

Baton Rouge

In the narrow corridor
of a sleeping car
on a train passing
through Louisiana,
I reached for the red
pen in my jacket pocket.

Suddenly alive,
in relief and pride,
I hold up my
baton rouge.

My red pen
is the storyteller,
this upcoming night
of performance,
in Birmingham,
Alabama.

Live and Die

On a small bridge,
I listen to the
frogs croak.

The chirping
of the crickets
plays havoc with
the joyful dying
of the frogs.

It's an irritating
alarm to keep
the frogs from
their wonderful
dying, their rich,
satisfied,
happy dying.

It's the unrelenting
whine of busybodies
who love their lives
of correction.

The frogs say,
"Live and die,
live and die."

Someone's Coming

One overcast day,
I stood on the sand
of Bodega Bay,
looking west,
as if I was expecting
someone to arrive,
not from the water,
not from the shore,
nor from the air,
but from the vast
ocean of the unknown.

I felt my soles sink,
grain by grain,
as my weight
reshaped the sand
beneath my feet.

Nearby,
there was an
overturned blue boat,
unused, by the look
of it, for many years.

I waited for the someone
of the boat to arrive.

I listened to the lapping
of the water in a slight
breeze at the grassy
shoreline.

I waited for the someone
of the shoreline to arrive.

Then I realized
we were all there.

I realized there were
many someones there,
and I realized I was the same
someone in their company.

Sardines and Wine

You said you didn't like the TV,
so I put it in the closet
in my hotel room
in North Beach,
and we made love.

First, we ate our stash
of sardines and drank wine.

Then, lying naked,
I dove into your skin with my eyes,
and I told you all the colors I saw.

You said that wasn't pretty at all,
and I said it was beautiful.

Six months later, while making love,
I felt my heart go through my ribs
and embrace your heart,
which had come out to meet it.

It was the only time, and later,
it was heart-breaking to remember.

One day, we pulled up in front of the María Hotel,
and I said, "Well, here were."

I got my words goofy,
and you laughed your great laugh,
and I loved my mistake.

We didn't always get along,
but we always didn't-get-along great.

Answering Machine Love Poems

When I stopped seeing you around,
the love poems I had been writing
stopped, so I called you up and said
you were holding up production.

Without you in my life, the greatest
poems weren't being written.

Then you called me up and said
you hoped too many poems weren't lost.

And I called you up,
and I said I didn't know,
that poems have a life of their own,
and I listened to your voice on the machine,
over and over.

Our mutual concern
for the production of love poems
felt great.

Half-seriously, I thought,
"It's good to share this concern."

Then I felt the enormous meadow of love
open in my heart, once again.

The Jackdaw Murders

I move about the day as invisible
as a jackdaw buried in a shoebox.

Some might say it's murder.

Sometimes, when I
wake up in my shoebox,
I think it's murder, too,
but I say my prayers of gratitude,
and I remember the contentment
that chose the shoebox,
in the first place.

There is an old voice that says,
"Jackdaws don't belong in shoeboxes,
get up and get out, be a regular jackdaw,
for heaven's sake."

That's the voice of jackdaw uniqueness
that keeps us from trying new things.

People who try to change their voices
to disguise them, usually choose one
of their own less familiar voices.

It's difficult to speak in an unfamiliar voice,
it's not normal among jackdaws,

for a jackdaw to be invisible,
but it's as normal as a jackdaw can be.

Lonely Nights

There is a man sitting nearby,
who has a truly annoying voice,
monotonously soft,
like the low growl of a beaten dog,
who never strikes back.

It's the ingratiating murmur
of unrepentent weakness,
the secret superiority
of the unheroic martyr.

A couple of women
really like this guy.

I look around the room at all the
unchallenged and unadventurous men,
and I think that if I were a woman,
I'd go howling into the night.

Then I wonder why I don't see
the women in this place
in the same light.

Partly, I suppose,
because I'm not a woman,
and partly because I know how
lonely it is, out there in the night

after the howling is done.

Female for a While

A man became a woman for a short time,
he looked at his breasts in a light blue dress
of smooth cotton. They were like smashed
cardboard or a dry river bed.

He walked across a crowded commons,
and no one noticed anything peculiar.

He went to his room and changed
back to a man like changing clothes.

Outside his room,
and echoing for years,
he listened to the shouting
of angry, derisive voices.

