
fastened on them and fattened.

It's 2004; now the creature
born from our union in 1983
attains maturity.

He guards the frontier.
As he guards the frontier he listens
all day to the records of Edith Piaf.

Heroic risk, Piaf sings. Love
is heroic risk, for what you are impelled
to risk but do not

kills you; as does, of course this voice
knows, risk. He is addicted
to the records of Edith Piaf.

He lives on the aroma, the intoxications
of what he has been spared.
He is grateful, he says, not to exist.

Romain Clerou

When I asked if she was in pain he said
No but that she had in her final minutes showed that panic

he had often seen the faces of the dying show facing the void.

He said this matter-of-factly, as if because he was
a doctor his experience mattered, as if he had known

her and her son long enough not to varnish or lie.

They had gone to high school together and now
because he had become a doctor and then become

her doctor he watched Martha face the void.

Twenty-eight years later, I can hear the way he said
Martha. His name was Clerou: Dr. Romain Clerou.

Hadrian's Deathbed

Flutter-animal
talkative
unthing

soon from all tongue unhoused

where
next

forgotten
voiceless
scared?

Song

You know that it is there, lair
where the bear ceases
for a time even to exist.

Crawl in. You have at last killed
enough and eaten enough to be fat
enough to cease for a time to exist.

Crawl in. It takes talent to live at night, and scorning
others you had that talent, but now you sniff
the season when you must cease to exist.

Crawl in. Whatever for good or ill
grows within you needs
you for a time to cease to exist.

It is not raining inside
tonight. You know that it is there. Crawl in.

Star Dust

Above the dazzling city lies starless
night. Ruthless, you are pleased the price of one

is the other. That night

dense with date palms, crazy with the breath-
less aromas of fresh-cut earth,

black sky thronging with light so thick the fixed

unbruised stars bewildered
sight, I wanted you dazzled, wanted you drunk.

As we lie on our backs in close dark parallel furrows newly

dug, staring up at the consuming sky, light
falling does not stop at flesh: each thing hidden, buried

between us now burns and surrounds us,

visible, like breath in freezing air. *What you ignore or refuse
or cannot bear. What I hide that I ask, but*

ask. The shimmering improvisations designed to save us

fire melts to law. *I touched the hem of your garment. You opened
your side, feeding me briefly just enough to show me why I ask.*

Melancholy, as if shorn, you cover as ever each glowing pyre

with dirt. In this light is our grave. Obdurate, you say: *We
are darkness. We are the city*

whose brightness blots the stars from night.

The Third Hour of the Night

When the eye

*When the edgeless screen receiving
light from the edgeless universe*

When the eye first

*When the edgeless screen facing
outward as if hypnotized by the edgeless universe*

When the eye first saw that it

*Hungry for more light
resistlessly began to fold back upon itself TWIST*

As if a dog sniffing

*Ignorant of origins
familiar with hunger*

As if a dog sniffing a dead dog

*Before nervous like itself but now
weird inert cold nerveless*

Twisting in panic had abruptly sniffed itself

*When the eye
first saw that it must die When the eye first*

Brooding on our origins you
ask *When* and I say

Then

•

wound-dresser let us call the creature

driven again and again to dress with fresh
bandages and a pail of disinfectant
suppurations that cannot
heal for the wound that confers existence is mortal

wound-dresser

what wound is dressed the wound of being

•

Understand that it can drink till it is
sick, but cannot drink till it is satisfied.

It alone knows you. It does not wish you well.

Understand that when your mother, in her only
pregnancy, gave birth to twins

painfully stitched into the flesh, the bone of one child

was the impossible-to-remove cloak that confers
invisibility. The cloak that maimed it gave it power.

Painfully stitched into the flesh, the bone of the other child

was the impossible-to-remove cloak that confers
visibility. The cloak that maimed it gave it power.

Envyng the other, of course each twin

tried to punish and become the other.

Understand that when the beast within you

succeeds again in paralyzing into unending
incompletion whatever you again had the temerity to
try to make
its triumph is made sweeter by confirmation of its
rectitude. It knows that it alone
knows you. It alone remembers your mother's
mother's grasping immigrant bewildered
stroke-filled slide-to-the-grave
you wiped from your adolescent American feet.
Your hick purer-than-thou overreaching veiling
mediocrity. Understand that you can delude others but
not what you more and more
now call the beast within you. Understand
the cloak that maimed each gave each power.
Understand that there is a beast within you
that can drink till it is
sick, but cannot drink till it is satisfied. Understand
that it will use the conventions of the visible world
to turn your tongue to stone. It alone
knows you. It does
not wish you well. *These are instructions for the wrangler.*

II

Three Fates. One
fate, with three faces.

Clotho Lachesis Atropos

Thread spun by one
from all those forever unspun.

Thread touched by one and in
touching twisted into something

forever unlike all others spun.

Thread touched by one and in
touching withered to nothing.

Atropos Lachesis Clotho

Three, who gave us in recompense
for death

the first alphabet, to engrave in stone
what is most evanescent,

the mind. *According to Hesiod, daughters of Night.*

•

“Unless teeth devour it it
rots: now is its season.

My teeth have sunk into firm-skinned
pears so succulent time stopped.

When my wife, dead now

ten years, pulls her dress over her petticoats
and hair, the air crackles, her hair rising

tangles in ecstasy. We are electric ghosts.

•

You hear the strange cricket in the oven
sing, and ask what it sings.

This is what it sings.

Because *Benvenuto* in my native tongue
means *welcome*, write

here lies an artist who did not
recoil from residence on earth—but,
truly named, welcomed it.

But I mis-spoke: not *wife*. Servant: model: mother
of my child, also now dead.

•

In prison, immured in the black pit where the Pope
once fed Benedetto da Foiano less and less each day
until God's will, not the Pope's own hand, killed him,—

where outside my door each day the castellan
repeated that darkness will teach me I am
a counterfeit bat, and he a real one,—

blackness, silence so unremitted
I knew I had survived another day only by the malignant
welcome singsong of his triumphant voice,—

Benvenuto is a counterfeit bat, and I a real one,—

where God had not found me worthy of seeing the sun
even in a dream, I asked the God of Nature
what unexpiated act the suffocation of my senses, such
suffering, served to expiate.

(This was my first prison.)

•

For the two murders I had committed,—their just,
free but necessary cause

revenge, however imperfect the justice—

two successive Popes recognized the necessity
and pardoned me. *Absolved* me.

Because my fame as a maker in gold and silver

preceded me, though I was hardly more
than an apprentice, when Pope Clement came into

possession of the second largest diamond in the world

he summoned me from Florence to Rome—called me
into his presence to serve him. To crown the resplendent

glittering vestment covering his surplice, he wanted

a golden clasp big and round as a small
plate, with God the Father in half-relief above the diamond

and cherubs, arms raised, below. *Hurry*, he said,

*finish it quickly, so that I may enjoy its
use a little while.*

Pope Clement, unlike the great I now serve, was

an excellent, subtle
connoisseur; he approved my design.

Each week he summoned me into the presence
two or three times, eager to inspect my progress.

Then Cecchino, my brother, two years younger than I
and still beardless, died—

was killed, as he tried to avenge the unjust killing of
a comrade by the ruthless guard of the Bargello.

Thus was stolen from him the chance to incise
his presence into the hard, careless surface of the world.
The fool who killed him

in what justice must call self-defense

later proved his nature by
boasting of it.

His boasting enraged, maddened me. In this

great grief the Pope rebuked me: *You act as if
grief can change death.*

Sleepless, eatless, by day I worked at the Pope's

absorbing golden button—and by night, hypnotized
as a jealous lover, I watched and followed

the fatuous creature who murdered my brother.

At last, overcoming my repugnance to an enterprise
not-quite-praiseworthy, I decided

to end my torment. My dagger entered the juncture

of the nape-bone and the neck
so deep into the bone

with all my strength I could not pull it out.

I ran to the palace of Duke Alessandro—for those who

pursued me knew me. The Pope's natural son,
later he became Duke of Florence, before his murder
by his own cousin Lorenzino, whose too-familiar
intimacies and pretensions to power
he not only indulged but openly mocked.

Alessandro told me to stay indoors
for eight days. For eight days I stayed indoors, working
at the jewel the Pope had set his heart on.

For eight days the Pope failed
to summon me. Then his chamberlain, saying that all was
well if I minded my work and kept silent, ushered me
into the presence. The Pope cast so menacing
a glance toward me I trembled.

Examining my work, his countenance cleared,
saying that I had accomplished a vast amount
in a short time. Then he said, *Now that you are
cured, Benvenuto—change your life.*

I promised that I would. Soon after this, I opened
a fine shop, my first; and finished the jewel.

•

As the knife descended (forgive me, O God of
Nature, but *thus* you have arranged it,—)

to my fevered mind
each moment was infinite, and mine.

•

Late one night, in farewell, Michelangelo
turning to me said, *Benvenuto*,

you deliver yourself into their hands.

•

Here I leapt Here I leapt Here I leapt Here I leapt
the shrilling cricket in the shrilling summer evening

sings; as did my father in the sweet years

he served the pleasure of the lords of Florence
as a piper, in the Consort of Pipers.

Imagine my father, no longer young, married, still

childless, an engineer who designs bridges and
battlements for the Duke, but whose

first love is music—the flute. He joined

the Duke's Consort of Pipers. Now his nights
often are spent not bending over charts and plans

but dazzled at the court of Lorenzo, called *The Magnificent*—

the same Lorenzo who once plucked Michelangelo, still
a boy, from among the horde of the merely-talented

bending to copy the masters in the ducal palace.

Lorenzo, with his father's consent, adopted
the boy; fed him at his own table.

