

The Love I Seek

The things I love the first time I love them
are the same as their memory once they're gone

The way I hold someone mirrors the way
I might want to hold them once more
when they can never be held again

The exquisite moment of love is the same
as the terrifying moment of its loss I seek
the love that will tear my heart out so I can
sit in the eternity of my emptiness and cherish
what I cannot hold

I Awaken to This Brevity

I awaken to this brevity of life where nothing happens
but the entirety of being where even this awareness
is caught in the vice of occurring twice twice I breathe
in every breath once for meaning and once for life

I call out to her I imagine her coming I'm sure
she's on the way I look at every car not in hoary
anticipation the sugary bitter taste of desire

But in the life where I live and breathe where I have
no idea what's about to happen and give it her name

I'm pulled apart by these pulls one toward surrender in
patient peace the other toward the pettiest of personal fears

Like a mother with a child and we're the same I have
the choice to anticipate something bad happening
or to be present with my eyes open

This pulling apart pulls parts from the center
that reveals the center more clearly than what's
been cleared away

These Outside Things of Wonder and Beauty

I used to get on the road and drive to remember
who I was alone clean and simple in need of
others but content like towns in the mountainous west
perched on slanted ground where all that remains
is only what isn't blown away or found to be useless

My family drove to the mountains every summer
and I'd feel home again stepping onto the gravel
by the river in the wind with the smell of pine
and the faint presence of brown bear and deer
not knowing I was walking alone in my heart
no longer separate from myself or anyone else

There were amusement parks in the city where
the lights on the Ferris wheel and roller coaster
were bright colors against the night sky where
everything beyond my heartbeat was wiped away

Being as a child is not simply being what
came before but being what remains

We might think we remain in memory or artifact
like images of certain scenery but what remains
is the resonant reality that first found its place
in these outside things of wonder and beauty

The Desire of the Habitually Homeless

Desire comes on me like a storm from behind
like a bear at my back and gives me too much
power where I don't need it

I look at the curve of her breast and I lose
interest in the love we all inhabit that I leave
only to gather up doubts and fears

Destination is the desire of the habitually homeless

Driving down a certain street in my hometown the
overhanging trees made it seem a tunnel to somewhere

Each time I drove that street I entered that
same tunnel to somewhere else

I didn't care that I emerged at the same intersection
with no thought of ever having arrived anywhere
different

I cared only for a time to forget about
destination on a journey without desire

Something of a Third

When you touch a brush of color to another color
and both colors are wet something of a third takes place

*We are wet with each other the pretext of our separation
is destroyed the way Matisse destroyed the canvas with color*

I feel foolish talking elliptically in public when our
private talk was this question of intimacy are we
intimates of the spirit or are we intimates of the flesh

And why are we not intimates in all ways of being there is
no perfect answer until all the questions are forgotten

I've never been able to make of myself a passenger with a
designated seat yet I sit on the bus trying to find my place
alone or in tandem with another

There's no reliable past to predict our position yet in the way
of our loving each other we avoid the thing we barely seek

A boy sits with his parents unaware of the calculations they make
to orchestrate his life into the perfect future and the glorified past
he's too busy naming the universe that's just arrived in his eyes

I'm with her in the best way possible not when I'm with her
as one or one of two but when we are something of a third
and the parts lose their designation

The Mosquito Night

What occurs in memory is a sense of color
in similar scenes an amber cube of history
the spine of a leaf an apartment in summer
a rain wet street the mosquito night
this emotional coloring

I let go of this moviemaking so no more film
is made of the redundant past that blurs the present

When eyes are heavy there's no relief in their grief
what keeps us apart is the film in our eyes

I love the romance of the pictures that populate
my mind and I love the reality I experience
in the witness of their appearance

These verbal recordings deceive their reality I misrepresent
the truth of my unsaid self whenever I say whatever I say

The grace of these accounts is not in their coloring but
in the invention of occasion from the emptiness of vision

I don't create from the history of myself but from the unknown
of who I am there's no true poem but what comes unknown

I love when I can look at others without thinking of who
I have been or who I ought to be in an embrace with open
arms in holding anything or anyone with open hands

It takes a grain of sand to make a pearl and the
pain of the grain is lost in the birth of the pearl

The Crunch Under Foot

There was a crunch to each step as I walked across snow
among sounds that leap to their death in the bitter winter

To be in a body that doesn't accept its own dying
is to be inside a submarine in an ocean of fear
one wants to steer clear of and can't

The air in the room was stifling so I stepped outside
because I could I can change anything except what
I can't and there's fear in that

I crunch across a frozen field and live on I continue to
desire love until desire itself begins to crunch underfoot

Things are begun that may not end
as well as we hope but we begin anyway

Beginnings are fraught with endings they signal a positive
but the history of our endings infiltrates our beginnings
until every beginning becomes known by an unsought ending

The more I sink into who I am the warmer the surface becomes
the center I approach in my surrender heats me where I am

With no history at the core it burns away the surface frost
as long as I don't return to the familiar sound of footsteps
on frozen snow

No Boat on a Sea of Love

I wrote a poem the last word of which was *love*
I took that word out of the poem and it said more
without the poor worn and beaten empty word
that I use like a popular brand I grew up with

Every time I think love is close I push it away
with demands on its time *what took you so long why*
don't you come more often why do you look at me like that

I float on a sea of love wishing I knew how to swim

In the middle of the sea with no boat and no land
in sight I'm alone adrift and I begin to panic

I think about swimming to shore but there is no shore
I am too far at sea then I notice it's effortless to float

I can play in the sea and fear disappears

Stuck on an Elevator with Too Much Beauty

A man went to visit his sister when on the elevator
came a woman of such beauty he had to cover his face
and sink to the floor saying *no no no too much beauty*

Two women came in *The Little Shamrock* late one night
when there were half a dozen other patrons all men
the two women sat together for half an hour they
shared a drink and talked in private conversation

The men by themselves and in pairs adjusted
to the presence of women until the two left the bar
then six men let go of their demeanor they slumped
at their tables and barstools

It had been their responsibility to respond to the presence
of women in a bar late at night until the pressure was gone

The relief in the room was palpable after the challenge
departed like men relaxing after a traffic accident had just
missed them after a call to military service had gone to others
in the draft after an attraction had been removed from their
eyes like a sudden change in the weather for the better

Being stuck on an elevator with too much beauty has
nothing to do with the duties of men the fire in the blood
the competition for female elk or the foolish fantasies
of lonely drunks

It has to do with a man who fears to look in the face
of the god of his own being when it reveals too much
about himself as if he might be looking in a mirror
without glass

The Wind Bends Things

Our coming together occurs in moments
of utter vulnerability not in the passion of beautiful
bodies I can hardly bear the sadness of love as I inch
toward surrender tasting along the way the entire fruit
the skin and pulp seed and stem leaf and earth

The wind bends things as if it wants them broken
then cradles them and caresses them then bends them
as if it wants them broken until I can see how the wind
works bathing everything in its uncaring embrace
and the sun shines on

I might wish love were not so equally indiscriminate as
the elements I might wish love were something I could
buy like a tree in a bundle but love comes up in me
from somewhere I'm not love comes down on me
from somewhere I'm not love makes me part of
everywhere it's ever been

This sadness must be how I'm kept from my
disappearance in the way everything seems to be
unrelenting uncaring and perfect in its place

We Tie Our Wings to the Trees

What you and I have we have to be together to have
together we can know it exists we can see it we can
cherish it but we can't have it unless we're together

Apart we're connoisseurs of distant wonders readers
of great books of travel without one step across the jamb

You spoke of the joy that's avoided by those who
accept imitations that keep them distracted from the gist
the gut the gullet the quick the depth and the height

And here we are on the verge of the thing we desire most
and we hold back mocking our monuments

We anticipate the leap into freedom and we hesitate
to make that leap a reality we hesitate to dirty our
feet with heaven we look back at where we're from
and we tie our wings to the trees

Someone Else's Words

Three preachers one in his Hawaiian shirt another
in a tee shirt and ball cap a third with a pot belly in a
checkered shirt take a table and talk the same as anyone
who gets together with his buddies in the same line of work

When their talk might be what could be between any
of us of the open heart and the inside out of the soul

Halfway through that first stanza I thought I was
reverting to my own shoptalk when it could be
the leavening of our common terror or the
celebrating of our common joy

Sometimes I fall into a workday mode versifying
no different from talking out the day with a friend

Grace is not a manner of dress or a chosen profession
it is what remains when everything else is taken away

There's no notable honor in waiting out this naked life
there's no shared pride in being left alone with eternity

I walk through these roses and thorns until there is
nothing left to complain about nothing left to praise

God is empty of speech and his words are someone else's

What these preachers call God has been inviting me
to this primal humiliation for longer than I've been alive

Of Where We So Gracefully Go

I miss what I've never known a certain reality
I want to call tender a way of being I want to
call cherishing a brave vulnerability I want to
call loving beyond what I call being in love

I want to give up the ghost of my sanctity
and trust another with a likewise lethal love

If I love in the way that threatens me I fear
I will be killed by love but the experience
of love doesn't kill even if the one I love
doesn't love me in return

And if she does love me I can't feign my dramatic death
but live on past what I was before I feared I had
loved too well or not at all

I've loved before and been lost in love and I've been
found in the loss I want to know if I might be found
in what remains after loss itself has been lost for good

We talk like ascetic saints caring companions incipient
lovers we pretend we're not in love when there's no
other word for it we tell each other how afraid we are
of where we so gracefully go

There's a tiny dawn rising on the back of this morning
and it's too late to say we still love the darkness

In the Glare of Our Astonishment

We love in the glare of our astonishment with no
respite from the brilliance of how we are with each other

There's respite in who we could be together yet we
don't allow ourselves to sit in the shade of our fulfillment

We use time apart to buffer the blows of unrelenting
wonder we're afraid love would be exhausted by its
constant presence that too much joy would ruin us

There are those who walk on burning coals
and we are afraid to fall into love itself

Enlightenment comes when one admits
that one is no longer un-enlightened

We make the case for love yet we
fear love won't survive its own truth

There's wonder we're afraid to lose
in the brilliant practice of its reality

The Leviathan

She was listening to someone and as I watched her
I was caught in the net of the kindness she cast

I enact my life as a physical man not as a thing to be seen
from the outside but as something seen from the inside

When Imaginary Jesus came down from the hills
an allusion to his enlightenment he played dice
with the boys and he kidded with the Marys

He turned wine to water until he was reminded of his
passion it was an embarrassing lapse that no one forgot
and when he died almost everyone stayed away

I have no enduring grasp of the eternal it has me
I enter it the way she entered me with no escape

She convinced me of her presence as I am of my own
I can't leave this reality even upside down it is my ground

I look at the beauties of the world and the heavenly ones too
and my eyes remain in my head she isn't being kind it is
the kindness of her being being itself

I see beauty in my sight and insight tells me to
take it in when it's already taken me from the inside

Breathe breathe I say the leviathan needs the wind

Escaping Gravity

In overlapping realities in this place where I live
something of the spirit pulls me up and out of
the profane something of the familiar pulls
me down and into the mundane