He knew that being a woman
was a way of teaching him things
he might not otherwise learn, but
the men and boys in the juvenile corridors
were completely confused.

They ran around like drunk college boys
or chickens with their hearts cut out.

The Forest of Trees

Once upon a time,
a man had perfect vision.

He could see the past,
and he could see the future.

He could see the present,
exactly as it was,
with the threads of past and future intertwined.

He could see the thousand faces
that mingled and quarreled in any one face.

One day, he met a woman
who made him feel innocent.

She said to him,
“I see you, you big bag of flaws,”
and she forgave him for the accident
of what we call wisdom,
his so-called ability to see so much.

“If you’re a seer,” she said,
“then I’m a seer sucker.”

She taught him how to forget all he saw
and get busy making things with his eyes closed.

She found out he was ticklish,
and they tickled each other.

One day he looked at her,
and he wasn't afraid of the things he saw.

He saw a forest, and he saw the trees.

It all belonged that way,
it was complete, and so were they.

The Island Cabin

Many years ago,
I lived for a few weeks in a cabin
with a girl and another couple,
on the island called Martha's Vineyard.

I was very busy in my head,
with the girl who would,
a year later, become my wife,
and with the girl who was with my friend.

I thought about the cabin a little,
at the time, and briefly, recently.

I went wide in my memory,
and I left the old thinking.

I left the cabin porch,
I went around to the side of the cabin,
I lay down in the deep, warm sand,
threaded with grass, by the side of the cabin.

I lay down on the ground, where no one was,
and I lay there for a long enough time
to be there with the island.

The island became my summer companion,
for a long enough time for the memory

to become a different memory
than the one I'd had before.

I found out that the past is a willing friend.

The Interview

I had the chance to interview a great man,
I asked him what made him great.

He said he was merely doing
what great people have always done,
they act as if they are great people,
without knowing for sure
if they are right.

They proceed on faith, and they discover
they were great people anyway,
they merely acted on it.

“It always works,
you can do the same,
and you will have the same results,
you will realize that you, too,
are a great man, or a great woman,
if you will.”

Then I watched him eat an orange,
and I'll be damned if I could tell the difference.

Evolution

The painter is angry,
her craft has become irritating,
she feels like she's been painting
with boots on her hands.

She flings her brush against the wall,
it's a nice wall,
she winces to think of the paint
splattering off the brush
as it hits the wall.

After she lets go of the flying brush,
she watches it sail through the air.

In her painter's eye,
she paints the brush flying across the room,
she paints the brush hitting the wall,
she paints her own startled face
of confusion, anger, and hurt.

She can't stop painting everything,
in her mind.

It bothers her to be so conscious
of the least conscious passion of her life.

“The trouble with being human,”

she says, “is I have to learn things,
even the things of my heart,
even the things that depend on instinct.”

“Animals don’t learn this stuff,” she says,
and goes to retrieve the brush,
her sense of the painting
already into the next phase,
evolving.

The Eulogy

“She turned in the doorway to the bedroom,
she hooked her thumb in the garter
on her glistening thigh.”

“Shit,” he said, “why am I reading this,
this isn’t going to do me any good.”

He tossed the magazine across the floor
and thought about his cousin in Toledo,
he didn’t have a cousin in Toledo,
it was a way he had of rearranging his thoughts,
like a piece of bread between wine tastings.

He slid off the bed and lay on the hardwood floor,
he hadn’t done that in years.

He crawled, army style, like kids do,
across the floor, under the desk,
and he said, “Sergeant,
I think there’s incoming.”

He assumed a gruff voice and said,
“You THINK there’s incoming, Shit-for-brains,
you THINK there’s incoming?”

Then he made a huge explosion with his mouth
and blew himself and the sergeant to smithereens.

He stood up and said, solemnly,
“Shit-for-brains was a lousy soldier,
but nobody liked him.”

He got the magazine and looked at the pictures,
it was fun looking at the pictures of girls
without any clothes on.

I'm So Tired

I'm so tired,
I'm as tired as an old woolen rug,
I'm as tired as an old wooden ladder,
I'm as tired as an old battery,
I'm as tired as an old alternator,
an old distributor,
an old generator.

These old things that I'm as tired as
are nice things to be as tired as.

I'm as tired as any old metaphor you might think of.

I like being as tired as a metaphor,
I don't especially like being as tired as a simile,
I don't mind saying that I'm as tired as a old woolen rug,
but I'd rather say, "I am an old woolen rug,"
than say, "I'm like an old woolen rug."