Imagine, tonight, the brief concert is over—

the Consort of Pipers (respectable, honorable

amateurs: small merchants, a banker, a scholar)

mingle, slightly awed, with an ambassador, a Cardinal ...

Suddenly Lorenzo is at my father's ear: *He stood not six inches from me.*

Not six inches from my father's ear Lorenzo

in a low voice as he begins to move through
the crowd followed by his son Piero

(as now my father must struggle to follow)

tells my father he has painfully and increasingly
remarked that the flute has led my father to neglect

his fine engineering talent and therefore my

father will understand why Piero and the Duke
must dismiss him from the Consort of Pipers.

Lorenzo, entering the private apartments, was gone.

In later years, my father repeated to his
children: *He stood not six inches from me.*

It is a lie. It is a lie that the Medici and you and I

stand on the same earth. What the sane eye
saw, was a lie:—

two things alone cross the illimitable distance

between the great and the rest of
us, who serve them:—

a knife; and art.

•

The emblem of Florence is the lion; therefore
lions, caged but restless and living, centuries ago

began to announce to the Piazza della Signoria

this is the fearsome seat of the free
government of the Republic of Florence.

Duke Cosimo, hating the noise and smell, had them

moved behind the palace. For years, I had known
the old man who fed and tended the lions,—

one day he humbly asked me if I could make a ring

unlike all others for his daughter's wedding.

I said yes, of course; but, as payment for its

rarity, I wanted him to drug the strongest lion

asleep, so that I could
examine, for my art, his body.

He said he knew no art of drugging; such poison

could kill the creature; a week later,
in fury he said yes.

The animal was numbed but not

sleeping; he tried to raise
his great head, as I lay lengthwise against his warm body;

the head fell back. My head

nestling behind his, each arm, outstretched, slowly
descending along each leg, at last with both hands I

pulled back the fur and touched a claw.

This creature whose claw waking could kill me,—
... I wore its skin.

•

After the Medici were returned from eighteen years'
banishment, placed over us again not by the will

of Florentines, but by a Spanish army—

my father, though during the republic he regained
his position as piper, ever loyal to the Medici

wrote a poem celebrating his party's victory

and prophesying the imminent
advent of a Medici pope. Then Julius II died;

Cardinal de' Medici, against expectation, was elected;

the new pope wrote my father that he must
come to Rome and serve him.

My father had no will to travel. Then Jacopo

Salviati, in power because married to a Medici,
took from my father his place at the Duke's new court;

took from him his profit, his hope, his will.

Thus began that slow extinguishment
of hope, the self's obsequies for the self

at which effacement I felt not only a helpless

witness, but
cause, author.

He said I was his heart.

*I had asked to be his heart
before I knew what I was asking.*

Against his mania to make me a musician
at fifteen I put myself to the goldsmith's trade;
without money
or position, he now could not oppose this.

Help the boy—for his father is poor
rang in my ears as I began to sell

the first trinkets I had made. Later, to escape
the plague then raging, he made me
quickly leave Florence; when I returned,
he, my sister, her husband and child, were dead.

These events, many occurring before my birth, I
see because my father described them
often and with outrage.

To be a child is to see things and not
know them; then you know them.

•

Despite the malicious
stars, decisive at my birth: despite their
sufficient instrument, *the hand within me that moves
against me*: in the utter darkness of my first prison
God granted me vision:
surrounded by my stinks, an Angel, his beauty

austere, not wanton, graciously
showed me a room in half-light crowded with the dead:

postures blunted as if all promise of change

was lost, the dead
walked up and down and back and forth:

as if the promise of change

fleeing had stolen the light.
Then, on the wall, there was a square of light.

Careless of blindness I turned my eyes

to the full sun. I did not care
to look on anything again but this. The sun

withering and quickening without distinction

then bulged out: the boss
expanded: the calm body of the dead Christ

formed itself from the same

substance as the sun. Still on the cross,
he was the same substance as the sun.

•

The bait the Duke laid
was Perseus. Perseus

standing before the Piazza della Signoria.

My statue's audience and theater, Michelangelo's
David; Donatello's

Judith With the Head of Holofernes ...

Here the school of Florence, swaggering, says
to the world: *Eat*.

Only Bandinelli's odious *Hercules and Cacus*

reminds one that when one walks
streets on earth one steps in shit.

Duke Cosimo desired, he said, a statue of Perseus

triumphant, after intricate trials able
at last to raise high

Medusa's mutilated head—he imagined,

perhaps, decapitation of the fickle
rabble of republican Florence ...

I conceived the hero's gesture as more generous:—

*Kill the thing that looked
upon makes us stone.*

Soon enough, on my great bronze bust of the great

Duke, I placed—staring out from his chest—
Medusa, her head not yet cut, living.

•

*Remember, Benvenuto, you cannot bring your
great gifts to light by your strength alone*

You show your greatness only through

*the opportunities we give you
Hold your tongue I will drown you in gold*

•

As we stared down at the vast square, at
David, at *Judith*—then at *Hercules and Cacus*

approved and placed there by Cosimo himself—

from high on the fortress lookout of the palace,
against whose severe façade so many

human promises had been so cunningly

or indifferently crushed, I told the Duke that I
cannot make his statue. My brief return from France

was designed only to provide for the future of

my sister and six nieces, now without husband
or father. The King of France alone had saved me

from the Pope's dungeon—not any lord of Italy!

At this, the Duke looked at me
sharply, but said nothing.

All Rome knew that though I had disproved

the theft that was pretext for my arrest, Pope Paul
still kept me imprisoned, out of spite—

vengeance of his malignant son Pier Luigi, now

assassinated by his own retainers.

One night at dinner, the King's emissary gave the Pope

gossip so delicious that out of merriment, and about to vomit

from indulgence, he agreed
to free me. I owed King Francis

my art, my service. The same stipend he once paid

Leonardo, he now paid me; along with a house in Paris.
This house was, in truth, a castle ...

I omitted, of course, quarrels with the King's

mistress, demon who taunted me for the slowness
of my work, out of her petty hatred of art itself;

omitted her insistence to the King that I

am insolent and by example teach
insolence to others. Omitted that I overheard the King

joke with her lieutenant:—

*Kill him, if you can find me
his equal in art.*

Before the school of Florence I had only been able,

young, to show myself as goldsmith
and jeweler; not yet as sculptor.

Duke Cosimo then announced that all the King of France

had given me, he would surpass: boasting,
he beckoned me to follow him past the public

common galleries, into the private apartments ...

Dutiful abashed puppet, I followed; I knew
I would remain and make his statue.

•

*In the mirror of art, you who are familiar with the rituals of
decorum and bloodshed before which you are*

silence and submission

*while within stone
the mind writhes*

*contemplate, as if a refrain were wisdom, the glistening
intrication
of bronze and will and circumstance in the mirror of art.*

•

Bandinelli for months insinuated in the Duke's ear
Perseus never would be finished:—

I lacked the art, he said, to move from the small

wax model the Duke rightly praised, to lifesize
bronze whose secrets tormented even Donatello.

So eighteen months after work began, Duke Cosimo grew

tired, and withdrew his subsidy. Lattanzo Gorini,
spider-handed and gnat-voiced, refusing to hand over

payment said, *Why do you not finish?*

Then Bandinelli hissed *Sodomite!* at
me—after my enumeration, to the court's

amusement, of the sins against art and sense

committed by his *Hercules and Cacus*, recital
designed to kill either him or his authority....

The Duke, at the ugly word, frowned

and turned away. I replied that the sculptor of
Hercules and Cacus must be a madman to think that I

presumed to understand the art that Jove in heaven

used on Ganymede, art nobly practiced here on earth
by so many emperors and kings. My saucy speech

ended: *My poor wick does not dare to burn so high!*

Duke and court broke into laughter. Thus was
born my resolve to murder Bandinelli.

•

I'd hurl the creature to hell. In despair at what must
follow—the Duke's rage, abandonment of my

never-to-be-born Perseus—I cast

myself away for lost: with a hundred crowns
and a swift horse, I resolved first to bid

farewell to my natural son, put to wet-nurse in Fiesole;

then to descend to San Domenico, where Bandinelli
returned each evening. *Then, after blood, France.*

Reaching Fiesole, I saw the boy

was in good health; his wet-nurse
was my old familiar, old gossip, now

married to one of my workmen. The boy

clung to me: wonderful in a two-year-old, in
grief he flailed his arms when at last

in the thick half-dusk

I began to disengage myself. Entering the square
of San Domenico on one side, I saw my prey

arriving on the other. Enraged that he still

drew breath, when I reached him
I saw he was unarmed. He rode a small sorry
mule. A wheezing donkey carried a ten-year-old
boy at his side. In my sudden presence, his face
went white. I nodded my head and rode past.

•

I had a vision of Bandinelli surrounded
by the heaped-up works of his hand.

Not one thing that he had made

did I want to have made.

From somewhere within his body

like a thread

he spun the piles surrounding him. Then he
tried to pull away, to release the thread; I saw

the thread was a leash.

He tried and tried to cut it.

At this, in my vision I said out-loud:—

My art is my revenge.

•

When I returned to Florence from Fiesole, after
three days news was brought to me that my little boy

was smothered by his wet-nurse

turning over on him as they both slept.

His panic, as I left; his arms raised, in panic.