A band plays in the marketplace and the singer sings
of a woman he saw on the street she seemed a figure
of transformation beyond the life of the town

It's disconcerting to hear a local woman described
in poetic language caught between transfiguration
and the gravity of society

What weighs me down is not cruel or evil but slowly
tightening wires on a tree and the tree doesn't know
it's become a decorative grotesquerie

Back from the land of my keenest awareness I thought
I could live as I had in that crucible in this land of
social restraints but I watched as my joy became
a smile then a protected glance

There is such gravity in our belonging
we risk losing what's ours to give

Gravity's embrace holds me to its bosom
even Icarus came from somewhere

The singer's dream of flight lifts him above his
place but the story of Icarus warns of his fall

The singer ended his song with the sop that
the sight of his muse was but a passing dream

The Empty Hedonism of Distance

Her presence on the couch like a naked Maja
was difficult to accept with no sign from her
beyond the sweetly spiritual and the gentle
slight of appreciation and admiration

She lay with unexplained pain in her legs
her body glistening in the summer heat

Then she became loud with distance-making
the way infants make a piercing shriek to ward off
attackers they can't defend themselves from

She told me of a man who enticed her to him
how she held her ground and became part of a life
that wasn't part of his until finally I too could no longer
continue to entice her I was finished I said I didn't care
anymore to be living in the intoxicating imbalance

Like letting go of water falling I let go of a good thing
because the poem demands it the poem that won't be
made less of by being only good enough

There's right in speaking myself to an unseen poetry
I believe myself and tell myself aloud in words of love
even when love itself is wordless and lies unclaimed

The Temporal Savior of My Eternity

My desired love has gone out of expectation
she was the temporal savior of my eternity

She would continue to be if I let imagination
play itself out without interruption

In the loss of my religious fervor I find myself
in a garden without the threat of crucifixion
or the promise of salvation

This stillness plays better between us

When my father died my son said it was easier
to love him his personality wasn't in the way

Peace descends on relationships when the heart
of love becomes clear of its trappings

With nothing in the way of love itself I love
and still I seem to believe in these prison walls

The more free I am the more I seek my imprisonment
the more I seek the imprisonment that claims me
the more I seek to be free of what I claim

She no longer lives as that which claims this mind
in the way I live more truly myself as that which
is no longer claimed by this mind

The Wind in the Trees

The wind in the trees is Russian blowing
across the Steppes like rain incessant on grasses
insistent like repetitive unyielding thought

I lay in the dark night thinking I open my eyes
from behind their lids I look at nothing and
I take long easy breaths

The first thought that comes sees how thought
constricts my breathing until it becomes shallow
tentative hesitant

Unattached to thought my breathing assumes
its nature I become clear about the abuse I allow
in the search for peace

I wonder if peace with another isn't the dream
of an impossibility I close my eyes I see peace
and my lungs open like the home of the wind

I look at the dark behind my lids and I see light
I think *don't look at the windows it spoils the dark*
but there is light in my curtained eyes
with no thought and no windows

I invent light from the dark night and nothing

To be with another is the beginning of thought
the moment the eternal thought of man eternity
entered the manufacture of thought

In seeking our forgiveness all the eternal can say is
close your eyes don't think of how I am everything and
nothing to you and breathe like the home of the wind

The Constant Indifference of Wonder

The light glints and glares off cars like stars
bright in the daylight a sun in a silver Mercedes
half a dozen stars in a gray Chrysler the night sky
in a blue Ford a Milky Way of reflected light small
galaxies on the arterial shooting stars on the freeway

The expectation of wonder has gone out of my love
of the other wonder is the black night sky and the light
behind the eyes not this reflected shower and soft thunder
I bring myself to wonder I am the sun of my expectation

The sun in the parking lot is the same as the one
in the sky the same as the one in my eyes its source
unmoved and unmoving and I am the field where
light thrives in the constant indifference of wonder

The Commotion of Intangible Love

In the surrender to any god there's a bliss
that fades to what's ordinarily real

In spite of my love for the muse in any
form she takes I love what doesn't come and go
what never fades is always here always true

And the objects of attention the icons
of my passion fade from bliss to what's real

A Catholic priest told his Advaita teacher after twenty
years of study *I can't give up my belief even though I know
everything you say is true I'm still in love with the form of my faith
I can't surrender enough to let it go* and his teacher replied
be as you are

My own teacher who led others in the practice of faith
without form cried when he spoke of the god of his faith
he couldn't forget the love of his god whose image
came and went when love itself is lasting

As soul in the spirit of a man's body my heart's
in league with my flesh and my heart is also bound
to its eternity there's no way out of this faith this loss
this enduring disillusion we experience in so many ways

Eternity is time without beginning or end
but there are beginnings and endings in its life

Falling back into stillness is the silent strength
of my being where there is no commotion
of intangible love

The Dancing Girls of the Buddha

I never had a god as personal as my love for a woman
I was taught to run through the apostles to get to Jesus
through Jesus to get to God through God to get to what is
this shopping among gods and people to know what love is
has been my personal failure

Love in the presence of a woman became the face
of essential love but I wanted to see love more clearly
I wanted to see love pouring out of me toward love itself

Warned of Buddha's dreams of dancing girls that came
to him even after his enlightenment I dismissed the warning
and continued to seek a woman as if she were my inspiration

Until I no longer felt the same familiar burst of freedom
between lovers or the willingness to look for another

I sought to embrace my naked self as the incarnation of spirit
but I continued to grapple with thoughts of sensual desire

When I saw spirit in a woman I sought to embrace her
with the same joy I embraced my own eternity face to face
with the spirit of my being I want to hold it and it to hold me

Love was the only worship that fit my flesh that matched
the degree of my passion until the dancing girls were gone
from where I had kept them close but not from who I am
in this dancing life

The Ruling Classes of the Soul

A man handed me a copy of a deep thought he said
I could keep it it was a discourse on the futility of yesterday
and tomorrow I handed it back and thanked him

I went to visit my former muse and priestess to see if I was
still attached and to what extent I could feel the familiar pull

I saw her struggling with something I could only imagine
what it was she didn't speak or hand me anything to read

Crowded with priests and priestesses my neck is sore
from craning to remove the cracked and peeling remains
of a surface that's lost its color despite being an irritation
to my eyes ears and lungs I turn a dilapidated wall
into a wide expanse of bright unbroken color

My curiosity has been to see if the truth promised by my
religion was a given to see if its beliefs and rituals weren't
merely for the satisfaction of the ruling classes of the soul

This is the challenge of poetry and its miracles to cut
to the core of a human being to live inside the brilliance
of another to share an instant intimacy to live in love
with a stranger to speak from the center that our
civilized self circles at a distance

The Peace that has no Biography

A window jutting out from the upper story
was the only access to the eaves I needed to paint
I had to find another way to paint the inaccessible

I stood on a stool I found in the attic and stepped onto
the sleek metal roof with screw-heads for a foothold

I tied a rope to a tree on the far side of the house
and threw it over the roof next to the eave

I tied a stepladder to the rope as a platform and with
one foot on top of the ladder I lay flat on the slanted roof

I stretched out and reached to paint I switched the rope
and ladder to the other side of the eave and repeated
the operation but when I moved my foot the ladder
slipped there was a sudden jerk and nothing happened

Fear might have overtaken me but nothing
of fear came into my mind or my body

In that same moment of shock and surprise with my face
next to the blue roof holding the rope in one hand I glanced
at my footing pulled out a rag and cleaned the streaks of
spilled paint I might have laughed in relief but I did not

I was overridden by what did not happen and when I got back
in the window onto the floor in the upstairs bedroom I felt
the perfect nothing of the peace that has no biography

The Congestion of Eternity

After a week of rain my visa needed renewal so I went
to the magistrate's office in a new building unfinished for
ten years there was standing water in the hallways it was
business as usual in a surreal ordinary landscape

The building was crowded and the lawyer's office was piled
high with papers his inner office was packed floor to ceiling

He was laughing with a man from Africa he took my visa
and put it aside I didn't know if he expected a bribe
I wasn't versed in the protocol of simple civil bribery

After more conversation and laughter the lawyer held my passport
and laughed he opened it and stamped it all the while laughing

I left thanking the lawyer several times *namaste namaste* down
four flights of stairs with laughter ringing in the halls behind me
into four inches of water out into the sunlit noisy crowded street

On the first days of teaching my brain was stacked
floor to ceiling with papers I am a poet with a job

When I read poems at a political rally in the city in the 70s
it seemed ironic to read poems as a call to action when poetry
brings everything to a halt and then perhaps something might open
poetry says *start slowly slow down stop now you're getting somewhere*

The assistant warden at Folsom Prison asked if I was going to read
anything subversive in the prison writer's workshop *only a few poems*
I said and thought *there is nothing more subversive than poetry*

The brilliant sun cuts the air free from its complacency I have
no choice in this unofficial act of surrender there is a reason
sought for everything and in everything there is no reason

I Wince at Invisible Injuries

I feel the pinch of loneliness when I don't access
the aloneness that fills me but this identity in being
as being suffuses fear and diffuses what feels lonely

When I let go of attachment to the other what feels
like loss becomes an awareness of fullness there is
no familiar language for this contradiction

You might think a man alone in his contentment
was egotistical like the drunkard's approximation of bliss
we don't easily trust any familiar version of serenity

We laud the virtue of serenity but discontent is the norm
and satisfaction of spirit is reserved for the insane and the
saintly peace is a no-man's-land in the querulous mind

In the desire to be in the presence of others I witness
the haunting shadow of aloneness and that becomes
the template of my imagination

We understand only to the limits of our understanding
and we can't describe the wilderness we never enter

I miss the other when missing her becomes my thinking
I'm attached to what feels torn away I wince at invisible injuries

A forest fire burns the forest to the ground but leaves intact
the fertile floor of its beginning

Becoming Someone Made Real

Who I am is who I am profound and ridiculous
this being inhabits and engulfs my self of those who
spend time with a master most return to their lives
unchanged

In the presence of our own eternity we return to our
mundanity we seldom leave what's familiar like sailors
who can't leave the sea we lose the taste for the land

One man drones on followed by another who speaks
his comfortable belief another speaks a kind of assurance
a third man risks the terror of meeting his unseen self in
his shame and degradation in the foolishness of his façades

The public lie of his life isn't his undoing but the private lie
of his secret pain undoes him this is the path to the clearing
called grace as a heart clogged with grand mal seizures
becomes a heart set free inside its own wide expanse

This café has comfortable furniture people come
and go someone waves from beyond the dark glass
between who I am and how I am I ease into being
someone made real by the acceptance of simple being

A Fearless Naked Constancy

Many of us sit in a particular cave protected
from the outside by our communion we tell
stories and share the warm fire of companionship

Each of us has a piece of the common fear and its damage
we discover we think the worst and that becomes a comfort

In the telling of fears in the company of others we find comfort
in the reluctance to live beyond fear we find our shared fear
a reason to return to the cave secure in the common habit
of fear's embrace