When I say I'm "like" an old woolen rug,
I imagine a picture of me and a picture of a rug,
side by side, an invitation to comparison.

I can jump from metaphor to simile, but I don't
like that *before and after* business with the pictures.

I never want to be as tired as a tired metaphor,

a tired metaphor is as bad as a tired simile,
no matter how you slice it, I never
want to be that tired.

The tired I am,
right now,
is just fine with me.

Animal Attraction

Joy attracts animals,
we're often glad to see babies and small animals,
and they like our gladness.

They don't care in the slightest that we like them,
like we think they do,
it isn't being nice to a cat that pleases the cat,
it's the gladness in our hearts that the cat recognizes.

Babies and animals are discouraged by human angst,
the animals who aren't hungry will turn on their heels,
and babies would, too, if they had recourse.

But the course is set for babies and most house-pets,
some cats will crouch, as high as possible, like panthers,
looking for gladness, upon which they will pounce,
there being so little of it in the world.

It is the greatest grievance to the animals
and a sign of their extraordinary patience
that they continue their vigil,
even to this present day.

The Stone Wall

A boy was out playing, one day,
when he came upon a stone wall.

For no reason, it seemed to him,
there was a stone wall in the middle
of nowhere, as he called it.

He liked the stone wall,
he'd never liked a stone wall before,
but this one was unique.

The boy became friends with the wall,
he thought the wall had been his friend all along,
and probably was, even before they met.

Whenever he got a chance,
he would go and sit by the wall,
and he always felt good about it,
he always left the wall feeling good.

One day, he began to listen to the wall,
there was a hollow in the stone wall,
and he began to listen to the hollow,
as if it might SAY something.

One day, he heard the wind speaking
through the hollow in the stone wall,

and it was the voice of God,
or it seemed like it,
and it said, "WHO," or "YOU,"
and it seemed to say, "SING."

It was the message he wanted to hear,
once he heard it, and he began to sing,
just like the wall recommended.

The Root Wife

There was a man, a long time ago,
who was concerned about his wife.

She wept all the time, all she did was weep,
she was a weeping willow, and he thought
he was the roots of the willow.

He thought he was the source of her
weeping and the source of her strength,
because, despite her weeping, she
remained strong and firmly grounded.

He thought his wife was rooted in him,
and he was of the earth, the soil,
the source, the nourishment.

He thought he was the source of everything,
which left very little for her to be.

Then, one day, it occurred to him
that if he was the roots of the willow,
how was it that he could see her so well?

He wasn't the roots, he was the branches,
he had been the one who was weeping.

He had been thinking upside down,

he had been trying to root himself in the air,
and his wife wasn't weeping, she was
soaking up the moisture in the earth.

He apologized for his error,
and she forgave him.

He wept.

The Handsome Man and the Goodlooking Woman Cafe

Frank sat at his usual table
in **The Handsome Man and
the Goodlooking Woman Cafe**,
and he said to himself, "What is it
about this place I find so appealing?
The food is OK, but it isn't great,
the prices are moderate, and that's good,
the decor is fine, but it's nothing special."

Even the music was no big deal to Frank,
but he liked the ambience, the atmosphere,
something about it made Frank feel right at home.

He looked around at the furniture,
the paintings on the walls,
and the view outside the windows.

He examined the cafe
for those little accidents of nuance
that might have affected him so amicably.

It might be something like a choice of floor tile
or the presence of an odd piece,
like a piano or a jukebox.

Even though he liked everything about the place,
he thought he liked it all, just because he did.

“Maybe it’s me,” he thought, “maybe it’s the frame of mind I’m in and nothing more.”

Frank sat at his usual table in **The Handsome Man and the Goodlooking Woman Cafe** and wondered, “Everybody else here seems to like it, too, it could be the lay lines in the earth, it could be the good nature of the owner’s dog. Oh, well, whatever it is, it works.”

Guns and Butter

When I saw a cube of sugar dissolve in a cup of coffee,
I congratulated myself on the courage it took for me
to take a bath, "I am one brave hombre," I thought.

Now, I've heard about the sigh of relief and the look
of relief, but what about the grunt of relief and the
shout of relief?

I think relief comes in many forms,
and none should be overlooked,
like the snort of relief
and the flapping lips of relief.