•

*from the great unchosen narration you will soon
be released*

Benvenuto Cellini

*dirtied by blood and earth
but now*

you have again taught yourself to disappear

*moving wax from arm
to thigh*

you have again taught yourself to disappear

*here where each soul is its
orbit spinning*

sweetly around the center of itself

*at the edge of its eye the great
design of virtue*

here your Medusa and your Perseus are twins

*his triumphant body still furious with purpose
but his face abstracted absorbed in*

contemplation as she is

*abstracted absorbed
though blood still spurts from her neck*

defeated by a mirror

*as in concentration you move wax
from thigh to arm*

under your hand it grows

•

The idyll began when the Duke reached me a goldsmith's
hammer, with which I struck the goldsmith's

chisel he held; and so the little statues were

disengaged from earth and rust. Bronze
antiquities, newly found near Arezzo, they lacked

either head or hands or feet. Impatient for my

presence, the Duke insisted that I join him each evening
at his new pastime, playing artisan—leaving orders

for my free admittance to his rooms, day or night.

His four boys, when the Duke's eyes were turned,
hovered around me, teasing. One night

I begged them to hold their peace.

The boldest replied, *That we can't do!* I said
what one cannot do is required of no one.

So have your will! Faced with their sons'

delight in this new principle, the Duke and Duchess
smiling accused me of a taste for chaos....

At last the four figures wrought for the four

facets of the pedestal beneath Perseus
were finished. I brought them one evening to the Duke,

arranging them on his worktable in a row:—

figures, postures from scenes that the eye cannot

*entirely decipher, story haunting the eye with its
resonance, unseen ground that explains nothing....*

The Duke appeared, then immediately
retreated; reappearing, in his right hand

he held a pear slip. *This is for your garden, the garden of
your house.* I began, *Do you mean,* but he cut me off
saying, *Yes, Benvenuto: garden and house now are yours.*

Thus I received what earlier was only lent me.

I thanked him and his Duchess; then both
took seats before my figures.

For two hours talk was of their beauty,—

the Duchess insisted they were too exquisite
to be wasted down there

in the piazza; I must place them in her apartments.

No argument from intention or design
unconvinced her.

So I waited till the next day—entering the private

chambers at the hour the Duke and Duchess
each afternoon went riding, I carried the statues

down and soldered them with lead into their niches.

Returning, how angry the Duchess became! The Duke
abandoned his workshop. I went there no more.

•

The old inertia of earth that hates the new

(as from a rim I watched)

rose from the ground, legion:—

truceless ministers of the great unerasable
ZERO, eager to annihilate lineament and light,

waited, pent, against the horizon:—

some great force (*massive, stubborn, multiform as
earth, fury whose single name is LEGION,—*)

wanted my Perseus not to exist:—

and I must
defeat them.

Then my trembling assistants woke me.

They said all my work
was spoiled.

Perseus was spoiled. He lay buried in earth

wreathed in fragile earthenware veins from the furnace
above, veins through which he still

waited to be filled with burning metal.

The metal was curdled. As I slept, sick,
the bronze had been allowed to cake, to curdle.

Feverish, made sick by my exertions for

days, for months, I slept; while those charged
with evenly feeding the furnace that I had so well

prepared, LARKED—

I thought, *Unwitting ministers of the gorgon*

Medusa herself. The furnace choked with caking, curdling
metal that no art known to man could
uncurdle, must be utterly dismantled—all
who made it agreed this must destroy
the fragile, thirsty mould of Perseus beneath.

But Perseus was not more strong
than Medusa, but more clever:—if he ever
was to exist as idea, he must first exist as matter:—

all my old inborn
daring returned,

furious to reverse

the unjust triumphs of the world's mere
arrangements of power, that seemingly on earth
cannot be reversed. First, I surveyed my forces:—

seven guilty workmen, timid, sullen,
resentful; a groom; two maids; a cook.

I harassed these skeptical troops into battle:—

two hands were sent to fetch from the butcher
Capretta a load of young oak,—

in bronze furnaces the only woods you use

are slow-burning alder, willow, pine: now I needed
oak and its fierce heat. As the oak

was fed log by log into the fire, how the cake began
to stir, to glow and sparkle. Now

from the increased

combustion of the furnace, a conflagration

shot up from the roof: two windows
burst into flame: I saw the violent storm

filling the sky fan the flames.

All the while with pokers and iron rods
we stirred and stirred the channels—

the metal, bubbling, refused to flow.

I sent for all my pewter plates, dishes, porringers—
the cooks and maids brought some two hundred.

Piece by piece, I had them thrown

into the turgid mass. As I watched the metal for
movement, the cap of the furnace

exploded—bronze welling over on all sides.

I had the plugs pulled, the mouths of the mould
opened; in perfect liquefaction

the veins of Perseus filled....

Days later, when the bronze had cooled, when the clay
sheath had been with great care removed, I found

what was dead brought to life again.

•

Now, my second
prison. It began soon after Perseus was unveiled

to acclaim—great acclaim. Perhaps I grew

too glorious. Perseus, whose birth consumed
nine years, found stuck to his pedestal

sonnets celebrating the master's hand that made him....

On the day of unveiling, Duke Cosimo stationed himself
at a window just above the entrance to the palace;

there, half-hidden, he listened for hours to the crowd's

wonder. He sent his attendant Sforza to say
my reward

soon would astonish me.

Ten days passed. At last Sforza appeared and asked
what price I placed on my statue.

I was indeed astonished: *It is not my custom,*

I replied, *to set a price for my work, as if
he were a merchant and I a mere tradesman.*

Then, at risk of the Duke's severe displeasure, I was

warned I must set a price: infuriated, I said
ten thousand golden crowns.

Cities and great palaces are built with ten thousand

golden crowns, the Duke
two days later flung at me in anger.

Many men can build cities and palaces,

I replied, *but not one can make
a second Perseus.*

Bandinelli, consulted by the Duke, reluctantly

concluded that the statue was worth sixteen thousand.

The Duke replied that for two farthings

Perseus could go to the scrap heap; that would resolve our differences.

At last, the settlement was thirty-five hundred, one hundred a month. Soon after, charges were brought against me, for sodomy—

I escaped Florence as far as Scarperia, but there the Duke's soldiers caught me and in chains brought me back.

I confessed. If I had not, I could have been made to serve as a slave in the Duke's galleys for life. The Duke listened behind a screen as I was made publicly to confess, in full court.... Punishment was *four years* imprisonment. Without the Duke's concurrence, of course, no charges could have been lodged, no public humiliation arranged

to silence the insolent. *The first Cosimo, founder of Medici power, all his life protected Donatello—whose affections and bliss were found in Ganymede.*

After imprisonment one month, Cosimo finally commuted my sentence to house arrest.

There his magnanimity allowed me to complete

my Christ of the whitest marble
set upon a cross of the blackest.

Now, my Christ sits still packed in a crate
in the Duke's new chapel; my bust of the Duke
is exiled to Elba, there to frighten in open air
slaves peering out from his passing galleys.

Now, after the Duchess and two of their sons
died of fever within two months, Cosimo

grows stranger: he murdered Sforza

by running him through with a spear:—
he does not own

his mind; or will.

When I ask release from his service, he says
that he cannot, that he soon

will have need of me for great projects; no

commissions come. Catherine de' Medici, regent of
the young French king, petitioned that I be allowed

to enter her service. He said I had no will now to work.

In prison I wrote my sonnet addressed
to Fortune:—*Fortune, you sow!*

You turned from me because Ganymede

also is my joy... O God of Nature, author
of my nature,

where does your son Jesus forbid it?

When I was five, one night my father
woke me. He pulled me to the basement, making me
stare into the oak fire and see what he just had seen.

There a little lizard was sporting
at the core of the intensest flames.

My father boxed me on the ears, then kissed me—

saying that I must remember this night:—
My dear little boy, the lizard you see

is a salamander, a creature that lives

*at the heart of fire. You and I are blessed: no other
soul now living has been allowed to see it.*

•

I am too old to fight to leave Florence:—

here, young, this goldsmith and jeweler
began to imagine that

severity, that *chastity* of style

certain remnants of the ancient world
left my hand hungry to emulate:—

equilibrium of ferocious, contradictory

forces: equilibrium whose balance or poise is their
tension, and does not efface them,—

as if the surface of each thing

arranged within the frame, the surface of each
body the eye must circle

gives up to the eye its vibration, its nature.

Two or three times, perhaps,—*you*
say *where*,—I have achieved it.

•

See, in my great bronze bust of the great
Duke, embedded in the right epaulette like a trophy
an open-mouthed
face part lion part man part goat, with an iron
bar jammed in its lower jaw

rising resistlessly across its mouth.

See, in Vasari's clumsy portrait of me, as I float
above the right shoulder of the Duke, the same face."

•

*As if your hand fumbling to reach inside
reached inside*

*As if light falling on the surface
fell on what made the surface*

*As if there were no scarcity of sun
on the sun*

III

I covered my arm with orchid juice.

With my hatchet I split a mangrove stick
from a tree, and sharpened it.

I covered the killing stick with orchid juice.

We were camping at Marunga Island
looking for oysters. This woman I was about to kill

at last separated herself from the others

to hunt lilies. She walked into the swamp, then
got cold, and lay down on sandy ground.

After I hit her between the eyes with my hatchet

she kicked, but couldn't
raise up.

With my thumb over the end of the killing stick

I jabbed her Mount of Venus until her skin pushed
back up to her navel. Her large intestine

protruded as though it were red calico.

With my thumb over the end of the killing stick
each time she inhaled

I pushed my arm

in a little. When she exhaled, I stopped. Little by little
I got my hand

inside her. Finally I touched her heart.

Once you reach what is
inside it is outside. I pushed the killing stick

into her heart.

The spirit that belonged to that dead woman
went into my heart then.

I felt it go in.

I pulled my arm
out. I covered my arm with orchid juice.

Next I broke a nest of green ants
off a tree, and watched the live ants
bite her skin until her skin moved by itself
downward from her navel and covered her bones.

Then I took some dry mud and put my sweat
and her blood in the dry mud

and warmed it over a fire. Six or eight times

I put the blood and sweat and mud
inside her uterus until there was no trace of her
wound or what I had done.