Willingness for the worst to occur is a path to freedom
or it is a haven away from the deepest part of the heart

We find a place to practice the rituals of our failure to become
what we might imagine where we leave our dreams to visit them
in an ongoing exhibit of our possibilities as acts of the impossible

Dreamers live in dreams and dream of still more dreams
some live in the absence of dreams or in broken dreams
some live in a shattered dreamscape of what cannot be

Some invent a haven to live at peace with bad things
happening in a homemade heaven of earth on earth

Inside my fear is true escape or I run back to the camps
a prisoner of war re-captured I return to welcoming arms

I fear being free in a world beyond the cave
where freedom terrifies where unprotected dreams
come true or die in a fearless naked constancy

In the Quiet Windless Aftermath

After the hurricane between us passed I came back
to poke among the ruins looking for something to
remind me of the possibilities in the rubble and I
found traces of the love that remains

I stood in the quiet windless aftermath a startled survivor
who'd flown with the cows and the roofs and the cars

In that stillness with the airborne flotsam and jetsam
on the ground I found myself grounded like being
dropped from the sky intact

No anxiety remains in this stillness I don't run toward her
or run away I stand where rooms once were where walls
ceilings and floors once were where the sky remains and
the earth and the air and the stillness that didn't go anywhere

Some part of who I am lives in the beginning to live at the end
but early on there's a drive to anchor and solidify and then the
wind comes howling nature's cruel clearance of everything must go

What remains has the nature of what's within with its
character undefined but closer to the nature of remaining
than to anything it might be called

As I scan the littered landscape of the real I find my permanence
still in place when everything else has been lost to the wind

The Impromptu Guest

In a moment of trapped panic I leap from
the precipice of my life and live another day
in increasing joy at the miracle of my unseen
salvation I fall in love with the precipitous cliff
of transformation

I want to repeat my leap in every troublesome
phase of my existence but whenever I get to
the edge I have second thoughts of easier times

It's a long way down with no sure way to repeat
the perfect collision of the desperate past and the
transformed present without leaping into the unknown

I return to my beloved continental shelf each time wanting
what happened before to happen again but some of the
greatest leaps are so tiny and quick they go unseen

Afraid to lose the humility I find in impromptu moments
of ordinary life I let the saints fall where they may

Slowly a car turns in a driveway and a light goes on
those inside know who's arrived they reach for the door
and pull it wide for the impromptu guest

Riding the Trees in Morgan Park

On the way to school I walked through woods with a stream
running its length in the middle of town it was wild to my eyes
you couldn't see the houses and I rode the trees to the ground

The stream was banked with saplings as thick as a boy's grip
we'd climb them and the weight of our bodies would bend them
we'd ride them to the ground on the far side of the stream back
and forth we rode my friend and I or I did it alone

A tree might have flung me into space but only if I was
strong enough to bend it far enough the science didn't matter
it was only boys and trees with no attempt to know or learn

When the poet Frost stops by woods on a snowy evening
does anyone imagine the old man in the buggy or is it
the reader or is it the silence of winter

I'm no more in my story than anyone who reads it
yet I walk a wooded path I climb a silent tree and ride

Once in a while a tree would crack under the weight
it was a thrill to risk it to fall to the bank or stream
the perfect excuse to run home in and out of the house
on a dead run with no explanation but childhood

Early wisdom learned to pick the right tree that matched
its resilient resolve to the awakening bravado of the not yet
grown sapling to sapling contestants of strength in simple joy
riding a whip conquering a bow with an arrow

That bending point between boy and tree when the tree
gives way and the boy falls back to earth halfway up a willow
held against the sky in a moment bent to its breaking point

Our Fathers Before Us

Our grandfathers were our fathers freed of their weaknesses
he went fishing with his grandfather I sat in my grandfather's
revered presence a big man with white hair who smoked a cigar
on the swing on the porch of his house or he sat in his big chair
in front of a tiny black and white TV a regal and imposing figure

We approach the age of our grandfathers men we admired
despite our conflict with their sons I wonder if my son looks
past me to his grandfather my father said he didn't deserve
to outlive his father I felt the honor in his self-denigration

In photos his grandfather stands next to his other grandson
my grandfather stands next to his wife both men slightly apart
from others both are shown in snowy weather his stands with
his hand on a car door mine stands with his hand in his coat
pocket the other hand holding his hat my frail grandmother
stands next to him holding his arm

We confirm something in each other we drink and talk and
trade photos but the meat of our stories is not in the telling
instead we pass on a recognition that sees itself alive

We look at ghosts in the snow and a fire is continued as each
man looks across his life at another man who looks back at him

Crossing Paths on the Prairie

The sky is a washed blue gray the hills are white
glistening in the sun cut by shadows broken clouds
reveal the blue behind them

In awe of being here in nothing decided I'm given this eye
to channel beauty back and forth across a simple knowing

We walk the world representing who we are when everywhere
we go is a constant forage for identity we think we move the past
behind us as we go instead we're crossed paths on the prairie

Our wisdom tells us to be at home in who we are
yet what we tell each other ignores the reality

A man nearly broken by life struggles to keep a semblance of
himself still his story reveals a hero's tale when my father died
I saw his life evaporate as if he'd been living in his own shadow

If he'd been more present in any one moment that I might
have witnessed I would have a thousand stories to tell but
he hung back content to make a brief appearance

When we fully commit to this flesh we give our spirit a way
to let itself be known in all the ways we are and steadily
commit to heart

We Drove into Kansas

I step out in front of myself and see how far I've come
I once stood at my side I often stood apart from myself

I think of the father I never had who's here in the one I am
it's good to see him in someone I love it's no good to look
in others for what only comes in oneself it's good to see
in others what comes alive in oneself

My father and I drove into Kansas one day when I was a boy
he took me on a business trip to a nearly deserted prairie town

He left me alone to wander the streets or I sat in the car or I
rode beside him and I saw the lonely town with a few buildings

I remember it as if I stood watch on a hill in a copse of sturdy elm
I wanted to dive into my father's body and be his flesh and bone
but I was his passenger I was his boy learning the brilliant
isolation of the heart

I long for the arms of a man long dead never as alive to love
as I dreamed him except when we played on the living room floor
he was a beached whale we three boys crawled over him and when
he stood he let us climb him like a tree we laughed until we cried

These tears of mine are his this heaving chest is his this love
is his I want the arms of a man who loved me to be my arms

I climbed the biggest tree in a small town and later
I wanted to buy the town I was certain it was for sale

A Whisper in the Cacophony

Trees barren of leaves with branches like scratches
on the gray plate of sky in a warm room looking out
the delicate lines are soft on a brittle day

Painters paint spirit in their art poets speak spirit in theirs
language is cruel in its stripping of the leaves but it is
generous when it reveals what remains

There's no resolution sharp enough to make anything
finally known the skyward lines begin to sing the mesh
of lines the still wafting lines

I stand on the ground with my feet firmly planted I reach into
the sky I draw myself from a tray of color into the endless gray

I find spirit in emptiness I see it in the company of others
spirit binds the branches like fresh paint on bare canvas

In a warm room the view is still on a windless day
I hold my gaze on barren trees I see the lines breathing

In this world of abandonment and abundance
a persistent joy leaps the glass and warms the sky

When I don't speak of love I begin to find it
where it is and not where it isn't

When I don't call another's name I begin to hear the song
of love that never leaves the love I cannot abandon and then
I abandon the fading love of my persistent abandonment

The Parody of Peace

I put it on the tongue of my heart so I
can hear what my heart has been thinking

Near to exploding and full of juices I cinch the saddle
of my heart I ride my heart like a horse I ride my heart
at night when I sing my songs of cowboy delight

I met a man in India who said he understood addiction
he'd drink for six months then be sober for six months

I met a writer in California who said we should divide the world
between us make ourselves notorious and fame would follow

I acted the equal of an enlightened master and he
slaughtered my audacity with such alacrity it filled
my lungs and took my breath away

When my heart is tied to its desire I'm defeated
and when desire distracts me from my innocence
I trade my peace for pieces of its parody

Handwriting the Mist

On this foggy day the calligraphy of the barren trees
blurs and nothing in my eyes can make my vision clear

I'm forced to accept its washed-out beauty or reconsider
the definition of beauty and wait for better

The only lover left on this island of heart becomes
my own self living in love itself without the satisfaction
of object or definition these words are true but there
are no words for the truth of love

I think of resorting to a *she* to reinvent a lover to reduce
love to an other to redraw the trees to etch them to a
certain beauty to paint my island to a city to a few
houses on a street to a house to a single room

I look back at the trees and their blurred lines
are lost in fullness I see fog suffuse the branches

I see the whole where before I had seen distinction
and then I saw indistinction and now I see embrace

The Fabric of Love

Snow melts ice melts water pools
desire goes away but not its object

Instead of desire's warm apprehension
I feel the empty expanse of its failure

My forehead tightens to a knot maybe it's barometric
the sun is out burning the frigid to florid

Shakespeare compared his love to a summer's day
then erased the praise knowing love's transience
believing his poem the only lasting reality a reality
more about death and poetry than love

Yet in our love of the poem we transit love
to the language of love and then to the unspoken
nature of love itself evanescent love has no matching
chronicle but the chronicle of loving is long

The poet's love can't be kept but its occurrence
can be clothed in words we can love the fabric
of love in place of love

The beauty of a flower becomes its vase with
an image of the flower painted on the porcelain

A boy without a father looks into my eyes and some
fathering is given and taken these words are a token
of the moment

In similar love we fashion and hold these totems across
the distance between the moments of love's presence

What we love is fleeting but love is not we are love's
carrier from flower to flower in words told of the
flower's startling beauty

The Good of Useless Prayers

In the midst of difficulties a calm beckons
until it becomes a complacency

There is a fierce tranquility in facing adversity
until in time it becomes a shadow of itself

One step leads to a half step to a stasis
to a falling away from being alive

Let me not slide to my demise in search of an ease

I've died many times and come back without the memory
of my dying this kind of death and birth has no history

In every room of others there are many ways to apologize
for what happens for what never happens but when I
take fear out of reality what must be done can be seen

I scattered my father's ashes in the river that ran by our
house and the river ran away with him I go to the spot
on the bank where I last saw him and he tells me
to be calm he says there's no good in this anxiety

He no longer lives he's become what he was
before he was my father before he was himself

I put my father in the river where he wanted to be
and he comes to tell me to stop this concern

There's so much pain in the world we don't know what
to do but complain and invent painful ways to end the pain

I want my father but he wants to swim I seek
advice from my father but my father won't help me

This grief and its grievance has no grant
but it helps my ears to call his name

Ordinary Drawings of Ordinary Objects

Another former president has died as in the turning
of pages we find more pages to turn life turns endlessly
upon itself old kings come round again we see their faces
in our leaders we churn out the future of the past

Beneath the showy passions of life lies the passion that's ignored
for the commotion on the surface until history shows the folly of its
repetition the air shimmers with scenery and action every time Hamlet
considers revenge he takes revenge every time he dies he dies anew