A man once climbed the highest mountain
in the Himalayas, in order to talk to the wisest man
in the world and ask him if he would reveal
the secret to long life.

"Can you tell me the secret to long life?"
the man said, nearly faint in the Himalayan heights.

"Don't hold your breath," the wise man said.

The Army Recruiter

I went back to my father's hometown,
I went way back in time to the place of my father's life,
it was a dusty, dirty street, there wasn't any pavement.

It was like a town in Old Mexico,
with a short row of stores in plain adobe
with signs of painted lettering on the walls.

I went back in time before The First Great War,
I watched the men of the town deal with the issue
of conscription with the army recruiter.

The army man said, "Come on, let's go,"
and the local men acted like they
didn't understand a word he said.
Instead, they played dumb.

There was a table set up in the middle of the street,
the men of the town jumped up on the table like monkeys
and made silly noises. They made it hard for the army.

I thought there must have been a time,
before paved roads, or in my ancient memory,
when wars went unanswered.

The Pillar

I stood in the open plaza of the dusty,
little country town where my father had lived,
I watched an old farmer come into the square and
step up onto a pedestal, that had been placed there.

He took a posture of prayer.
He was a poorly dressed old farmer,
humble and grateful.

The pedestal was over
a spot of great spiritual power.

The old farmer stood silently on
the pedestal, and then he got down.

No one seemed to notice him,
and no one bothered him.

It was an accepted thing to do,
in the ancient village of my father's
father's father. I went back in time,
and I stood on the pedestal.

It was like being on a box
on top of a crude stone pillar.

Sexual Piety

The trick to really good sex
is to bring the spirit of God into your genitals.
A lot of people have got it backwards,
they think you need to get out of your body
to be spiritual.

I say if your spirit abandons your body,
you have essentially failed at life.

The challenge of life is to open up and let spirit in,
and that means all the way in, not just part of the way.

Some people let spirit as far down as their hearts,
that's a great advance, but it still isn't the whole way.

Let spirit all the way down into your genitals,
into your bowels, all the way down to the ground
beneath your feet.

Say this little prayer, "God, my lower parts belong to you.
Thy will be done, down here, as it is up there. Amen."

A Real Tomato

I lay on the grass, listening to opera sung
in the park on a beautiful Sunday afternoon.

A truly beautiful young woman sat next to me,
with a handsome man who wore a gold ring
encrusted with diamonds. Encrusted.

They opened a knapsack and lunched on fresh rolls,
deli meats, and a large ripe tomato, which they passed
between them, sharing it, sucking on it like they were
giving each other hickeys.

I was struck by the sheer natural beauty of her arms
and her legs, her back and her neck, her forehead
and her chin, her eyebrows and her hair.

It was as if she had offered me a plum or a fig,
and it amazed me that I could take it,
without giving her another hickey,
or wishing I could get one from her.

“Thank you,” I thought, “thank you, very much.”

The Poet at Work

A poet saw himself sitting
at the far end of a vast cafe.

“What amazing eyes that other one has,” he said.
“He has the eyes of an actor in an engaging play,
the eyes of truth in drama.

If one encountered that drama, suddenly, on the street,
one would be afraid of such amazement, but when we
go into the theatre for our amazement,
it feels natural and acceptable.

We witness the amazement of everything we ever do,
acted out for us. True amazement is swallowed up in
life outside the theatre, it's kept unseen and unspoken.

When life is threatened, the amazement comes out,
and it's wondrous to see. There sits the poet like
a crack in the mirror. He's not safely on stage,
and yet he shows the unseen.

What should we do with him?

Oh, good, he's found some book, now he's reading,
he's looking at the pages, now he's writing, he's as
busy as a lamb at pasture, as a lion at carrion.”

Phoebe

I went to an outdoor concert given by a singer,
who said she was thinking of her daughter,
who was three thousand miles away.

She said she was also thinking about
chicken fajitas, thanks to an advertisement,
facing her, but behind everyone else.

One woman in the crowd was reading
“The Hero with a Thousand Faces,”
one man was doing the Sunday crossword puzzle,
while he stood listening.

The singer talked about how skinny another singer was,
the woman next to me said this was one of those times
she wished she was taller, so she could see over
the heads of the shoulder-to-shoulder crowd.

One very tall woman stood in front of me,
her nearness felt good and reminded me
how satisfying it is to hug tall women.