I was careful none of her pubic hair was left
inside her vagina for her husband to feel.

Her large intestine stuck out several feet.

When I shook some green ants on it, a little
went in. I shook some more. All of it went in.

When I whirled the killing stick with her heart's blood

over her head, her head
moved. When I whirled it some more, she moved

more. The third time I whirled the killing stick

she gasped for breath. She blew some breath
out of her mouth, and was all right.

I said, *You go eat some lilies.* She

got up. I said, *You will live*
two days. One day you will be happy. The next, sick.

She ate some lilies. She walked around, then
came back and slept. When laughing and talking women
woke her she gathered her lilies and returned to camp.

The next day she walked around and played,
talked and made fun, gathering with others oysters
and lilies. She brought into camp what she
gathered. That night she lay down and died.

Even the gods cannot
end death. In this universe anybody can kill anybody
with a stick. What the gods gave me
is *their* gift, the power to bury within each
creature the hour it ceases.

Everyone knows I have powers but not such power.

If they knew I would be so famous
they would kill me.

I tell you because your tongue is stone.

If the gods ever give you words, one night in
sleep you will wake to find me above you.

•

After sex & metaphysics,—
... what?

What you have made.

•

*Infinite the forms, finite
tonight as I find again in the mirror the familiar appeaseless
eater's face*

*Ignorant of cause or source or end
in silence he repeats*

Eater, become food

*All life exists at the expense of other life
Because you have eaten and eat as eat you must*

Eater, become food

*unlike the burning stars
burning merely to be*

Then I ask him how to become food

*In silence he repeats that others have
other fates, but that I must fashion out of the corruptible*

body a new body good to eat a thousand years

*Then I tell the eater's face that within me is no
sustenance, on my famished*

plate centuries have been served me and still I am famished

*He smirks, and in silence repeats that all life exists
at the expense of other life*

*You must fashion out of the corruptible
body a new body good to eat a thousand years*

*Because you have eaten and eat as eat you must
ignorant of cause or source or end*

•

drugged to sleep by repetition of the diurnal
round, the monotonous sorrow of the finite,

within I am awake

repairing in dirt the frayed immaculate thread
forced by being to watch the birth of suns

•

This is the end of the third hour of the night.

WATCHING THE SPRING FESTIVAL

(2008)

Marilyn Monroe

Because the pact beneath ordinary life (*If you
give me enough money, you can continue to fuck me—*)

induces in each person you have ever known
panic and envy before the abyss,

what you come from is craziness, what your
mother and her mother come from is

craziness, panic of the animal
smelling what you have in store for it.

Your father's name, your mother said to the child
you, is too famous not to be hidden.

Kicking against the pricks,
she somehow injured her mind.

You are bitter all that releases
transformation in us is illusion.

Poor, you thought being rich is utterly
corrosive; and watched with envy.

Posing in the garden,
squinting into the sun.

Tu Fu Watches the Spring Festival Across Serpentine Lake

*In 753 Tu Fu, along with a crowd of others, watched
the imperial court—the emperor’s mistress, her sisters,
the first minister—publicly celebrate the advent of spring.*

Intricate to celebrate still-delicate
raw spring, peacocks in *pasement* of gold
thread, unicorns embroidered palely in silver.
These are not women but a dream of women:—

bandeaux of kingfisher-feather

jewelry, pearl

netting that clings to the breathing body

veil what is, because touched earth
is soiled earth, invisible.

As if submission to dream were submission
not only to breeding but to one’s own nature,

what is gorgeous is remote now, pure, true.

•

The Mistress of the Cloud-Pepper Apartments
has brought life back to the emperor, who is

old. Therefore charges of gross extravagance, of
pandering incest between her sister Kuo and her cousin

are, in the emperor's grateful eyes, unjust. Her wish
made her cousin first minister. Three springs from this

spring, the arrogance of the new first minister
will arouse such hatred and fury even the frightened

emperor must accede to his execution. As bitterly to
hers. She will be carried on a palanquin of

plain wood to a Buddhist chapel
deep in a wood and strangled.

•

Now the Mistress of the Cloud-Pepper Apartments,—
whose rooms at her insistence are coated with

a pepper-flower paste into which dried pepper-
flowers are pounded because the rooms of the Empress

always are coated with paste into which dried pepper-
flowers are pounded and she is Empress

now in all but name,—is encircled by her
sisters, Duchesses dignified by imperial

favor with the names of states that once had
power, Kuo, Ch'in, Han. Now rhinoceros-horn

chopsticks, bored, long have not descended.
The belled carving knife wastes its labors. Arching

camel humps, still perfect, rise like purple hills
from green-glazed cauldrons. Wave after

wave of imperial eunuchs, balancing fresh
delicacies from the imperial kitchens, gallop up

without stirring dust.

•

With mournful sound that would move demon
gods, flutes and drums now declare to the air

he is arrived. Dawdlingly

he arrives, as if the cloud of
suppliants clinging to him cannot obscure the sun.

Power greater than that of all men except one
knows nothing worth rushing toward

or rushing from. Finally the new first minister
ascends the pavilion. He greets the Duchess of

Kuo with that slight
brutality intimacy induces.

Here at last is power that your
soul can warm its hands against!

Beware: success has made him
incurious, not less dangerous.

(AFTER TU FU, "BALLAD OF LOVELY WOMEN")

The Old Man at the Wheel

Measured against the immeasurable
universe, no word you have spoken

brought light. Brought
light to what, as a child, you thought

too dark to be survived. *By exorcism*
you survived. By submission, then making.

You let all the parts of that thing you would
cut out of you enter your poem because

enacting there all its parts allowed you
the illusion you could cut it from your soul.

Dilemmas of choice given what cannot
change alone roused you to words.

As you grip the things that were young when
you were young, they crumble in your hand.

Now you must drive west, which in November
means driving directly into the sun.

Like Lightning Across an Open Field

*This age that has tried to use indeterminacy
to imagine we are free*

Days and nights typing and retyping

revisions half in
relish because what you have

made is ill-made

•

*Picking up the phone next to your bed
when her voice said he is dead you*

stood up on your bed

Like lightning across an open field
I he said

wound the ground

•

*His body had risen up to kill him
because beneath him there was no*

earth where the soul could stand

•

Renewed health and renewed illness
meant the freedom

or necessity to risk a new life

*Bar by bar he built meticulously
a new cage to escape each cage he built*

why why why why

It is an illusion you were ever free

*The voice of the bird you could not help
but respond to*

You Cannot Rest

The trick was to give yourself only to what
could not receive what you had to give,

leaving you as you wished, free.
Still you court the world by enacting yet once

more the ecstatic rituals of enthrallment.
You cannot rest. The great grounding

events in your life (weight lodged past
change, like the sweetest, most fantastical myth

enshrining yet enslaving promise), the great
grounding events that left you so changed

you cannot conceive your face without their
happening, happened when someone

could receive. Just as she once did, he did—past
judgment of pain or cost. Could receive. Did.

Poem Ending With Three Lines From “Home On the Range”

Barred from the pool twenty-three years ago, still I dove
straight in. You loved to swim, but saw no water.

Whenever Ray Charles sings “I Can’t Stop Loving You”

I can’t stop loving you. Whenever the unstained-by-guilt
cheerful chorus belts out the title, as his voice, sweet

and haggard reminder of what can never be remedied,

answers, correcting the children with “It’s useless to say,”
the irreparable enters me again, again me it twists.

The red man was pressed from this part of the West—

’tis unlikely he’ll ever return to the banks of Red River, where
seldom, if ever, their flickering campfires burn.

An American in Hollywood

After you were bitten by a wolf and transformed
into a monster who feeds on other human beings

each full moon and who, therefore, in disgust

wants to die, you think *The desire to die is not
feeling suicidal. It abjures mere action. You have*

wanted to die since the moment you were born.

Crazy narratives—that lend what is merely
in you, and therefore soon-to-be-repeated,

the fleeting illusion of logic and cause.

You think *Those alive there, in the glowing rectangle,
lead our true lives! They have not, as we have been*

forced to here, cut off their arms and legs.

There, you dance as well as Fred Astaire,
though here, inexplicably, you cannot.

Sewer. Still black water

above whose mirror
you bend your face. Font.

Seduction

Show him that you see he carries
always, everywhere, an enormous

almost impossible to balance or bear

statue of himself: burden that
flattering him

dwarfs him, like you. Make him

see that you alone decipher within him
the lineaments of the giant. Make him

see that you alone can help him shape

the inchoate works of his hand, till what
the statue is he is. *He watches your helpless*

gaze; your gaze

tells him that the world someday must see.

You are the dye whose color dyes

the mirror: he can never get free.

•

You ask what is this place. He says
kids come to make out here. He has driven

out here to show you lovers' lane.

Because your power in the world exceeds

his, he must make the first move.

His hand on the car seat doesn't move.

•

He is Raleigh attending Elizabeth, still
able to disguise that he does not want her.

In banter and sweet colloquy, he freely,

abundantly shows you that what his
desire is is endless

intercourse with your soul. Everything

he offers, by intricate
omissions, displays what he denies you.

Beneath all, the *no* that you

persuade yourself
can be reversed.

•

You cannot reverse it: as if he is

safe from
engulfment only because he has

placed past reversal

the judgment that each
animal makes facing another.

You are an animal facing another.

•

Still you persuade yourself that it can be
reversed because he teasingly sprinkles

evasive accounts of his erotic history

with tales of dissatisfying but repeated
sex with men. He adds that he

could never fall in love with a man.

Helplessly, he points to the soiled
statue he strains to hold

unstained above him. He cannot.