I make small drawings for my daughter's daughter halfway round the
world she likes black ink drawings of ordinary objects I put my pen to
paper and a world is born the lines become houses and the edge of hills

A road in the center reappears in the distance on the side of a mountain
a small car climbs the street to the top before plunging down the other
side a tree on one side a cat on the other there's a bird on the wing
one house has a door the other has two doors and a window

So much happens when so little is intended the antenna on the
little car the curl in the cat's tail the snow on top of the mountain
my granddaughter may send simple drawings to her own grandchild
my grandfather put his thumb in his fingers and said he had my nose

This last president who died was known for his pardon of the
disgraced president who came before him in a photo taken
in his room in the Forbidden City the president wears striped
pajamas and moccasins while conferring with his advisors

His wife was a dancer who became a champion of those addicted
to alcohol the president once captain on a national championship
football team became a caricature of awkward clumsiness

The nightly drop in temperature turns the thawed roads to ice
and ordinary drawings of ordinary objects are the wonder of a child

Sweet Deceit

Cursed with the blessing of spirit in a body I gradually
weaken myself to get along with others I turn reality
into a exchange of substitutions

Desire to love and be loved orchestrates sweet deceit
to wear a popular face to think well of others and when
we see their deception mocking our own we refuse to
condemn the actions of our shared diminishment

Desire colors the complexion of those I want near desire
acts like an ownership as if when I believe in desire I earn
territorial rights over others desire gives me property
I ought to refuse when I have no right to its claim

I'm propertied in my unfenced spirit when I covet no other
and from that clean vantage I see the compact of social
ownership that overvalues the fields of my neighbors
and undervalues their essence

In common market with each other we raise crops
that starve the source and fail to feed the kind

In the Circle of My Narrowing Eye

As the driving force of my attention desire
gets me to an intoxication that ignores the real

No addiction goes away but it goes the way of all addictions
and in its final failure one sees the way clear of it

The vision of intoxicating desire leaves the periphery unseen
when I might see beyond the circle of my narrowing eye

Greater than the magnification of desire what comes
into an open lens is not what is held in exaggerated focus
and the object of desire reduces to its inherent nature

When desire raises its swollen head and declares
its domination what might feel like an insult
to the other is revealed to be an insult to sight

The open spirit that turns from obsession to
acceptance invites rebellion from the rejected mask

Desire is the mask of passion that wants to be
all that passion is but bedrock passion threatens
desire until desire rages turning my attention
away from the foundation of reality

When I don't go away from what I am
I see my façades build and fall away

To let go of the deceit of desire is to stand more
clearly alone in the company of everything to see
each tree and the forest as well to stand no longer
alone in the presence of crystalline beauty

I See a Face Drawn Larger Than Itself

I speak of an landscape no less real for seeming less real
I choose not to mistake reality for what we call real

I look at a thing that's not a thing to describe it
into gentle proximity so its reality can be seen

I see a doorknob across the room as big as a grapefruit
I see the head of a screw as large as a saucer I see a face
drawn larger than itself a face that becomes not drawn
but drawn upon these portraits enlarge to an arrangement
of pigmented revelation

I see something become a face to see it from within itself
not as a fiction crafted from our joy and shared pain
but to reveal itself in its reality

My unseen self has no physical being but this forensics
of the unseen uncovers what seems less real in its camouflage
until what lies beneath easy sight is lifted into recognition

I map the character of energy spirit sits for its likeness
I see the invisible not in projection but in revelation

I tell my flesh to tell the shape of its source to tell the real
that inspires and informs the flesh a beast risen from the muck
cleans its face to a beauty and even the demon of my fears
becomes a creature of courage

I'm mistaken at a distance from myself to think I sleep
with fallen animals when they awaken to my waking eyes

The Second Day in Heaven

The second day in life is like the second day in heaven
that passes like the first day without the same fascination

It seems impossible to believe that the new person I was
or the new person I met that first day is still new to me

Everything dies the second day unless I let dying die with it
they said of the teacher-saint he was both human and eternal
but the human self has been ignored in accepting them as one

This overlay of man and god is difficult to fathom there's no simple
separation to make it clear duality is easier to embrace one moves
between dualities like the houses of a separated mother and father

The first day in heaven breaks like no other and the second day arrives
like repetition the second day is the same as the first but my mind
stuck in time is inclined to repeat any second day as nothing new

A father moves around to take his daughter's picture but
she turns away from his light no matter where he moves
her bright eyes go blank then she agrees to his request
and unsmiling grips her juice box in her tiny fist

No one has ever had his picture taken every picture
is of someone else tourists take pictures of each other
but no one captures the moment a man's pictures
of his trip abroad fail to convince him he was there

This poem is another bright artifact

An ancient bowl in the museum once infused with
divinity has been drained over time of its sacred
power it's become only a bowl and nothing more

I pick up the first day's bowl on this second day
in my ordinary heaven and the first day is gone
but not the empty bowl that holds the divine

Between Small Dark Towns in Illinois

In a familiar room tired of its familiarity I think
to think away from it instead I think to that part
of the room that has no known familiarity

More familiar than anything I know on its face the greater
part of us all it fills the room with its disappearance that
takes the place of everything that takes place within it

My uncle came back from the slaughter of war a changed
man he was never fully present in his life again until he
was dead in a crash

He drove his car off a bridge flew a hundred feet
in the air and landed in the night against a riverbank
between small dark towns in Illinois

He was in the ice cream business engaged to a woman who
loved him but life had ended around him so many times
in such hurtful ways he couldn't be free of it

It's not hard to believe his death was no accident that he
drove his car into a room where he was finally happy to be

The Old Dairy Building

My friend's gallery burned to the ground life is what you expect it to be and then one day nothing is the same and never will be again he held images of the current war alongside the loss of his business

Everyday life is war time in slow time

The old dairy building a home to artisans was a local landmark a genial gathering place of disparate souls engaged in chosen work I took pictures as it burned and when it was a bin of charred ruins

The capable firemen never set foot in the building instead they poured water in from trucks in fat hoses breaking the windows until the roof collapsed its wooden beams burned for hours

In war and life we see death ignorant of our worth and compassion we wonder about those who survive such cruel absurdities with their sanity intact how do they stay sane despite our presumed supremacy over the rampantly meaningless

They do it by the gift of their breathing

My ex-lover's daughter died too soon it became an endless war of dying everyday the same young woman was killed before it could be accepted her daughter was killed again and again by cruel death in the mind of her mother she saw death in her child take and retake her life and she danced on the precipice of sanity

Transient death comes and goes like bullets in the air

And we are given to smell the unbroken air between the bullets and take it deep in our innocent lungs like the child of a mother like the mother of a child

The Moment of Chancy Death

The random speed of war feeds the recognition
of arbitrary death the sudden prolonged occasion
of reality insistent and unrelenting that comes
to the innocent without explanation or alternative

One man in the factory after the Big War said he
was taught how to kill but not taught how to stop

He said they swept him up and threw him in the war
then they threw him back out again he said he loved
his family but he couldn't feel that love he couldn't
stop fighting and years later he was still fighting

Peace is time and space between separate deaths
we fill the space to avoid the reality

We're expected to live in peace in the illusion of life
to walk away from the truth of life itself not to look
back on what we might have seen or what we might
have been in the seeing

Between wars in no war raging in no illusion but
our reality we have the luxury to embrace it or not

This time between is no end of cruel awareness
but it is the open moment of our enclosing truth
it is a place for the embrace of the vital absence
greater than our gloried occupation of destruction

Some never feel more alive than when death is their
partner not because death is such a good dancer

It's not death that teaches the amazing purity
of existence but the absence of illusion

The moment of chancy death is the same
as this prolonged presence of reality

A Small Bird Perched in a Bare Tree

A small bird perched in a bare tree basking
in the bright sun as if attending to an errand
or waiting for a sign from some other bird

He doesn't do anything as far as I can tell
not being learned in the habits of small birds
in bare trees I begin to feel impatient

A slight wind vibrates the tree the bird could be
helping the tree tiny claws could be nurturing
the growth of the twiggy branch

And then the bird is gone a man walks close to
the tree and the bird takes wing as small birds do
as if flung into the air suddenly and swiftly aloft

Now the tree seems companion to the wind and not
the bird now that the bird has flown the tree reveals
the presence of the invisible where one moment before
the presence of the bird kept my attention on the
bird itself and its place in the tree

Absence of the other frees my attention to the unseen
to witness the nature of present love in the wind house
of my unseen self

My love is with the wind and the bird on the wing
just as it is with the tree and its budding branch

On the Mesa of America

People walk to their cars on the mesa of America
this flat open vista on the world where people think
nothing of driving sixty miles when they can see that far

When the sky is high people walk to their waiting cars
and drive away I'm less alone in the open heart than I am
in the company of those for whom being alone is a burden

The rancher on his spread alone by habit still belongs
to his conglomerated self his bonds are heightened by
his aloneness his family rides the fence line with him
he returns to what he never leaves

When I first heard it said that a certain guru was never born
never died it angered me of course he was born of course
he died but his footprint was illusion except to the relative
reality in which he walked

There is wisdom in these windswept steppes an impermanence
that drives us into huddled masses of polite strangers such space
breaks our vision open to the horizon where no end is in sight
living in houses on shifting sand under high skies of clouds
like homes of the imagination

Residence is identity nothing comes with us but what we
bring to this residential moment I come alone to the future
I walk to my car and drive away

The Calm That Caused It

To whom do I speak when I say I'm alone
when by the nature of speaking I'm not alone

We are an exchange of listeners these words are
the chronicle of stillness the quietest words listen
I listen to what speaks within so I might hear
what can't be said

Any effort to speak silence matches rather than
challenges those who speak to a meaning I listen
to the voice of listening I look to eyes that witness

My body is prepared for action or it's at peace
in the fullness of being to live in the license of life
is to be compelled by the force of being itself

The wind is at rest at its source
Aolis emerges from a cave of calm

Undefined by what wind I become I fall into a
turbulence and claim its deepest identity as my own
yet I'm found in the stillness between breaths I look across
the gap and I fall into the center of my uncertain being

People move about in their wrappings I can see their
layers of color there's an identifying kindness in what
I am in a room of others without knowing or needing
to know who anyone says they are

I see myself among others we share the delight
of our variety as we are blown and blowing

In the wind is the calm that caused it

The Dogs of the Desert

Pulled over beside the road in the dark
the crunch of gravel gives way to the night

I listen for the distant howl of beasts and the quiet
fills my ears like water fills the empty compartments
of a submerging submarine

I sink to the earth below everything that moves
in the fearless peace here where the road runs by
like memory and desire

At ease with the engine off with nothing running
but my heart as blood moves in its course everything
is within reach

Nothing lies outside such stillness on this night
beside the road in the desert's dark embrace

In fearful warning the dogs of the desert
come out of the desert at dawn

I attribute love to being with those I live among
I start the car and regenerate the gravel

On the road again I see I'm still the same in my darkness
and in my stillness as when I'm crowded together in love