The singer sang ballads of love lost and found,
and a great eagle rose out of her throat
and spread its giant wings across the sky,
obscuring the sun, and raising a wind of
such purity no other bird could fly in it.

The pure cry from her throat raised a chorus
of helpless cries from the crowd.

A Tin Drum

There is a woman who loves me,
and there is a woman I love,
but they are not the same.

I'd like to get together with the woman
who loves me and tell her, "Now, I know
what you're feeling, now, we are the same,"
but it would be wrong to share with her
our mutual dilemma.

If the woman I love came to me and said,
"I love someone, too, but he doesn't love me,"
I'd say, "Well then, you fool, turn around,
look at me," but what empty words they'd be
if I heard them from the woman who loves me.

"I can't turn around and love you back,
it wouldn't be true." What can we do,
all the lovers who love the backs of the
lovers in front of us, all the lovers who
want the line to turn around, about face.

This foolish line of love; in one direction,
black as domino faces, in the other, bright
as face cards. We march like tin soldiers
to the beat of a tin drum held in the hands of
a sad child who doesn't like himself very much.

Going Against Nature

“You’re making a wonderful mistake,” she said,
when I agreed to take a chance and be her lover.

I thought it was going against nature,
when my nature was to wither and die.

I’d been so long in that direction that a momentum
of withering and dying had nearly taken over.

I fought the momentum of my suffering, and I tried
to give into it, I allowed it to be better and worse,
by turns, but it was sure in its constancy.

It was my nature, or so I thought, then she showed up
and started to teach me how to ruin my life for good.

“Let this happen, and you’ll be sorry,” she said,
“you’ll hate it, because it won’t feel right.”

What could I say against such logic? She was offering me
a new kind of suffering, a kind I’d never tasted before.

She was offering me the exquisite pain of transformation,
I couldn’t resist the challenge of ripping my guts out
and tossing them in the washing machine, putting
them and all my other organs back in my body,
squeaky clean and aching with originality.

What a bonanza of pain, what a reward for my preparation, I'd learned everything but this.

Sea of Love

I was naked in the cafe. The raw naked love poured out of me from every pore, gushing from every orifice, flooding from every chakra.

So much love rushed from me toward the one I loved that at first I was amazed to be unseen by most, until another woman appeared between me and my beloved.

She seemed unharmed by the great wave of love, she seemed to be sunning herself like a dolphin, she seemed serene, like a fisherman on a fertile sea.

Yellowstone Revisited

Here's another crisis for you;
I'm in love with you, and I bring
with me the full crisis of love.

This is no casual catastrophe,
I'm unable to offer you a mild disturbance,
I'm beyond being small about it.

When you look at me,
you won't be able to see a minor conflagration,
I'm a fire of major alarm, I'm trying to be contained,
like a forest aflame, contained by an army, but
I'm sweeping toward your hillsides, unrelenting.

If you accept me, I'll be transformed to sunlight,
If you reject me, I'll reappear as a memory
of futures only dreamt of.

True Insanity

I'm insane, I've put myself in the hands of an insane god,
I'm in the hands of the only god, the insane god of us all.

How could a god be god of us all, if that god wasn't insane,
more insane than I can imagine, and I'm nuttier than a fruitcake.

If it weren't for curbs on the streets and walls around the rooms,
I'd be entirely without boundary, "What are you?" someone might
ask, and I'd have to say, in all honesty, "I'm dangerous, volatile,
dense, and active, I think like a gas, and I feel like a solid."

Look, up in the air, look, down on the ground, what is it,
it's a man in love, faster, more powerful, able to leap,
and crazy as a loon, my hero.

The Subject at Hand

There was a time when if she didn't love me,
then neither would I, but times have changed.

I love myself, in spite of her love or not her love,
I've come to a fondness for myself, not like a Narcíssus,
more like a parent, so if my beloved were to miss my love,
I would take myself out for a long walk, encourage in myself
a gentle grieving, and tell myself it's better to have loved,
and therefore, never to have lost.

"I've lost, I've lost, I've lost!" I would cry, always in threes.

"The ability to love, the willingness to love, and especially to
have loved, is a gift, and that makes you the prize, that she's lost.

You haven't lost, even though you remain unclaimed," I'd respond.

"Yeah, but she couldn't lose what she didn't try to win.
She couldn't lose what she'd never looked for," I'd say.

"Picky, picky," I'd say back, and change the subject.

Lone Wolf

There was a man who lived in the Wilderness, and when he came into the City, he lived as if he was still in the Wilderness.