•

*You must write this without the least
trace of complaint. Standing at the edge of
the pool, for him there was no water.*

*You chose him not despite, but
because of. In the twenty-three years since
breaking with him, his spectre*

*insists that no one ever replaces anyone.
He is the dye whose color dyes*

the mirror: you can never get free.

•

What is it that impels

What is it that impels us at least in
imagination

What is it that impels us at least in

imagination to close with to
interpenetrate flesh that accepts

craves interpenetration from

us with us
What is it What

•

Sweet cow, to heal the world, you must

jump over the moon. All you ask is
immolation, fantastic love resistlessly

drawn out of a withdrawn creature who

must turn himself inside out to give it:
dream coexistent with breathing.

•

Near the end, when the old absorbing

colloquy begins again, both he and you
find yourselves surrounded by ash.

To his meagre circumscribed desire whose

no you knew from the beginning, that you
want to pluck out of your eye forever,

you submit as if in mourning.

To ash, he too submits. In revenge
you chose submission, chose power.

Catullus: Id faciam

What I hate I love. Ask the crucified hand that holds
the nail that now is driven into itself, why.

Song of the Mortar and Pestle

The desire to approach obliteration
preexists each metaphysic justifying it. Watch him
fucked want to get fucked hard. Christianity

allowed the flagellants

light, for even Jesus found release from flesh requires
mortification of the flesh. From the ends of
the earth the song is, *Grind me into dust.*

Valentine

How those now dead used the word *love* bewildered
and disgusted the boy who resolved he

would not reassure the world he felt
love until he understood love

Resolve that too soon crumbled when he found
within his chest

something intolerable for which the word
because no other word was right

must be love
must be love

Love craved and despised and necessary
the Great American Songbook said explained our fate

my bereft grandmother bereft
father bereft mother their wild regret

How those now dead used love to explain
wild regret

With Each Fresh Death the Soul Rediscovered Woe

*from the world that called you Piñon not one voice is now not stopped
Piñon little pine nut sweet seed of the pine tree which is evergreen*

Soul that discovered itself as it discovered the irreparable

breaking through ice to touch the rushing stream whose skin
breaking allowed darkness to swallow blondhaired Ramona

in 1944 age six high in the cold evergreen Sierras as you

age five luckily were elsewhere but forever after Soul there
failing to pull her for years of nights from the irreparable

Sanjaya at 17

As if fearless what the shutter will unmask
he offers himself to the camera, to
us, sheerly—
vulnerable like Monroe, like Garbo.

Now he is a cock that raises
high above his wagging head
the narrow erected red
flag of arousal—

Of course the ignorant, you say, hate him.
In the world's long conversation, long
warfare about essence, each taunting
song, each disarming photograph, a word.

*There is a creature, among all others, one,
within whose voice there is a secret voice
which once heard
unlocks the door that unlocks the mountain.*

Winter Spring Summer Fall

Like the invisible seasons

Which dye then bury all the eye
sees, but themselves cannot be seen

Out of ceaseless motion in edgeless space

Inside whatever muck makes words in
lines leap into being is the intimation of

Like the invisible seasons

Process, inside chaos you follow the thread
of just one phrase instinct with cycle, archaic

Out of ceaseless motion in edgeless space

Promise that you will see at last the buried
snake that swallows its own tail

Like the invisible seasons

You believe not in words but in words in
lines, which disdaining the right margin

Out of ceaseless motion in edgeless space

Inside time make the snake made out of
time pulse without cease electric in space

Like the invisible seasons

Though the body is its

genesis, a poem is the vision of a process

Out of ceaseless motion in edgeless space

Carved in space, vision your poor eye's single
armor against winter spring summer fall

Ulanova At Forty-Six At Last Dances Before a Camera Giselle

Many ways to dance Giselle, but tonight as you
watch you think that she is what art is, creature

who remembers

her every gesture and senses its relation to the time
just a moment before when she did something

close to it

but then everything was different so what she feels
now is the pathos of the difference. Her body

hopping forward

remembers the pathos of the difference. Each
hop is small, but before each landing she has

stepped through

many ghosts. This and every second is the echo
of a second like it but different when you had

illusions not

only about others but about yourself. Each gesture
cuts through these other earlier moments to exist as

a new gesture

but carries with it all the others, so what you dance
is the circle or bubble you carry that is all this.

•

Inside the many ways to dance Giselle

*the single way that will show those who sleep what
tragedy is. What tragedy is is*

your work in Act One. Then comes something else.

•

The poem I've never been able to write has a very tentative title: "Ulanova At Forty-Six At Last Dances Before a Camera Giselle." A nice story about an innocent who dies because tricked by the worldly becomes, with Ulanova, tragedy. A poem about being in normal terms too old to dance something but the world wants to record it because the world knows that it is precious but you also know the camera is good at unmasking those who are too old to create the illusion on which every art in part depends. About burning an image into the soul of an eighteen-year-old (me) of the severity and ferocity at the root of classic art, addicted to mimesis.

•

After her entrance, applause. We are watching

a stage production, filmed one act per
night after an earlier public performance.

But without an audience, who is applauding?

The clapping is
artifice, added later. We are watching

the illusion of a stage performance, filmed

by Mr. Paul Czinner using techniques he specially
developed to record the Bolshoi Ballet's first

appearance in the west. Despite the Iron

Curtain, at the height of the Cold War, the Russian government now has decreed we may see Ulanova.

•

Whether out of disgust or boredom, the young

Duke of Silesia has buried what the world
understands as his identity

here, in a rural dream. Watching her

from the safety of his disguise
he is charmed: he smiles. She is a bird whose

wings beat so swiftly they are invisible.

•

Tragedy begins with a *radical given*—your uncle has murdered your father and married your mother. Before your birth a prophecy that you will kill your father and marry your mother leads your father to decree your murder. The *radical given*—irremediable, inescapable—lays bare the war that is our birthright. *Giselle* begins with the premise of an operetta: a duke is in love with a peasant girl.

•

*Impossible not to reach for, to touch
what you find is beautiful,*

but had not known before existed.

•

... The princess. *Her brocaded dress, cloth of
gold.* Behind her back and

embarrassingly before everyone, Giselle

cannot resist caressing it. *Her dangling,
glittering necklace.* Out of graciousness or

condescension, the princess

removed it from her neck, then so
everyone could see, placed it

around yours. How pleased you were!

•

... Or Albrecht, stranger, clear
spirit, to whom despite your

dread you gave your heart.

•

Impossible—; to your shame.

•

The princess, to whom Albrecht is betrothed, arrives in the village during a hunt and takes rest in Giselle's home. A young forester, jealously in love with Giselle, now finds Albrecht's hidden silver sword and betrays his secret. Albrecht tries to hide his real status, but the returning princess greets him affectionately, thus proving his true identity. Heartbroken by his duplicity, Giselle goes mad and dies.

•

The Nineteenth Century did not discover but

made ripe the Mad Scene, gorgeous
delirium rehearsing at luxuriant but

momentary length the steps, the undeflectable

stages by which each brilliant light

finds itself extinguished. *She stares*
straight ahead at what her empty hands
still number, still fondle.
Such burning is eager to be extinguished.

•

Before her she can see the hand
that reaches into her
cage
closing over her. *The hand is the future*
devoid of what, to her
horror, she had reached for.

As the future closes over her
the creature inside beating its wings in
panic is dead.

•

You have spent your life writing tragedies for a world that does not believe in tragedy. What is tragedy? Everyone is born somewhere: into this body, this family, this place. Into the mystery of your own predilections that change as you become conscious of what governs choice, but change little. Into, in short, particularity inseparable from existence. Each particularity, inseparable from its - history, offers and denies. There is a war between each offer you embrace and what each embrace precludes, what its acceptance denies you. Most of us blunt and mute this war in order to survive. In tragedy the war is lived out. The *radical given* cannot be evaded or erased. No act of intelligence or prowess or cunning or goodwill can reconcile the patrimony of the earth.

•

Act Two, because this *Giselle* has been
abbreviated by L. Lavrovsky, is a sketch of Act Two.

Worse than being dead yourself

is to imagine him dead.

Many ways to dance Giselle, but in the queer

moonlit halflife of the forest

at night, when Giselle in death
dances with Albrecht to save him, Ulanova

executes the classic postures of ecstasy, of

yearning for
union, as if impersonally—

as if the event were not at last

again to touch him, but pre-ordained,
beyond the will, fixed as the stars are fixed.

•

Here, in darkness, in the queer halflife of

remorse, Myrtha, Queen of the *Wilis*, offers
revenge against those who condemned

you forever to remain unchosen, baffled.

Myrtha, refugee from Ovid famished
into sovereign self-parody by

centuries of refusal and hunger, rules

row upon symmetrical row of pitiless
well-schooled virgins, dressed in white.

Their rigid geometry mocks

ballet as the abode of Romantic
purity, harmonious dream.

•

The conscience-stricken duke visits Giselle's grave and is confronted by the *Wilis*. The Queen condemns him to dance until he dies. The ghost of Giselle appears and pleads for his life— without success. Giselle, determined to save him, dances in his place whenever he falters, allowing him time to recover. The church bell rings: dawn. The power of the *Wilis* is broken.

•

When Giselle dead defies her dead sisters

Death and the dramatist make visible
the pitiless logic within love's *must*.

*Love must silence its victims,—
... or become their vessel.*

She has become his vessel.

•

At dawn, in triumph incapable of youth's
adamant poise, Giselle reenters the ground.