The Grace of Another's Need

She needed me and I turned away
unsure of my place in her need

Unwilling to reveal her need she turned from
my attention and was gone from the moment
I was helpless to taste the grace of her need

In abundance we make our need unnecessary
and unwelcome even as we turn our attention
to help the devastated and the dying

I imagine a look in her eyes that might grant
a way to the interior a reaching outside of care
for its companion in the kindness of needing
another's care

Having no need for need is another deprivation
when we might be open to its place in our happiness

Self-strength holds no door open for kindness
and being kind is sidelined to noisy charity

An old woman sits with another old woman
in the quiet of their age and love abounds

In the peculiar prosperity of life nature finally
drops us into degrees of ourselves we are willing
to avoid in our rise

In the practice of a common kindness we see
what might seem of little use not in rushing
to the aid of infirmity and weakness but in
being with each other in calm regard

The Autobiography of Blood

Considerations take the place of everything
in their wake one might go looking for a missing
thing and end up organizing the entire house

When a man's business burns down his heart
may be brought to zero to no longer go where
his accounts have kept him apart from himself

Considerations don't care for the open future
or the dissolution of concern or the need to be
alone with no business to conduct

I suggested that my friend rent space for his work
in the movement of bodies directing them back
to stasis and impulse as if he were a lawyer
hanging out his first shingle

I realized my mistake proposing a place of commerce
for the shaping of breath the inventory of muscle the
autobiography of blood and the encouragement of flight

I knew my error when he said *well you and I* I realized
I had been talking as if I were giving myself bad advice
calling the cadence for a forced march into the practical

Walking off into the dawn with no map of the east
is the only function for the real and the rest is concern
for consideration we succeed when we fail to advertise
what's not for sale at such a price

The Calendar of Creation

The sun's glare has character it glints and reflects
it highlights and washes away and the hillside loses
depth of color burnt away in bright light

Points of fire mark the corners of metal roofs
as people lower their brims and consider their
misplaced faith in destiny

The young have time to let their lives play out
under the sun of destiny but destiny washes away
the moment of life draining its color when its glare
burns overhead or in the reflection of a mirror

The absence of destiny also has character turning
silhouette to shadow turning the face of one's attention
to reflection in a cloudy glass I can't see outside myself
who I am being inside

The sun of my being is inside who I am where nothing
is bound to occur and nothing prevents anything from
being or becoming it is the mystery of the unknown
mixed with the not yet known

Destiny organizes the journey toward its arrival a destiny
of having nothing destined does the same and having
no destined day opens the day to itself what remains
tells me I am destined to this moment

Among the wonders of the day the clearest sense
of destiny is rendered in hindsight when whatever
is still to come is lit by the returning sun and nothing
is named in advance by the calendar of creation

The Praise of Present Joy

I walk out of myself displaced by the change in myself

Unfamiliar with what I'm not I walk in the rubble
of myself I look for what survives when so little
truly changes in a world of unceasing change

Kick me out burn me down destroy the present
as past the barren future is closer to the bone
than what I've ever been or done

A woman's thick hair lifts in the wind around her head
like an island rising out of the sea she gets in her car
buckles up checks the traffic and pulls out into the road

A man leaves a heater on a mattress a small world burns
to the ground and dozens are thrown out of a kind of home

Nothing of the certain is lost in destruction like a fraction of war
some people wander lost in themselves sometimes until death

The kindness of our greatness lives on we bear our losses
to a painful advantage even in death that never-ending
cleaner of lives

When masterpieces burn we invent the charred art
of what's burned in memory nothing we fancy
is little more than present in our presence

When we celebrate what's to come or what came
before we let loose the praise of present joy

The Roar of the Ant Lion

My body falls into itself to be drawn back to its periphery
by nearly impossible forces and nothing can prevent its
ultimate dissolve

The ant lion digs a hole and hides beneath the pit its pincer
the only part showing until passing ants lose ground to the center
and are caught and devoured by the waiting predator

If the prey escapes the jaws of the ant lion trying to climb
the precipitous walls of the sand pit the ant lion casts showers
of sand to dislodge its climb until it falls helpless to its demise

My brother and I talk about our father as if we might defame or insult him
as if he were in the next room and not gone these many years forever

When my father died I imagined his absence an erasure his colorful
character lost like memory like wood is forgotten by fire if a man's
mind can lose its own storage where is his presence in the body

The shape we give our formless being belies our periphery there's
no edge to us everything I forget of my father is not what remains
I cherish his being when nothing of his shape remains

I am compelled to let myself go as I've done with my father
I hold my father in effigy as long as I hold myself in time

Twins enter the cafe dressed as unlike as strangers
whatever conjoined reality there is between them
goes unexpressed only their differences are proclaimed

We are all of us twins of the inexpressible yet we cling
to our differences making outfits of our singularity

I live and die not away from my father but toward him
I mimic the show of his character in my transient fantastic
existence

Pulling the Heads Off Grasshoppers

Driving across the roof of the world is the same as driving
across its floor over the pass through the valley I feel sadness
in the rain something in the body tells me of something else

I come home over the ridge that thrills me when I see it
from my house now below me in the distance I ride the back
of the same ridge but from here it carries no thrill of distance

A man in the wilderness pulls the head off a grasshopper
he pulls the stomach with it he cooks and eats a delicacy
of necessity I drove miles to stand in line next to someone
I know the back of my hand has become familiar topography

To know myself is to know what no longer needs to be known
I move to the known of the unknown and then leave it behind

Attention no longer goes to learning the unfamiliar heart
what is sure no longer requires training in dangerous terrain

Being with a certain lover was driving faster than wise attuned
to a fearful anticipation a false excitement learning too rapidly
what didn't need to be learned being afoot in the desert without
a method of return teaches its own eager history of self

Falling back into the speed of simply being present in life with
the past at ease with itself with the future quietly silent time
opens one's pages for reading by moonlight experience becomes
kindling in a fire that tells the beasts to keep their careful distance

Now time has no anxious anticipation fear folds into itself and
what remains lies coiled at the ready a light behind the night

My Brother Runs Near a Sunny Beach

The ground is frozen as if the ice were centuries old
layer upon layer like sheathes of opaque façade

Walking becomes a careful venture getting to the car an event
going in a store becomes calculated arriving an accomplishment

Of a multitude of fears and feats this frigidity affects who we are
in how we are and in the world another dictator has been put
to death so far from our lives it barely merits comment

My brother runs near a sunny beach as my hands tighten
in a grip not my own it may be the onset of arthritis or
I'm being frozen from within my lyrical ears want its
cause to be the absence of romantic physical love

Whatever occurs is the grist for whatever mill that grinds
in whatever moment of time one lives here it has been cold
long enough for the cold to be what operates in everything else

I heard a teacher tell an earnest man his physical pain needed
to be taken care of before he'd be free to recognize his freedom

The sun is diffused to a crystal gray and my brother runs near a
sunny beach I recall living in a torment of desire a fire I danced
around and through it could have been the summer sun that heated
my passion we are simple creatures living in the temperature of our lives

Nostrils Flare in the Vigorous Air

It is a mountain wind that blows in the bright sun
that takes nothing from the body like being near
a rocky wall or glacial waters

It leaves the clean edge of seeing things for what
they are with nothing in the air to cloud the senses

Pollution creates texture of a different beauty my
brother's friend drove him to a ridge above the city

A vast panorama spread below in a valley thick with
the exhalation of millions *look how beautiful it is* his friend
said indicating the stagnant sky with a sweep of his arm

The setting sun lit the crowded canvas of purple red
and backlit yellow to a conflagration of unnatural riches
for the eye's uncritical imagination

How beautiful is our crowded private sky when
no crisp wind blows away unmixed thoughts

In the feelings of our accumulated days we thicken ourselves
to a kind of beauty until it is what we see and where we
see greatness and even our alarms become artfully designed

Books are written and cultures defined as faces see beauty
in their kind and what's born of what we love bears us
to another generation the more we add the more we
claim for ourselves

Nothing within what I think I am is strange I even make
a home in my conflicted air for everything I say I'm not

A bracing wind blows in the brilliant sun that takes nothing
from the mind or the body nostrils flare in the vigorous air
and the sky is taken anew for the home of beauty unclouded
by its residue

The Joy of Being Seen

Raised unseen in that way we are barely raised
I learned to be seen for the masks I wore to live in
the pains and pleasures of being seen not for myself
but for what I might project of myself to be seen
for what I was in the eyes of others

Until I began the pursuit of being seen for true
by god and man and myself to reveal the real within

I began to see myself in the eyes of the inherent
where there is no seer and no seen except in being itself

My ancient habit of not being seen for true
limited the time and place of any self-revelation

I sought to be seen as the unseen self in myself
but the unseen has no sight in familiar eyes

My unshown face has no mask in the masquerade
of meeting others so I began to trust the nakedness of
my face in what I once took for the face of love in others

I sought to accept love as the easy absence of masks I sought
to accept the pleasure of being seen in the love of lovers

But to be unmasked of the lover's mask is to accept only what
can be seen by the unseen in all of us beyond what we wear
as ourselves even what we wear as naked lovers

I think of one who was afraid of being naked her nakedness
could have become the absence of a mask that might have
begun the time of no more masks but she was unprepared
to be unafraid of her revelation

No matter how thin the veil the joy of being seen
begins in the terror of being seen

Rocky Outcroppings

One with whom I had difficulty has found another with whom
she is at ease and a weight has lifted from the deep of my heart

Someone has taken my place freeing it from the file of failure
I keep whenever I think I am being untrue to my being

This habit of mind to make a thing done badly of what should
have never been haunts the mind that makes it and its ghost
lives on in the habit of the mind that carries it

This habit to make a whole from no part of it and my place
in a place that has no place for me becomes a persistent ghost

In the wider of this narrow reality is the force of being a creature
of the mind to make of myself an entity and cling to its belief
then to imagine my place among others as if these occurrences
have substance like a rocky outcropping imagined into being
the prow of a ship

In relationship to others bound by the names of shapes
I construct fortifications of thought to be manned by armies
of even lesser thoughts or I live in the reality of what is real

Happiness flowers in the light I grin at the news of my old lover's
new life my chest swells with new breath I'm free again as I've
always been even as I was when we were imprisoned together

I see how easily and falsely bound I am to the pretense of these
rocky ships of love as if the glue of desire can bind its objects
to a purpose in this self-imagining realm of relative unrealities

Caverns of Delicate Intricacy

After a spell of chilling cold in the midst of heavy fog
the town woke to a sparkling scene with every tree's
branches covered with a delicate white fur of frost

With car antennas plants and power lines coated
the streets appear as caverns of delicate intricacy

There must have been a breeze that lifted the frost
to these angles

Branches coiled in white extend a million white wings
and dreary history is transformed to beauty

The dirtied face of unbroken cold is coated with white
its cheeks powdered its charm restored

The beauty of being has a greater endurance than my
epiphanies I fall in love I fall out of love I blame nothing
or no one for dragging me down to my cold condition