The World was a place of great adventure, he loved it and all the things in it, he was a private man, in a teeming universe, nothing was out of place or unforeseen.

One day, he thought he might have picked up a virus, he laughed at the microscopic wilderness he knew lived inside him and inside all of life's creatures.

He knew that when a storm passed or a plague of insects arrived, it affected the entire landscape, he began to feel alone, he'd never felt alone before, as alone as he had always lived, this new feeling plagued him, he couldn't shake it, in the crowded city or above the timberline, he felt well enough, but he didn't feel better.

"I've lost everything!" he cried, as his heart began reshaping his universe, "I cannot live like this!" he vowed, as his soul began to teach him a new way, a way he'd never known, in all his wandering.

"I will die like this!" he said, and he began to die, just in time.

I Want You for Your Mind

I love the steady flame of your intelligence.

Imagine saying that
to your lover in your embrace.

*I love the capacity of your intellect,
like the eye of an eagle.*

Think about using that line at a party.

*I think you have the gift of genius,
and that part of you excites me,
like mounting a carapace
at the peak of the Pyrenees,
the Píco de Aneto.*

Could you tell that to her or him,
and mean it?

Think for a minute of the sudden wonder
that shocks a gasp from your throat.

Is your mind no less an organ than any other?
Does your mind only play catch-up to your emotions,
is it equal to the orgasm you imagine happening
somewhere else? She is. He is. You are.

Joy Profound as Sorrow

If you want a challenge, tell the unvarnished truth of joy,
tell the hard facts of peacefulness, without flinching, the way
the hard-boiled authors tell the heartless failure of hurtful lives.

We accept the stoic death and the cry of pain,
but there's another story, the story of unblinking joy
and immense serenity, that defines itself as clearly,
for those who see and feel them, as a knife goes
into the belly of a man reaching for his life,
as it flees his body in a wretched alley.

It is a story no less sharp, true peace and true joy
are not told by sentimentalists or romanticists who
only fantasize their stories, their fantasies deny
the richer reality, by embellishing a paltry reality
with pretty lies and reassuring pain.

The truth of misery and insanity have left us
embracing cruelty and destruction as the talisman
of honest storytelling, cheap courage, it is the courage
of the soldier who kills and dies without feeling.

There's a greater courage in the one who puts away
the steely heart, and loves, at great risk to his uniform
of cold reckoning, in a universe of bare survival.

Not the Same Vale

If this world is a vale of tears,
the spirit world is a vale of laughter.

I say *if*, to introduce a foreign concept,
I know for a fact that the spirit world rocks
with laughter, and there, they depend on
our tragedy for relief and balance.

When people who've lived tragic lives,
die, or when people die tragically, they go
among the angels and tell their terrible stories,
and the angels admire them and embrace them.

They say, "Yes, it's good to remember, it's good
to hear the terrible stories, how easily we forget,
thank you for reminding us."

Soon, the newcomers forget themselves
and join the jubilant throng, needing to be told,
from time to time, of the tragic tears of a distant past.

An Ancient Taboo

There's an ancient taboo against watching a woman while she nurses a baby.

The story goes that if you stare at the wet nipple and the wet mouth of the child, you will become, for some time after, like a baby yourself.

The taste of the nipple in your mouth will not leave you for days and may linger as long as a year in your confused sense of self.

To all outward appearances, you'll be the same, this is the cruelest part of the curse, your behavior will betray subtle changes, despite your normal appearance.

These changes may include an increased sense of serenity and an inability to concentrate on impossible tasks.

You may experience an abnormal euphoria and a desire to hold and be held by people you care about, but without your normal discretion

Most awkwardly, you will sometimes feel an urge to scream at the top of your lungs at the approach of uncharitable and unkind people. Beware of catching sight of a child at the breast of a nursing woman, the danger is great.

The Artist from the Art

The moment a singer ends her song, a sculptor lays aside his chisel, or a dancer stands down, the enraptured lovers of the art fill the vacuum with themselves.

They close the gap, they take the place once held by the artist, they become one with the art.

While the singer sings, the sculptor remains, or the dancer dances, we see no separation.

When the artist steps apart from the art, we are left alone with it, as if caught in a forbidden embrace.

The artist is moved out, becomes oddly useless, unwanted, but acknowledged, like a child at a funeral, or a matchmaker on the honeymoon, or tossed aside, like a goblet into the fireplace, as the now empty carrier of the spirit.