•

“You see how keen the pointed foot looks in the air, during attitudes, arabesques, and passés, how clearly the leg defines and differentiates the different classic shapes. Below the waist Ulanova is a strict classicist; above the waist she alters the shape of classic motions now slightly, now quite a lot, to specify a nuance of drama. Neither element—the lightness below or the weight above—is weakened for the sake of the other.” (Edwin Denby)

•

*Ulanova came to Pomona California in
1957 as light projected on a screen
to make me early in college see what art is.*

Under Julian, c362 A.D.

[] or full feeling return to my legs.

My jealous, arrogant, offended by existence
soul, as the body allowing you breath

erodes under you, you are changed—

the fewer the gestures that can, in the future,
be, the sweeter those left to you to make.

Candidate

on each desk mantel refrigerator door

*an array of photographs
little temple of affections*

you have ironically but patiently made

•

Those promises that make us confront
our ambition, pathetic ambition:

confront it best when we see what it
promised die. Your dead ex-wife

you put back on the mantel
when your next wife left. With her iron

nasals, Piaf regrets NOTHING: crazed
by the past, the sweet desire to return to

zero. Undisenthralled you
regret what could not have been

otherwise and remain itself.
There, the hotel in whose bar you courted

both your wives is detonated, collapsing;
in its ballroom, you conceded the election.

There's your open mouth
conceding.

A good photograph tells you everything
that's really going on is invisible.

You are embarrassed by so many
dead flowers. They lie shriveled before you.

Coat

You, who never lied, lied
about what you at every moment carried.

The shameful, new, incomprehensible

disease which you whose religion was
candor couldn't bear not to hide.

Now that you have been dead thirteen years

*I again see you suddenly lay out my coat
across your bed, caressing it as if touch could*

memorize it—no, you're flattening, then

*smoothing its edges until under your
hand as I watch it becomes*

hieratic, an icon.

What I seized on as promise
was valediction.

To the Republic

I dreamt I saw a caravan of the dead
start out again from Gettysburg.

Close-packed upright in rows on railcar flat-
beds in the sun, they soon will stink.

Victor and vanquished shoved together, dirt
had bleached the blue and gray one color.

Risen again from Gettysburg, as if
the state were shelter crawled to through

blood, risen disconsolate that we
now ruin the great work of time,

they roll in outrage across America.

You betray us is blazoned across each chest.
To each eye as they pass: *You betray us*.

Assaulted by the impotent dead, I say it's
their misfortune and none of my own.

I dreamt I saw a caravan of the dead
move on wheels touching rails without sound.

To each eye as they pass: *You betray us*.

God's Catastrophe in Our Time

when those who decree decree the immemorial

mere habits of the tribe

law established since the foundations of the world

*when the brutalities released by
belief engender in you disgust for God*

hear the answering baritone sweetness of Mahler's "Urlicht"

*I am from God and shall return
to God for this disfiguring*

*flesh is not light and
from light I am light*

when I had eyes what did I do with sight

Little O

To see the topography of a dilemma
through the illusion of
hearing, hearing the voices
of those who, like you, must live there.

•

*We are not belated: we stand in an original
relation to the problems of making
art, just as each artist before us did.*

At the threshold
you can see the threshold:—

it is a precipice.

When I was young, I tried not to
generalize; I had seen little. At sixty-six,

you have done whatever you do

many times before. Disgust with mimesis,—
disgust with the banality of naturalistic

representation, words mere surface mirroring

a surface,—

is as necessary as mimesis: as the conventions

the world offers out of which to construct your

mirror fail, to see your face you
intricately, invisibly reinvent them. But

imagining that words must make the visible

a little hard to see,—
or speech that imitates for the ear speech

now is used up, the ground sealed off from us,—

is a sentimentality. Stevens was wrong. Genius
leading the disgusted over a cliff.

Everything made is made out of its

refusals: those who follow make it new
by refusing its refusals.

The French thought Shakespeare

a barbarian, because in their eyes he wrote as if
ignorant of decorum, remaking art to cut through.

Watching the Spring Festival

In my dreams all I need to do is bend
my head, and you well up beneath me

We have been present at a great abundance

displayed beneath glass, sealed beneath
glass as if to make earth envy earth

Until my mouth touched the artful

cunning of glass
I was not poor

We have been present at a great abundance

Warring priests of transformation, each
animated by an ecstatic secret, insist

they will teach me how to smash the glass

*We have been present at a great abundance
which is the source of fury*

Hymn

Earth, O fecund, thou. Evanescent when grasped, when

Venus drives all creatures crazy with desire
to couple and in coupling fill the earth with presences

like themselves
needful, ghostly.

Earth, O fecund, thou. Electric ghosts

people the horizon, beguiling since childhood
this son of the desert about to disappear.

They are no less loved and feared because
evanescent. Earth, O fecund, thou.

If See No End In Is

What none knows is when, not if.
Now that your life nears its end
when you turn back what you see
is ruin. You think, It is a prison. No,
it is a vast resonating chamber in
which each thing you say or do is

new, but the same. *What none knows is
how to change.* Each plateau you reach, if
single, limited, only itself, in-
cludes traces of all the others, so that in the end
limitation frees you, there is no
end, if you once see what is there to see.

You cannot see what is there to see—
not when she whose love you failed is
standing next to you. Then, as if refusing the know-
ledge that life *unseparated* from her is death, as if
again scorning your refusals, she turns away. The end
achieved by the unappeased is burial within.

*Familiar spirit, within whose care I grew, within
whose disappointment I twist, may we at last see
by what necessity the double-bind is in the end
the figure for human life, why what we love is
precluded always by something else we love, as if
each no we speak is yes, each yes no.*

The prospect is mixed but elsewhere the forecast is no
better. The eyrie where you perch in
exhaustion has food and is out of the wind, if
cold. You feel old, young, old, young—: you scan the sea

for movement, though the promise of sex or food is
the prospect that bewildered you to this end.

Something in you believes that it is not the end.
When you wake, sixth grade will start. The finite you know
you fear is infinite: even at eleven, what you love is
what you should not love, which endless bullies in-
tuit unerringly. The future will be different: you cannot see
the end. What none knows is when, not if.

Song

At night inside in the light

when history
is systole
diastole

awake I am the moment between.

At night when I fold my limbs up
till they fit
in the tiniest box

I am a multiple of zero.

In the sun
even a tick
feeding on blood

to his sorrow becomes visible.

A bat who grows in love with the sun
becomes sick unless disabused of the illusion
he and the sun are free.

Surreal God

*you too a multiple of zero
you who make
all roads lead nowhere*

Surreal God

I find nothing

*except you
beautiful.*

When thus in ecstasy I lie to the god of

necessity he replies the world he has devised is
a labyrinth where travelers at last achieve to their
dismay eternal safety in eternal night.

Columbus is dead

so try as you will
you cannot make me feel
embarrassment

at what I find beautiful.



Collector

As if these vessels by which the voices of
the dead are alive again

were something on which to dream, without

which you cannot dream—
without which you cannot, hoarder, breathe.

Tell yourself what you hoard

commerce or rectitude cannot withdraw.
Your new poem must, you suspect, steal from

The Duchess of Malfi. Tonight, alone, reread it.

•

By what steps can the Slave become
the Master, and is

becoming the master its only release?

It is not release. When your stepfather
went broke, you watched as your mother's

money allowed survival—

It is not release. You watched her pay him
back by multitudinous

daily humiliations. In the back seat of

the car you were terrified as Medea

invented new ways to tell

Jason what he had done to her.

•

You cannot tell that it is there
but it is there, falling.

Once you leave any surface

uncovered for a few hours
you see you are blind.

Your arm is too heavy to wipe

away what falls on a lifetime's
accumulations. The rituals

you love imply that, repeating them,

you store seeds that promise
the end of ritual. Not this. Wipe this

away, tomorrow it is back.

•

*The curator, who thinks he made his soul
choosing each object that he found he chose,*

wants to burn down the museum.

•

Stacked waist-high along each
increasingly unpassable

corridor, whole lifeworks

wait, abandoned or mysteriously
never even tested by your
promiscuous, ruthless attention.

•

The stratagems by which briefly you
ameliorated, even seemingly
untwisted what still twists within you—
you loved their taste and lay there
on your side
nursing like a puppy.

•

Lee Wiley, singing in your bathroom
about “ghosts in a lonely parade,”
is herself now one—
erased era you loved, whose maturity
was your youth, whose blindnesses
you became you by loathing.

•

Cities at the edge of the largest
holes in the ground
are coastal: the rest, inland.
The old age you fear is Lady
Macbeth wiping away
what your eyes alone can see.

Each of us knows that there is a black
hole within us. No place you hole up is
adequately inland.

•

*The song that the dead sing is at one
moment as vivid, various, multi-voiced
as the dead were living—
then violated the next moment, flattened
by the need now to speak in
such a small space, you.*

•

He no longer arrives even
in dreams.

You learned love is addiction
when he to whom you spoke on
the phone every day
dying withdrew his voice—
more than friends, but
less than lovers.

There, arranged in a pile, are his letters.

•

The law is that you
must live
in the house you have built.

The law is absurd: it is
written down nowhere.

You are uncertain what crime
is, though each life writhing to
elude what it has made
feels like punishment.

•

Tell yourself, again, *The rituals*
you love imply that, repeating them,
you store seeds that promise
the end of ritual. You store
seeds. Tell yourself, again,
what you store are seeds.

METAPHYSICAL DOG

(2013)

ONE

Metaphysical Dog

Belafont, who reproduced what we did
not as an act of supine

imitation, but in defiance—

butt on couch and front legs straddling
space to rest on an ottoman, barking till

his masters clean his teeth with dental floss.

How dare being
give him this body.

Held up to a mirror, he writhed.

Writing “Ellen West”

was exorcism.

•

Exorcism of that thing within Frank that wanted, after his mother’s death, to die.

•

Inside him was that thing that he must expel from him to live.