I retire to the familiar when to live in love's long epiphany
is to accept the spontaneity of the endless unknown it is a
kind of perilous perfection

The night fog dulls the newly wonderful catastrophe
but its surface beauty remains in place until morning

And another century of miracles follows the dawn
of another day

In Simple Grace

A barefoot worker came to our rooms to clean he swept
the apartment with a short natural broom silent light swift
in no hurry with the movement of a dancer without excess
he finished the job picking up the wispy debris with his fingers

Collecting the scraps of refuse he elevated a mundane task to
its beauty it wasn't work or a performance for reward it didn't
demean his station it undefined him from caste or caricature

Lifting the detritus of our rooms with his long narrow fingers
was not an act of simple grace it was simple grace performing
an act it could have been any other act in its place he was one
in whom grace occurred

It lifted me to wonder itself nameless pointless indescribable
and here I reduce it to details of something that happened

These words may appear graceful or the telling of another
culture but one can't claim the moment by describing it

It is good to forget everything but simple grace even
when there is a graceful thought to stand in for it

Beauty Accumulates to Calamity

The beauty of the recent frost accumulates to calamity

The fog that sits in the valley begins to burden lines and
branches everything hangs in the balance waiting for worse

A rancher walks his fence clearing the electric lines so his bulls
won't run the range they hear the coyotes howling at night

As we continue to kill each other at war with each other
we sanctify our insanity we forbid aggression then reward it

We elevate existence to the sacred then debase it then
we kill to maintain the illusion of our benevolent sanctity

An atmosphere of dull dread hangs in the air a barometric
prison the unhappiness of molecules as we live in the
acceptance of cruelty in the name of what we honor

Even when no one is truly threatened long before the knife is
at his throat the defense of the assault occurs before it's been
attempted too late for the cure we make retaliation mandatory

The foolishness of willfulness is circular no one wins when
anyone thinks of winning no one wins in any of the wars
between our various selves until winning has no more
credibility than losing does

The One Who's Left When Everyone Leaves

I chase myself to become who I am not to become a part
and call it the whole or to play a role that feels good or right
but to clear the layers until my identity is identical to nothing
but itself

I began to act on the crowded human stage with other actors
jammed together in a small space sending one after another
off stage until I saw a drama with characters in scene after
scene of conflict and resolution reduced to monologue
splitting into dialog then reducing to itself again

A narrator's voice seemed useful to the enactment of the drama
then new characters appeared then nothing then a silence
then stillness then empty stage then the character of space
then the presence of being and not being all to discover
the voice of emptiness within which the play is performed

To be alive is to listen for the voice that has no other voice
competing with it to hear the voice that stands alone
without primacy the voice of the aloneness at the center

To be alive is to hear the voice that remains when everyone
is gone when everyone who might be listening is embodied
by the light and the darkness to be the one who's left when
everyone has gone home to their place in themselves

Never Only a Life

Being in a room with old desire is to feel the mind pulled
to a crescent to a point of pain to feel resurgent emotion

To be in a room with desire's sweet pain is to be
in the open grave of love's resurrection images of
pleasurable pain are a passport to what no longer lives

To revisit the grave of pain and pleasure is to resurrect
its life to prolong what has been shortened to the past

A life that depends on the resurrection of the cherished dead
brings forward what wants to recede to the ground

Jesus meant to say *I was never born I never died* but he
was taken to mean he was returned from the dead

To resurrect the dead is to keep alive the pain of the dead
it is to hold onto the memory of the end of the living

To be born again is to deny the life that never dies
we are born as what never dies beyond the desire
of the flesh beyond the fear of the flesh

I don't stay in the room of the past I don't hold the pain
of desire I leave the room of the pain of the desire of the past

This life has no need to be born or to die or to be born again
I live who I am in being never only a life never only a death

I Wipe My Eyes With Words

I invite myself to this arrival the way my eyes teach
their tears my shoulders shake like oxen shed their flies
their sweat their yoke I wipe my eyes with words

My father would retreat to his den whenever it was time
to say goodbye to anyone he loved to leave its expression
was his way of loving he couldn't show how much he loved

Whenever anyone left he was left behind in hiding I take up
these habits without any habit for them in speaking what I
was not taught I learn what I never learned

I walk into the faith of not knowing I learn that this life
is a constant arrival where it's capable of always having been

I learned what my father taught what he never admitted
to be teaching I learned what he didn't know he knew

I learned the secrets his ignorance tried to mask
I learned his unseen self I became the son of
his failure I became the son of his perfection

The Frightened Lover

Winter fades to a dullness no painter would come here
for the light the day wanders though itself like anonymity
without purpose

Unchallenged and vaguely content these are not bad days
to be at peace in the absence of any fervor

A circus strongman in a deserted surreal countryside
seethes with anger and frustration until he kills a man
who tries to be a lover to the woman he kept for himself

Any lover in this long winter's landscape is at a loss
but not insane

Love born of the spirit walks quietly until it meets
a similarity the lover in my heart trims the soles
of his shoes until bare ground is underfoot

The heart left to itself in a heartless reality
turns to its purpose in the passage of simple peace

The fertility of peace is unsung while pain and conflict
stir the creative to contemplations of pain and conflict

Peace is disguised by a shroud we ask how any good
can come of such a vast nothing the last days of winter
are flat gray and dead to the eye but one can feel the
ground below one's feet moving out of its own way

The Dancer

He felt a disquiet so he built a compact room with a door
four walls and a few paintings an open room with slender
limbs of trees across the top

To enter felt like an honor to become one to whom art
is revealed to stand in the company of art like those
who meet at a small party getting to know one another
in a open room of love's possibility

Feeling unsettled he wakes in the night and performs
a motion meditation that takes him into the life of the body

Then he sleeps until he wakes for tea with his wife he quotes
Chesterton on the sense of something present in the room
neither coming nor going

He squints gapes sprawls jumps he contemplates
a long room for poetry where those interested in listening
might gather for those who speak to those who listen

He holds poems up to the light like fabric like maps
like bones like babies like a handful of power and light

His movements tend toward dance a crumpled paper
in the corner is a dance something needs to be out of place
for one to dance something needs to be asleep for one
to dance well nothing needs to be for one to be a dancer

The Eyes of its Own Arrival

The hills are the bare backs of beasts bears whales
encrusted and frosted by time the fruition of life is its
own fulfillment but if one dwells on that being done
the difficulties outweigh the reality

One chooses a path that few others choose then sees
others less welcoming of the choice in a pattern of
thought that defines choice as an act of separation

One may seek to step off the common path in order
to bridge the very separation one never sought

One may fulfill the general self in pursuit
of the fulfillment of one's inherent self

The organic doesn't reject the organ
fulfillment raises itself to its own height

One looks for recognition in the sight of others
but the genuine is seen in the eyes of its own arrival

Pollock Was a Painter

Pollock was a painter pretending to be a painter drinking fucking fighting painting he tried to act like a regular guy with his family but one day he became a painter and he couldn't go back to playing one

One might say it's what killed him to become the one he'd been imitating he was odd in his own family it's what they expected he began to act like an artist and dress the part he was still odd to himself and everyone else

He bought an artist's brush at the artist's market until one day he became an artist and everything before was swept away in the first and final stroke of his transformation

We play roles akin to the reality we scarcely recognize until we begin to play who we are my desire to be with a woman is a role I have played until it became how I was seen and nearly who I was

When I played the role of a lover in the heart of love I became what I approximated in the center of what once had seemed all periphery until my objects lost their objectivity in the realm of how I live not as a lover but as one who lives in love itself

Nothing happens in love but the room is lifted from its contraries to be set back down in the same place transcending its furniture

I see you without seeing you the same as I saw you I see the same way the light sees what it falls upon the trance of love plays a surrogate for love it becomes a way of being but being doesn't need a way to be

We are love itself and even that becomes a paradigm of love we define ourselves away from the reality of love the pursuit of love is a fraud for love itself

Humans awoke at the dawn of reality and they noticed something they gave it a name and we began to pursue what was already true

One morning I loved and I was loved and nothing occurred there was nothing between us to give it the name of love

The Others of Love

I might wish there was a god or a lover in my
immediate heaven but I don't surrender who I am
for the sweet absence of another's nearness no lover
no god I don't give up what I have for what I don't

There's nothing missing in what seems missing no god
no lover comes to me in the night no god no lover
reassures me or promises me better than this

I'm left with everything I might imagine from these
others of love to discover their presence in this simplicity

I might wish there was a god in my immediate heaven
but what I imagine missing is only missing in my
wishing for it in the belief in its being missing

No lover no god what's between my reality and the
reality of everything that's real is nowhere to be seen

Uncalled for undreamt of as present as the air I breathe
all day long every day every night no lover no god

A Long Flatbed Truck

A long flatbed truck in a wet mud lot a section of sheet metal
twisted and curled like a strip of roof blown off to be discarded

The town is visited by actors their coaches and directors creative
people in a profession made of the beauty and truth of their presence
it is their protection and freedom to make of themselves a profession

A paper towel is stuck in a man's pocket like a decorative handkerchief

After we learn to walk we learn a way of walking that brings a certain
attention still we walk from here to there a means of transportation

One girl unsure of the beautiful face she was born to wear distorts it
in the way she sucks a straw she jerks her womanly body like a rag doll
as she coolly watches others with nothing childlike in her manner

The low clouds bank the hills the hills front the clouds a man with the
face of a line-drawing calls out the time as everyone laughs and leaves

There's an abundance of definition in the details of life before the self has
seen its face but the inherent has the patience of the absence of time

A Passing Paradise in an Endless Sea

Habits have their way with themselves personality
is the calcification of character characteristics build
on themselves like coral islands of once-living cells
to make a passing paradise in an endless sea

Knowing what goes to make this life doesn't lessen
the love of it imagine a god who fashions a universe
of painfully sharp objects and luscious beauty

Imagine it's come from nothing and will return there
one dayless day imagine knowing the source of knowing
is better known when it's unknown

A boy one of the children of another player as small as a
lemur on a leafy branch comes to the field and sits on the
fifty-yard-line in the grass and sinks into its green embrace

Then the wind comes up so powerful it changes
the temperature by twenty degrees and the boy
curls into his own legs

Another man shouts to his son a small copy of himself
it's time to go home and the boy comes running we divine
ourselves in reproduction nothing more is needed
to accomplish the wondrous and the divine

Those who live without children brave the singularity of
their experience living out our common ordinary divinity

The Fine Point of the Soul

The closer I draw to the center the stronger I am in its reach
the farther I go from the center the weaker I am in its reach

I run out to my fingertips and all I feel is their whorl I run
deep within myself at a fearful distance from my hands
and I gain their touch

To be human is to be an instrument to be true to oneself
is to be a musician to be true to being itself is to be the wind

The fine point of one's soul is where the music has yet
to become a shape in its sound in the ground beneath
its startling emergence

I'm tired my brain is full of its own fumes I swore I would
do nothing to blunt the fine point of my soul what Keats called
the effect of modern society but a teacher said there was no
freedom in the caves that the only place to live free is here
in the marketplace