Later, on the street, the artist is a reminder of a private pleasure, an intruder in an intimacy, made either holy or ridiculous, according to our willingness to admit ecstasy, our willingness to face ourselves, in our finest embarrassment.

In a Lighted Place

When you leave a place, even a brightly lit place, some light goes with you, and the great blanket of light eventually becomes threadbare.

You can see through the light in an empty place, there, the light doesn't enrich sight, it reverberates, like a cheap amplifier and bad speakers, the light gets louder and drowns out color it had shown brightly, only moments before.

It isn't only one's leaving that creates this draining of soul from the light, the light gets lonely, it misses you and pines for you, it suffers from your absence, as it suffers from the absence of forests and jungles.

The sound the Moon makes is a mournful cry for the Man who left when we stopped sending him there with our dreams, the lunar expedition was a half-hearted gesture to assuage the Moon.

Neil Armstrong was a puppy offered to the Moon in its grief, after it had lost its best friend.

The light needs you as much as you need the light, you are bound together, give the light your best, the light will reward you with its brilliance.

The Way of All Love

A man found a flower, a woman,
a way of being of incomparable beauty,
and it died, she died to him, it died in him.

What about the man who found a flower?

He was astounded by its beauty, he gazed at it
rapturously, he sang songs to it, he wrote poems
to it, he praised it to the world, he took it with him
wherever he went, he nurtured it and protected it,
he displayed it with care and pride, it died.

As it was dying, he said to it, "Why are you dying?
I've loved you more than anything I've ever known.
Why do you die? I've done everything for you.
What did I do wrong? How did I fail?"

With its last, sweet-scented breath,
the most lovely flower he had ever seen,
said to the man who loved it, "You never ...
let me ... love you."

A Natural Holiday

I have come upon one of those rare days,
a Natural Holiday, the kind of day we try
to create, imitate, and make permanent.

It never works, the parks, playgrounds,
stadiums and theatres are filled to capacity
with those trying to capture or recapture this day.

The result of enforced holidays is a mockery,
as a nation of amateur actors attempts to fool itself
into believing the ruse, the audience takes to the stage
and everyone plays the identical role of Rudolph
the Red Nose Reindeer, Uncle Sam, or Eros,
Resplendent on a Field of Hearts.

Natural holidays appear out of nowhere, unplanned
and unexpected, they come all the time, but most don't
recognize them, and even fewer celebrate them.

In order to celebrate a natural holiday, one must have
a natural sense of celebration, there's always one child,
at the Fourth of July fireworks, who looks up at the fiery
sky the same as when she first saw her mother's eyes.

Were there magical skies in your mother's eyes,
when you were once a child of natural wonder?

The Gardens at Versailles

There are beautiful children,
who, if they were left to thrive entirely
without our guidance, might become
exactly what we imagine.

They don't, and they can't,
because of our insistent imagination,
it's one thing to erect a trellis for climbing vines,
another to design their random path, put wires
in their stems, and spray paint the leaves
the color of their projected maturity.

I ate a horse and saddle, yesterday,
it all came out like creamed corn and
banana skins, like everything else I eat.

Even stories have wires in them and need
a good enema, occasionally, I feel better now.

A Million in One

I love to see her doing things in the world,
I love to watch the one she is, to see her being
herself in the world, this is a fascination I have
for others when they exhibit themselves remarkably.

In her, everything seems remarkable, I'm fascinated,
she's like all great and famous people, a million in one.

I am amazed by this accident. Why her? Why me,
this way, with her? I know it's called love, but
I have called other feelings love, before.

I was fascinated, once, by another, it was a shock
to look at her, she was a work of God's hand, there
was no other way to look at her, except in wonder.

That was easy to understand, this is more,
it's more than awe at an instance of creation,
this is love of life that is creating itself.

This is recognition in another of my own life, this is
the willingness toward another to love my own life,
this is love, and even as it goes toward her,
it remains in me.

Bird of Paradise

She sat in a comfortable chair, she read
a good book, she was content in all her
previous compartments of discontent.

That is to say, over the years,
there had been parts of her life
that had not satisfied her.

She'd opened up the areas of discontent,
she'd changed their names and fed
their hungry bellies.

She sat in a comfortable chair,
she read a good book,
a feeling flushed her heart,
a feeling electrified her spine,
a feeling stroked her thighs,
and stripped complacency
from her belly.