•

He read “The Case of Ellen West” as a senior in college and immediately wanted to write a poem about it but couldn’t so he stored it, as he has stored so much that awaits existence.

•

Unlike Ellen he was never anorexic but like Ellen he was obsessed with eating and the arbitrariness of gender and having to have a body.

•

Ellen lived out the war between the mind and the body, lived out in her body each stage of the war, its journey and progress, in which compromise, reconciliation is attempted then rejected then mourned, till she reaches at last, in an ecstasy costing not less than everything, death.

•

He was grateful he was not impelled to live out the war in his body, hiding in compromise, well wadded with art he adored and with stupidity and distraction.

•

The particularity inherent in almost all narrative, though contingent and exhausting, tells the story of the encounter with particularity that flesh as flesh must make.

•

“Ellen West” was written in the year after his mother’s death.

•

By the time she died he had so thoroughly betrayed the ground of intimacy on which his life was founded he had no right to live.

•

No use for him to tell himself that he shouldn’t feel this because he felt this.

•

He didn’t think this but he thought this.

•

After she died his body wanted to die, but his brain, his cunning, didn’t.

•

He likes narratives with plots that feel as if no one willed them.

•

His mother in her last year revealed that she wanted him to move back to Bakersfield and teach at Bakersfield College and live down the block.

•

He thought his mother, without knowing that this is what she wanted, wanted him to die.

•

All he had told her in words and more than words for years was that her possessiveness and terror at his independence were wrong, wrong, wrong.

•

He was the only person she wanted to be with but he refused to live down the block and then she died.

•

It must be lifted from the mind

*must be lifted and placed elsewhere
must not remain in the mind alone*

•

Out of the thousand myriad voices, thousand myriad stories in each human head, when his mother died, there was Ellen West.

•

This is the body that you can draw out of you to expel from you the desire to die.

•

Give it a voice, give each scene of her life a particularity and necessity that in Binswanger's recital are absent.

•

Enter her skin so that you can then make her other and expel her.

•

Survive her.

•

Animal mind, eating the ground of Western thought, the “mind-body” problem.

•

She, who in the last months of her life abandoned writing poems in disgust at the failure of her poems, is a poem.

•

She in death is incarnated on a journey whose voice is the voice of her journey.

•

Arrogance of Plutarch, of Shakespeare and Berlioz, who thought they made what Cleopatra herself could not make.

•

Arrogance of the maker.

•

Werther killed himself and then young men all over Europe imitated him and killed themselves but his author, Goethe, cunning master of praxis, lived.

•

Frank thought when anything is made it is made not by its likeness, not by its twin or mirror, but its opposite.

•

Ellen in his poem asks *Without a body, who can know himself at all?*

•

In your pajamas, you moved down the stairs just to the point where the adults couldn't yet see you, to hear more clearly the din, the sweet cacophony of adults partying.

•

Phonograph voices among them, phonograph voices, their magpie beauty.

•

Sweet din.

•

Magpie beauty.

•

One more poem, one more book in which you figure out how to make something out of not knowing enough.

Like

Woe is blunted not erased
by *like*. Your hands were too full, then
empty. At the grave's
lip, secretly you imagine then
refuse to imagine
a spectre
so like what you watched die, the unique
soul you loved endures a second death.
The dead hate *like*, bitter
when the living with too-small
grief replace them. You dread
loving again, exhausted by the hungers
ineradicable in his presence. *You resist
strangers until a stranger makes the old hungers
brutally wake*. We live by symbolic
substitution. At the grave's lip, what is
but is not is what
returns you to what is not.

TWO

HUNGER FOR THE ABSOLUTE

Those Nights

(FOR M.P.)

*Those nights when despite his exhaustion or indifference
you persisted, then finally it*

caught, so that at last he too

*wanted it, suddenly was desperate to reach it,
you felt his muscles want it*

more than anything, as if through this chaos, this

*wilderness he again knew the one thing he must reach
though later, after*

he found it, his resentment implied he had been forced.

•

Those nights ended because what was
missing could never be by
the will supplied. We who could get
somewhere through
words through
sex could not. I was, you said, your
shrink: that's how
I held you. I failed as my own.

•

Now you surely are dead. I've searched
the databases: you everywhere

elude us. Long ago without your
reaching to tell me, surely
the plague killed you. Each thing in your life
you found so
incommensurate to the spirit
I imagine that becoming
untraceable makes you smile.

Name the Bed

Half-light just after dawn. As you turned back
in the doorway, you to whom the ordinary

sensuous world seldom speaks

expected to see in the thrown-off
rumpled bedclothes nothing.

•

Scream stretched across it.

•

*Someone wanted more from that bed
than was found there.*

•

Name the bed that's not true of.

•

Bed where your twin
died. Eraser bed.

Queer

*Lie to yourself about this and you will
forever lie about everything.*

Everybody already knows everything

so you can
lie to them. That's what they want.

But lie to yourself, what you will

lose is yourself. Then you
turn into them.

•

For each gay kid whose adolescence

was America in the forties or fifties
the primary, the crucial

scenario

forever is coming out—
or not. Or not. Or not. Or not. Or not.

•

Involuted velleities of self-erasure.

•

Quickly after my parents
died, I came out. Foundational narrative

designed to confer existence.

If I had managed to come out to my
mother, she would have blamed not
me, but herself.

*The door through which you were shoved out
into the light
was self-loathing and terror.*

•

Thank you, terror!

You learned early that adults' genteel
fantasies about human life
were not, for you, life. You think sex
is a knife
driven into you to teach you that.

History

For two years, my father chose to live at

The Bakersfield Inn, which called itself
the largest motel in the world.

There, surrounded by metal furniture

painted to look like wood, I told him that I
wanted to be a priest, a Trappist.

He asked how I could live without pussy.

He asked this earnestly. This confession
of what he perceived as need

was generous. I could not tell him.

•

Sex shouldn't be part of marriage.

Your father and I,—

... sex shouldn't be part of marriage.

•

That she loved and continued to love him
alone: and he, her: even after marrying others—

then they got old and stopped talking this way.

•

Ecstasy in your surrender to adolescent

God-hunger, ecstasy
promised by obliterated sex, ecstasy

in which you are free because bound—

in which you call the God who made
what must be obliterated in you love.

•

In a labyrinth of blankets in the garage

at seven
with a neighbor boy

you learned abasement

learned amazed that what must be
obliterated in you is the twisted

obverse of what underlies everything.

•

Chaos of love, chaos of sex that
marriage did not solve or

mask, God did not solve or mask.

•

Grant and Hepburn in *Bringing Up Baby*,

in which Grant finally realizes being
with her is more fun than anything.

•

What they left behind

they left behind
broken. The fiction

even they accepted, even they believed

was that once
it was whole.

Once it was whole

left all who swallowed it,
however skeptical, forever hungry.

•

The generation that followed, just like their
famished parents, fell in love with the fiction.

They smeared shit all over

their inheritance because it was broken,
because they fell in love with it.

But I had found my work.

Hunger for the Absolute

Earth you know is round but seems flat.

You can't trust
your senses.

You thought you had seen every variety of creature
but not

this creature.

•

When I met him, I knew I had

weaned myself from God, not
hunger for the absolute. O unquenched

mouth, tonguing what is and must
remain inapprehensible—

saying *You are not finite. You are not finite.*

Defrocked

Christ the bridegroom, the briefly
almost-satiated soul forever then

the bride—

the true language of ecstasy
is the forbidden

language of the mystics:

I am true love that false was never.

I would be pierced
And I would pierce

I would eat
And I would be eaten

I am peace that is nowhere in time.

Naked their
encounter with the absolute,—

pilgrimage to a cross in the void.

A journey you still must travel, for
which you have no language
since you no longer believe it exists.

•

When what we understand about

what we are

changes, whole
parts of us fall mute.

•

We have attached sensors to your most intimate

*body parts, so that we may measure
what you think, not what you think you think.*

*The image now on the screen
will circumvent your superego and directly stimulate your*

vagina or dick

*or fail to. Writing has existed for centuries to tell us
what you think you think. Liar,
we are interested in what lies
beneath that. This won't hurt.*

•

Even in lawless dreams, something
each night in me again

denies me

the false coin, false
creature I crave to embrace—

for those milliseconds, not

false. Not false. Even if false,
the waters of paradise

are there, in the mind, the sleeping

mind. *Why this puritan each*

night inside me that again denies me.

•

Chimeras glitter: fierce energy you
envy.

Chimeras ignorant they're chimeras
beckon.

As you reach into their crotch, they foretell
your fate.

With a sudden rush of milk you taste
what has

no end.

•

We long for the Absolute, Royce
said. Voices you once

heard that you can never *not* hear again,—

... spoiled priest, liar, if you want something
enough, sometimes you think it's there.

He is Ava Gardner

He is Ava Gardner at the height of her beauty
in *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman*.

I had allowed him to become, for me, necessity.
I was not ever for him necessity.

An adornment, yes. A grace-note. Not
necessity.

Everyone, the men at least, are crazy about
Pandora. She is smart,

self-deprecating, funny. She who has seen,
seemingly, everything about love, and says

she has no idea what love is—
who knows the world finds her beautiful, so that

she must test every man and slightly disgusted
find him wanting—clearly she has not, in this

crowd of men eager to please her, to flatter
and bring her drinks, found someone

who is, for her, necessity. Watching
Pandora and the Flying Dutchman, you feel sympathy

for the beautiful
who cannot find anyone who is for them necessity.

•

He is Ava Gardner

at the height of her beauty.

Fucked up, you knew you'd never fall for someone not fucked up.

You watch her test each suitor. She sings about love to an old friend, drunk, a poet.