Keats admired the energy of a fight in the street below his
window in the crowded city but he moved to the country
he moved to the center of his being he moved to the center
of his being a poet

He gave up the life of his ambition and took up
the life of his wonder

Dance Across Montana

for Nicki Giovanni at Virginia Tech

A couple dances in Montana her small arms go
up his back and her hands dance across Montana

Their feet shuffle in loose unison it is the dance of easy lovers
she turns and walks across Montana a wide soft smile on her
face he watches the air she leaves behind with Montana in
his happy eyes neither leaves the state of their happy union

With burnt yellow clouds above the ridge the east turns to
shadow deep furrows darken the hillside takes the shape
of bodies reclining the bodies of the earth as close as kin
are in the things that bring us to love

Nameless before we name them the clean air treats everything
with respect the lines are lean the colors light and strong

Dozens die in a show of rage and in the aftermath a famous poet
tells the gathered *we don't know what to do we can't explain it we will
survive we will thrive we're alive* her voice rises above the grieving

Taken down by the blows that took so many lives the poet
speaks for those who don't know what to say *we're one we're
one together we're undone we begin again together* and a shout
follows her words as joy follows a broken heart to fill it

The Easy Escape from Nirvana

We escape the reality of our existence when
we cling to any passing thought or action

Any version of our condition is more welcome
than this nirvana this grace this heaven
because it has no teeth for our neck

As soon as I speak of this unspoken reality I show
a film of the tropics I open an album of pretty pictures

*Look how beautiful how serene how peaceful how rich how
stirring* yet as soon as I live what I am I forget its name

We say we love each other and still we avoid the true nature
of love to fashion a model of love from what we avoid

I go looking for its match in those I might love
the same as I do with this moment of being

It seems easier to worship replicas than it is living in this
danger I'm concerned with what has its teeth in my neck

This recognition of the bite of the unreal has been a part
of me for so long I can't remember when it wasn't

Carl Jung told his patient *you're a dipsomaniac you need
a transformative awakening and I can't help you there's no way
to achieve what you need goodbye*

This teaching that there is no way to be free except in
transformation has no history no master and no secret

On the boat sailing back to the States Roland the drunk
found his impossible awakening within himself with no help
from anyone

He became free inside the prison of his own entrapment the
goose was out of the bottle and the bottle was out of his heart

The Ascent of the Descent

In the practice of our being with words
grace and gravity belong to everyone

The first leap in learning is learning
to speak from silence

Poetic language stirs the skepticism that
*poets make obscure what should be easy truth and beauty
should not be difficult* a tin miner approached Neruda
and told him *you must speak for those of us who cannot
speak for ourselves*

Neruda didn't know he was so needed to speak
in the common language what is uncommon
in the telling of the untold the saying of the unsaid

A poet is called to go into the earth of our being
and return with the beauty and the truth of it
in words that match the ascent of the descent
in some way that molds the tin to its purpose

The Taste of Such a Delight

He spent a day with an old love to make new what had never been made old the years had left them unchanged in the heart their reunion was kinder no less a recognition

She put her hand on his head and her touch erased thought from his mind

His friend was never not his friend they were brief lovers but it wasn't what made them friends and being friends didn't make them lovers they were always both and neither

A woman I barely knew loving by her nature put her hand on my back without intent and I felt the touch of a certain heaven a bonding of what's missing with what takes the missing away

A wise old man put his hands on my face and my controversies were concluded across the decades

Some touch jumps the physical and all thoughts are rendered useless the taste of a such a delight erases the thought of hunger

I put my own hands on my own face like the hands of the old man who taught me like the touch of the warm flesh of a beloved elder and my old hands remind me what is constant in my own heart

The Wu Li Heart

With no belief in science or spirituality everything is a
dance the Wu Li Dancers dance ahead of their demons
so no demon can catch them

When I begin a poem I am no poet of words as soon
as I end a poem I am no poet of words *poet* is a name
I use that disappears in the using yet of poetry I am
its champion and I am indifferent to it there is no
greater spiritual dance than a poem

Poetry is the science of thought and feeling with no
theory of evolution or construction except the good
tears itself open in the telling

The good is lost and found in its transit from nothing
to something and back again death is predictable and
every birth is fraught with unknowns the Wu Li heart
holds nothing in its hands for its demons to covet

A young man in swept-wing sunglasses red jacket
tanned skin two days stubble and windblown hair
sits at a sidewalk table drinking from a cup with a lid
he turns his head searching then hunched over
he throws his eyes back watching and waiting

On the inside of the window sits a man with gray hair
cut and combed white skin a paunch like a pregnancy
reading the paper turning pages in the practice of a lifetime
scanning for something never looking up from his search

Men dance with their demons to ward off their demons
until their demons are doing the dance for them

Wu Li is Chinese for *patterns of organic energy nonsense my way*
I clutch my ideas and *enlightenment* I dance free from my demons
in the dance of organic nonsense the dance of enlightenment
the dance of clutching no idea the dance of no way

Jesus Laughed

My dancing heart won't take direction and
it won't stop dancing it doesn't listen to advice
all it wants to do is dance

A playful heart in prison is still a playful heart
my father could play but he didn't know how

There's no room for play in a tragic world with
comedians for relief I commit to play to plunge
deep in the heart of play

True play has few expositors in this world of
travail and respite but it has its practitioners

Struck in the side with a sword Jesus laughed
he knew there was no body to be wounded in who
he was but he had sealed an obligation to act it out
he had to appear to be born again in the flesh

He cried out and continued to die but there is
no need to be born again no one needs to do
the impossible a second time

Being born in a body is the sleight of hand of
existence and an open heart is its place of birth

Persona Manqué

While playing characters on stage I discovered that
as long as I stayed in character I could do no wrong

The character did the speaking there were no mistakes in
character as a man in the world I sought the same freedom

When I played myself in the world I discover I was not
the character I played I discover that being true to myself
meant dropping my character in favor of the indefinable
being who plays me

I can devote myself to the character of my experience
or I can fall into the being that pervades my character
I felt joy in losing myself in character I let my character
do the acting while I remain in peaceful being itself

The absence from myself in playing a character
frees me knowing my character is a persona manqué

I become lost and found in being itself as my character
speaks in the occasional drama of my eternity

My drama is the story of this being in character it is
the common drama of all beings I am this becoming from
being to a man in his character to the character he plays

This is the only story I can tell without pretense I cannot
then be false in any dramatic sense untrue to his truth
Polonius dies in the play of lies

Deep Blue Spills in a Light Blue Sky

The sky was deep blue spills in light blue water
a painted ceiling a roof of blue abstracts of color

The sky rose to such a height to make everything below it
a place of awe I went driving beneath a great friendly heaven

We gather in this room of earth to recognize the wonder
of our being with no one different from any other

There is humility that betters my own and greatness
that grows my greatness larger the songs of the spirit
sing the reality of this heaven on earth

Behind every god is a reality that outshines it we are like
children in a room unable to describe what's outside so we
listen to anyone with a story of what might be beyond us

A man sits by a rock wall in a canyon in the desert safe enough
to sleep another night wise enough to survive another day

He neither prays nor panics he is alone but he knows
an even greater aloneness he lives in the wonder of his being
with his heart forgetting its parts for the whole and the sky
is a deep blue joy nameless as he becomes it

The Seas Keep Themselves Separate

The desired love of last year is nowhere
to be found in this fragile arrangement of lives

We try to build institutions of solidarity we make
laws of our desires to keep the parts of the sea
from pouring in and out of each other

Instead we're made boundless and
nameless by this life's long love of itself

I become the weather of my senses the weather
becomes the nature of my body and what was
true yesterday has no place today

When something occurs like joy one wants it to stay
in place but the love I feel is not what I claim it to be

Falling from the sky like a showy violence desire makes
a hole in the earth until its fire goes out and only
the hole remains

People name the jagged emptiness of desire love
they invite others to see what no longer exists
in the empty shape of what once appeared to be

We celebrate the shape of love's absence that now is made
to seem so much greater than its even greater reality

I am this love that appears as a hole in my heart
only in the sideshow of my brokenheartedness

A Softly Ruined Face

She has a softly ruined face with age lines in baby skin
her hair has been bleached white by time she has sparkling
eyes in protective creases she's earned her scrimshaw beauty
staying alive in herself has earned her a measure of peace

A wise man listens to the litany of practices engaged in
by his new disciples who seem eager to take on more
and at the end of their long list of devotion he says
*that's enough you've done enough the purpose of meditation
is to stop meditating to reach the moment where these practices
are no longer useful be quiet be still be as you are*

They stare in disbelief as he calls an end to their chosen path
it's not easy to stop at the end of a life of devotion to experience
the object of one's dedication now present in one's awareness

I am the master of devotion exhausted by my practices

In the search for liberation one's aging may take away
all that distracts us from the beauty of who we are it
takes time to survive the distractions that flood our lives

Until in no time at all we see freedom in this moment
with no more need to add to the ideas of freedom or to
call the heart to atone in the practice of its innate accord

Pictures of Home

The Queen sits on her throne representing the family
that's ruled for four hundred years she is the paragon
of stability her visage a reassurance

Our own mother didn't change her demeanor in ninety
years she was expected to be what she expected herself
to be it drove her children to the far corners of the land

Detachment is an imitation of what occurs naturally
we take up a likeness of the natural for our private peace
and when we're away from home we hang pictures of home

I fell in love with myself as a thinking creature until
I saw the original awareness was born from nothing

To let go of seeking home is to be at home in oneself

The charade of leaving home makes me absent from myself
and masks of peace are hung in empty halls of separation

Come Home! cries out from the center to the parts that have
gone away I cry for joy when anything human calls itself home
in grief in pain in love in simple recognition the farthest
distance home is no distance at all

I seldom saw my mother and I couldn't be rid of her but
when I finally went to see her I found she had disappeared
into my heart

The Privilege of Passion

When I was passionate I thought something
should happen as if passion had a privilege

When I fell in love something had to be done
my passion for love separated itself from love itself

It became the privilege of passion to take possession
of the habit of love until what's inherent is overridden
by passing pains and pleasures I indulged the children
of passionate love until they were fat with privilege

In this privileged mind I owned what I thought what
I felt and what I was this mind wanted to own what
these things named as their incarnations as if desire
had the right of love on its side

Desire grows a garden in the name of love and then
claims the privilege of its gardening desires are lifted
from love as the property of the lover

In this habit of passionate privilege desires become the
stolen ownership of answered and unanswered love alike

True passion is not the owner of love but its emancipator

Another Man Taught by Another Man

I watched a man living as a famous teacher to see
if he would betray himself as another man taught by
another man to believe something from what other
men had said to each other a long time ago or if
he was in being with the reality of the original moment

It's a old sad story that what we teach each other
could be held suspect that what men tell other men
as the unimpeachable truth straight from the godhead
could be held to question

To ask how is this not something written by a man for a man's
purposes how is this not a way to separate us from each other
and from our simple reality by claiming it as a path to our
eternal reunion when we already are this original reality