For a split-second, she was
naked in her desire to be held,
she saw someone touch someone else,
in a way that touched her,
and her concerns and preoccupations
were stolen from her by the fleetest of thieves.

A memory, in her ancient garden,
became a wildfire in her flesh and then passed,
she made and lost a fortune in a moment.

She was born, flourished, and died,
to an instantaneous afterlife of wonder,
in the blink of an eye, she was out of breath.

She grieved for the loss of what she'd only known
like a sudden bird in her sight, the frenzied beating
of wings, the startling cry, and the rush of passionate color.

The Double

A man hired a double to make love in his place, the double came to him in a lucid dream, and the man said to the double in the dream, "Why don't you come down and make love for me?"

It'd be good for any woman to make love to an angel, and it'd be good for you to have the human experience, it'd be good for me to know that at least some part of me got to have sex again."

His double agreed, but the experiment didn't work the way he wanted, it made him long for sex, more than ever.

As he was experiencing the sensations of knowing his double was engaged in sex, a woman took him aside and seduced him, much to his pleasure and astonishment.

As she was about to come, he said, "My god, you're an angel," and she said, "Yes I am."

She evaporated like steam from a kettle, she ran off with his double, he could feel them leaving his sweat-soaked body.

The Man With the Slowly Weeping Heart

A man wrote wonderful poems and stories that told the truth in a sadly loving way about his own life and the desperate lives around him, the poems and stories were filled with kindness and honor for the lives he described.

Until, one day, he looked at his poems and stories, and said, "These are stories of pity, and I write as if there is no god, and I'm responsible to step between the people I write about and their absent god.

It's pity I feel, and so many feel the same way, I write pitying poems and stories for a pitiful, self-pitying world.

I'm saying, 'There's no god to pity you, so I will.'
I'm not God, but I wish I was, I'm the Pity King,
and I pity myself as much as I pity everyone else.

There must be a God, or I wouldn't try to take his place,
I'm pretending there's no God, because I'm afraid I'd
no longer be King, As I am, I'm a pauper in the land
that has no pity, in the land of Unlimited Love."

Revelations

What duty is there for a man to be seen,
when he's known for his bushel and not his light?
There are kind people who say, in a world of bushels,
"Oh, what a lovely light," or less kindly,
"Your bushel seems to have an inner glow,"
when their most honest response would be,
"All I see is bushel."

There are those, so accustomed to the dark,
they will say, "There's a candle present,"
when they're awash in blinding light.

How responsible is anyone to make known
the exact candlepower of their presence,
when the world is so bushel conscious,
it can't tell a candle from a man shouting fire,
when bushel staves are all the rage,
what profit a man to glow?

What is the purchase of a clear light,
when Clear Light is the name for bushel varnish?

And the sun shines unceasing joy.

In Magnetism

I thought of a lover I knew
with whom the physical attraction
was as compelling as it was rare.

We were drawn to each other so strongly
that all other interests were diminished.

Our minds, hearts, occupations, histories,
the recognition of others, all were shrunk
to nearly non-existent when we were in
the embrace of our attraction.

We took no particular interest in any other
qualities, or lack of them, in the other.

In our sex, we may as well have been
outcasts in love or gods in love,
it was inconsequential which.

When we weren't together, there was
no particular awareness of the other,
looking at each other across a room,
no power caught either one's attention.

But within the heat of our physical compulsion,
we were electromagnetic, and that was that.

It was a collapsed distance of no one's choosing,
it was a mindlessness of Promethean fire,
it was magnetism.

When we were in its pull,
we were found, we were lost.

Chinatown

An accident of fate
occurred to a famous poet,
in Chinatown, one night.

He wondered what his work
would be like if his fate were
more sudden and less kind.

His Chinatown night
startled him from his greatness
back into the commonplace
of tasting his own saliva.

I Spilled Coffee on the Buddha

I was respectful, listening to the Buddha, my body was vibrating a small, constant tremor.

I felt humble, a little afraid, the Buddha's words were sweet, a gentle breeze in soft sun.

I reached for my coffee, and in a broken moment, I spilled coffee on the Buddha.

Without innocence and without guilt, my fingers knocked against the lip of the cup.

I looked up, horrified, my devil of a heart was laughing, and the Buddha was gone.

In his place, in the doorway, was a chubby family of hungry patrons, entering the ordinary cafe.