He asks her to marry him. After she again refuses, you see him slip something into his drink—

then he dies, poisoned. She says he has tried that too many times, now she feels nothing.

Promising nothing, she asks the famous race-car driver, who also wants to marry her,

to shove the car he has worked on for months over the cliff, into the sea. He

does. In the first flush of pleasure, she agrees to marry him. The next day

he has the car's carcass, pouring water, dragged up from the sea.

You are the learned, amused professor surrounded by his collections, who carefully pieces together

fragments of Greek pots. You know it is foolish to become another suitor. *Hors de*

combat, soon you are the only one she trusts. You become, at moments, her confessor.

•

Then she meets the Dutchman. He offers little, asks nothing.

When she withdraws her
attention, he isn't spooked.

Because, when she meets him, he is
painting the portrait of someone who has

her face, with petulance
she scrapes off the face.

He charmingly makes her head a blank
ovoid, and says that's better.

She thinks that she is the knife
that, cutting him, will heal him.

•

You know she is right. You have discovered
he is the fabled Dutchman—who for

centuries has sailed the world's seas
unable to die, unable to die though

he wants to die. You know what it is to
want to die. His reasons

are a little contrived, a mechanism of the plot:
reasons that Pandora, at the end, discovers:

he murdered, centuries earlier, through
jealousy and paranoia, his wife: now

unless he can find a woman
willing to die

out of love for him, sail out with him
and drown, he cannot ever

find rest. This logic

makes sense to her: she who does not
believe in love
will perform an act proving its existence.

•

She wants, of course, to throw her life away.
The Dutchman will always arrive

because that's what she wants.
Those of us who look on, who want

the proximate and partial to continue,
loathe the hunger for the absolute.

•

*All your life you have watched as two creatures
think they have found in each other*

*necessity. Watched as the shell
then closes, for a time, around them.*

You envy them, as you gather with
the rest of the village, staring out to sea.

When she swims out to his boat, to give
herself, both succeed at last in drowning.

•

Couples stay together when each of the two
remains a necessity for the other. Which you

cannot know, until they
cease to be. Tautology

that is the sum of what you know.

He is a master, he has lived by
becoming the master
of the alchemy that makes, as you
stare into some one
person's eyes, makes you adore him.

Eyes that say that despite the enormous
landscapes that divide you
you are brothers, he too is trapped in
all that divides soul from soul. Then
suddenly he is fluttering his finger ends
between yours. He rises
from the table, explains he had no
sleep last night, and leaves.

•

You couldn't worm your way into
becoming, for him, necessity.
When did he grow bored with seduction and
confessors, and find the Dutchman?—
For months there has been nothing
but silence. When you sent him a pot only
you could have with care pieced together
from the catastrophe of history, more
silence. *The enterprise is abandoned.*

•

Something there is in me that makes me

think I need this thing. That gives this thing
the illusion of necessity.

As enthralled to flesh
as I, he could not see beneath this old
face I now wear, this ruinous, ugly
body, that I

I am the Dutchman.

But nobody knows, when living, where
necessity lies. Maybe later, if history
is lucky, the urn
will not refuse to be pieced together.

This is neither good nor bad.
It is what is.

Mourn

Why so hard
to give up

what often
was ever

even then
hardly there.

But the safe
world my will

constructed
before him

this soul could
not find breath

in. He brought
electric

promise-crammed
sudden air.

Then withdrew
lazily

as if to
teach you how

you must live
short of breath.

Still now crave
sudden air.

The enterprise is abandoned.

I'm not a fool, I knew from the beginning
what couldn't happen. What couldn't happen

didn't. *The enterprise is abandoned.*

But half our life is
dreams, delirium, everything that underlies

that feeds

that keeps alive the illusion of sanity, semi-
sanity, we allow

others to see. The half of me that feeds the rest

is in mourning. Mourns. Each time we must
mourn, we fear this is the final mourning, this time

mourning never will lift. A friend said when a lover

dies, it takes
two years. Then it lifts.

Inside those two years, you punish

not only the world,
but yourself.

At seventy-two, the future is what I mourn.

Since college I've never forgotten Masha
in *The Seagull* saying *I am in mourning for my life.*

She wears only black, she treats others with

fierce solicitude
and sudden punishment.

The enterprise is abandoned. And not.

Janáček at Seventy

*It was merely a locket but it was
a locket only*

I could have made—

Once she is told that it was made
for her, recognizes it as a locket

her little agile famous-in-his-little-world

Vulcan
himself

made only for her, she must

reach for it, must
place it around her neck.

Soon the warmth of her flesh

must warm what I have made.
Her husband will know who made it

so she will wear it

only when
alone, but wear it she will.

Threnody on the Death of Harriet Smithson

She was barely twenty, she was called
Miss Smithson, but through her

Juliet, Desdemona

found superb utterance. A new
truth, Shakespeare's old truth

bewitched us, unheard

until she made us hear it—she
heralded a revolution

Madame Dorval, Lemaître, Malibran,

yes, Victor Hugo
and Berlioz

then taught us we had always known.

Now, at fifty-four, she is dead,—
... bitter that fame long ago abandoned her.

I think her fate our fate, the planet's fate.

•

These fleeting creatures, that flit by
giving themselves to us

and the air

unable to etch there

anything permanent

Addicted to the ecstasies of

carving again from darkness
a shape, an illusion of light

They say, *I wash my hands of the gods*

this has existed

whether the whirling planet tomorrow

survive, whether recording angels exist

•

On this stage at this
moment *this* has existed

unerasable because already erased

Everything finally, of course, is
metaphysical

this has existed

THREE

HISTORY IS A SERIES OF FAILED
REVELATIONS

Dream of the Book

That great hopefulness that lies in
imagining you are an unreadable, not
blank slate, but something even you cannot
read because words will rise from its
depths only when you at last
manage to expose it to air,—
the pathology of the provinces. *You need
air.*

•

Then you find air. Somehow somewhere
as if whatever feeds expectation were
wounded, gutted by the bewildering self-
buried thousand impersonations
by which you know you
made and remade
yourself,—
one day, staring at the mountain,
you ceased to ask
Open Sesame
merely requiring that narrative reveal

something structural about the world.

•

Reading history

you learn that those who cannot read
history are condemned to repeat it

etcetera

just like those who
can, or think they can.

*Substitute the psyche for history substitute myth for
the psyche economics
for myth substitute politics, culture, history etc.*

•

As if there were a book

As if there were a book inside which you can
breathe

Where, at every turn, you see at last the lineaments

Where the end of the earth's long dream of
virtue is *not*, as you have

again and again found it here, the will

gazing out at the dilemmas
proceeding from its own nature

unbroken but in stasis

•

Seduced not by a book but by the idea
of a book

like the *Summa* in five fat volumes, that your priest

in high school explained Thomas Aquinas
almost finished, except that there were,

maddeningly, “just a few things he didn’t

have time, before dying, quite
to figure out”

•

That history is a series of failed revelations

you’re sure you hear folded, hidden
within the all-but-explicit

bitter

taste-like-dirt inside Dinah Washington’s
voice singing *This bitter earth*

•

A few months before Thomas’

death, as he talked with Jesus
Jesus asked him

what reward he wanted for his

virtue—
to which Thomas replied, *You, Lord,*

only You—

which is why, as if this vision

unfit him for his life, he told the priest
prodding him to take up once again
writing his book, *Reginald, I cannot:*
everything I have written I now see is straw.

•

Though the Book whose text articulates
the text of
creation
is an arrogance, you think, flung by priests
at all that is
fecund, that has not yet found being
Though priests, addicted to
unanswerable but necessary questions,
also everywhere are addicted to cruel answers
you wake happy
when you dream
you have seen the book, the Book exists

•

You sail protested, contested
seas, the something within you that
chooses your masters
itself not chosen. Inheritor inheriting
inheritors, you must earn what you inherit.

Inauguration Day

(JANUARY 20, 2009)

Today, despite what is dead

staring out across America I see since
Lincoln gunmen
nursing fantasies of purity betrayed,
dreaming to restore
the glories of their blood and state

despite what is dead but lodged within us, hope

under the lustrous flooding moon
the White House is still
Whitman's White House, its
gorgeous front
full of reality, full of illusion

hope made wise by dread begins again

Race

(FOR LEON WOOD, JR.)

*America is ours
to ruin but
not ours to dream.*

*The unstained but
terrifying land
Europe imagined*

*soon the whole
stained
planet dreamed.*

•

My grandmother, as a teenager,
had the guts to leave

Spain, and never see her parents again—

arriving in America
to her shame

she could not read. O you taught by

deprivation
that your soul is flawed:—

to her shame she could not read.

•

Olive-skinned, bewilderingly
dark, in this California surrounded
everywhere by the brown-skinned
dirt-poor progeny of those her ancestors
conquered and enslaved, she insisted we are
Spanish. Not Mexican. Spanish-Basque.

•

Disconsolate to learn her
seven-year-old grandson
spent the afternoon visiting the house—
had entered, had
eaten at the house—
of his new black friend, her fury
the coward grandson sixty-five years
later cannot from his nerves erase.

•

Or the rage with which she stopped her
daughter from marrying a Lebanese
doctor whose skin was
too dark. Actual Spain
was poverty and humiliation so
deep she refused to discuss it—
or, later, richer, to return.
But the Spanish her only

daughter, my mother, divorced, light-

skinned, spoke

was pure

Castilian. On her walls, the dead world

she loathed and obeyed

kept vigil

from large oval dark oak frames.

•

The terrifying land the whole stained
planet dreamed unstained

Europe first imagined. To me, as a child,
Europe was my grandmother—

clinging to what had
cost her everything, she thought

the mutilations exacted by
discriminations of color

rooted in the stars. We brought
here what we had.