The wise man pointed past his teaching to my origin and I
let go of my doubting mind I watched a man living as a teacher
become another voice for my own in the same way a poem
passes from one heart to another

Sometimes what is taught is not taught but held up for
recognition the way the face of a friend is a delight when it
turns a corner and appears in one's sight in one's heart

A Habit of My Hands

When I release what I think I love it seems
cruel and unfair to the thing I think I loved

We think the war must be won when we went
to war with good intentions as if good intentions
divine their ends when what occurs outlives desire

Determination has a military mind desire believes
it will outlast its adversaries equipped as it is with
wings of trumpeted glory

Desire flies to the sun on wings of wax believing the sun
will succumb to our determined assault our fondest desire
would transform the sun to ourselves by our resolute will

The warrior of desire that I have cherished like a loved one
dies and I no longer hold dear what's been dearly held

This letting go betrays my holding as a habit of my hands
I look at empty hands and I can't remember what they held

Bare feet on bare ground cross the earth holding nothing
and nothing holds them the earth doesn't need to be held
to be the ground beneath my feet

When the Greatest Actor Died

When the greatest actor died many cried
they said he was a being greater than a man

There are many great actors some few great beings
and when something greater than a man inhabits
a man we want that greatness to live on

We see ourselves in our mirrors but we are not small
beings inhabited rarely by something greater but beings
of a greater being living in the constraints of our limitations

We elevate a rare being to honor its rarity and to keep
that rarity from becoming the standard of our reality

No man is greater than any other except he opens the gates
of his being he puts himself inside a self larger than himself

A force of nature opens itself to its own greater self my friend
says he shall have no other gods before him he says it so his ears
can hear what his heart is speaking he says it to lift the lid of god
from the bowl of his being to become what he is by his nature

The greatest actor was no god he played roles conceived
by others his life among those he wanted to love and those
who loved him was a turmoil of inept concern

He came from tragic life and begat a life no less tragic but
the open heart of his art unleashed the art of being itself

His eyes had the gleam of the discovered universe a fleeting
glance of eternity in the look of a moment shared with
anyone who saw him

With Tender Flesh the Avenue

Caught in thwarted thoughts for one who did not
match my desire I still feel loyal to the desire

We seemed to have a bond beyond formality but the more
we loved in simple recognition the less we became as lovers
and I felt a loss in the heart of the body

By the side of the ocean in a naked commune of spirit
mind and body I didn't want others to see my lover's
bared breasts lest my desire be seen I couldn't bear
to recognize my desire naked in her nakedness
among easily naked others

Physically touched by the touch of tender flesh what I'm
given gives me what I have to give this last desired love
never crossed that transparency we were one in the spirit
but not the body my desire longed to cross the line

She says she's taken to massage to unknot her pain
one can only go so long without being touched she says

I remember another love from long ago with whom
I could touch and be touched by the possibility if not
the reality of love she too was indifferent to the moment
of private power in being without power

When the spirit runs to the surface of the skin when
the spirit wears the skin of twined lovers the moment
touches the body to its being from love to love itself
and back to love again with tender flesh the avenue

A Cry Rises in the Cells

A cry rises in the cells for what I let be missing
in their lives in the affectionate love of another

In choosing to live with those of the same ignorance
I have carried and shared an ignorance in the life
of the body but the body knows its inherency I
impose ignorance where ignorance has no home

The mind dissolves to a greater awareness
when the body resolves to a natural knowledge

The caring touch I sought I find in myself not in
relief from its absence but in recognition of its presence

I sharpen what's been made dull by experience to
become as honest in the physical as I am in the spirit

Blunted by the historical and the personal I catch
glimpses of the fine point of my flesh what lies within
seeks the surface despite all that's done to discourage it

The fine point of my flesh is nowhere a blunt instrument
whether my flesh is given or received I've thrown my body
about in pain and pleasure and my cells have cried out

The gift of touch survives despite trying to hold what cannot
be held in hands that have not listened to their cells that cry
for tender ears to hear their clear and simple lament

Bowling Lessons

He jumps out of his chair to tell of bowling
with his father he's no more isolated in himself
than the center is separate from what it centers

The seven deadly sins are seven things we do
to surrender ourselves to a fault to who we are

His passionate presence is centered in its being
not its persona he dances in his visible self
an expression of the fullness of his being

My heart opens to see him complete in himself
he doesn't need my definition to define him

The more he is himself the more he defines himself
a spirit of nameless being my joy is not in his name

His fullness seems to call attention to his definition
but eyes that look to the core see his fertile foundation

From the surface we makes waves that wash ashore and die
from the depths we show ourselves an ocean without a shore
he's afraid in loving this way of surrender that he'll disappear

We identify our lives in the glare of our days and the dark
of our nights but the diffuse and nameless light of sinless love
frees and unites us all

Each born individual acts out extremes of our electric
stillness in brazen displays of selfless self-adoration

The Old Sailor Baby

His hands were small animals he couldn't contain
he kept pulling them back under his care to keep
them from being seen in their bestial vitality

They tried to live independent lives like children crawling
away from their mother only to be pulled back again

He was an old sailor alone in a bar with gnarled knuckles
and canvas skin his eyes averted from the younger crowd

His was a quiet curse that revealed a gentle confusion
a child in a giant body who reminded me of my father
who reminded me of myself both man and child

He sat by himself at a round table nursing a beer
when it was the beer that nursed him

Waiting behind a woman at the Goodwill I held
her baby's bottle as she made her purchase

The baby girl was almost full of milk on the edge
of sleep heavy-lidded like a sliding wall of earth

The child's feet were bare in the carrier two big toes
and eight tiny niblets of pink skin she suckled on the
nipple with less and less enthusiasm her little hands
let go of the bottle and fell into the air

A beautiful baby I said to the mother then stepped into
the warm sun of the street and later watching a movie
I cried it helps my heart to cry for any reason for
no reason to be like a baby to be like a man

The History of the Body

I put my hand on my own shoulder the way a friend or a
caring lover might I feel the muscle not my reaction to it

Out of habit I touch myself like a dutiful nurse rarely with
the kind and gentle touch I reserve for real and imagined others

Our mother washed our hair at the sink she scrubbed our
scalps with zeal I learned the technique and carried it
forward as if the body were in need of vigorous cleansing

We look for others to come to us with love in their hands
to satisfy the need for touch to have our bodies loved

We hire professionals to approximate a crossbred love
when to touch ourselves with loving care seems foreign

We expect to get love from a lover to give love to a lover
to know what that love is without loving ourselves in kind

We scrub our skin and caress another *show me*
how to love we forget what we fail to remember

I put my hand on my shoulder and feel the muscle
curiosity in my fingers awakens my being cared for

My hand moves to my arm I feel the muscle beneath
the skin I feel what had not been felt before another
kind of recognition hidden in this simple grateful body

No Idea Where to Put Her Petals

In a cool room she pulls her halter-top by the straps
she rubs her shoulders with the hands of crossed arms

She looks around with the eyes of one who wishes she were
engaged in some passionate activity that she has yet to name
she pulls at her clothing like an alien dressed by other aliens
to mix among humankind

Summer has come too quickly in the long slow spring of her
maturation suddenly she's in bloom and she's got no idea
where to put her petals there is sweet pain in her demeanor

Passions of the body that flood the will are compelled
in the midst of not knowing what to do to do something

Swamped by contraries in the protocol of obsession
one's fear is overwhelmed by a surging mindlessness

Later in life a parallel occurs as the juggernaut of passion
drives to an outlook above the city of its experience with
the engine still running and a new history begins of one's
lifelong contemplation of the essential

Nothing changes in what changes everything as peace appears
in what once felt like the frantic center of swirling energy

Passion recognizes its urgency in a calm without confusion
obsession sheds its skin and the bones of the inevitable
are exposed

The Play of Self-Delighting Pains

I watched a great teacher speak he had nothing to teach and he taught it well but there were so few ready to hear it that he became an challenging entertainment to those who came to be with him

Everything is a cliché or an obfuscation until there is a readiness for it and then it jumps outside itself

Ciardi talks of Keats taking *self-delighting pains* to say that nothing we do has lasting significance including ourselves

He asks *why does he do that if that's the way he feels* he says *it's play* no matter the significance poetry is play life is play and being here is the play of all that is

First one person speaks then someone else then more then someone new comes in from outside then more arrive then there's too many then a few or two or only one *when I witness any drama I can't keep it straight who should I listen to and who is the one speaking*

Characters speak the playwright speaks but the play is the one speaking I sit back in the awareness of being and I hear my own voice in the play of self-delighting pains

Ordinary Ecstasy

Cezanne says he's looking for a good cup of coffee with his hands in his pockets his shirt tied around his waist wearing a straw hat and frameless glasses his beard is neatly trimmed his short pants reveal stocky muscled legs hairy and tan

He seems content to be doing something mundane and then his eyes darken as if a thought intervenes

A thin man stands waiting wearing a short sleeve shirt with large writing on it *Life is short Death is sure Sins the curse Christ the cure*

A young man sits with his young lover looking at breasts he's seen many times ordinary ecstasy in their easy demeanor

The setting sun illuminates the east reflecting on the west walls and windows shadows build on the far side a smudged yellow orb hangs in the haze of the horizon

Cezanne calls his child and the boy runs around him like a firefly to its flame a tall woman sails by like a schooner on a smooth sea

A black man in a yellow shirt and green shorts his long sleek hair tied behind his head skims across the tile with a snare brush sound he moves light and swift and he's gone

These words come and go sometimes with a weight that lightens sometimes with a light that has weight sometimes with weight and light that live on their own

The Music of the Blooded Air

On the first hot day of the year bugs jump out of their cocoons
and flood the air one could plant the air and reap a harvest

Everything competes for space in what gives it life
the air is kneaded like dough in muscled hands

Lightnin' Hopkins sits on an old couch across from another man
a bottle on the table between them in the sweltering Texas night

The music seeps and squeezes out of the air it hangs and grips
the air it cries and moans comforts and caresses it tears the air
so thick with itself it can't be torn we play the music of the blooded air

In this fertile heat nothing is kept unique the heat lives in what
lives in the heat in the tropics there is no birth and death in mythic
cycle both are constant with no separation to want metaphor

Seasons don't follow each other like discriminated egos they
pile on top each other in the same inseparate season of self

Television makes it difficult to know what's present or past
everything playing at the same time the movies started it
when dead actors appear alive in their images books started it
when characters come alive as they once lived myth started it
when those we eulogized never die we started it in the life
of our open minds without borders in time

I sit where I sat a year ago and not much has changed
I could make a list of faces and memories of terrible things
happening in the world of events predicted to be the scourge
of the future a future that becomes a rapidly receding memory

Instead I tell myself to write this moment's unwritable poem
and I laugh at wisdom that fails to daunt the daring

You Should Save the World

Someone says *hey Jesus hey Buddha you should be
a preacher you should find a mount and deliver a sermon
you should write four principals you should save the world*

Jesus sat on a rock in the desert and said *I'm not here
I'm not the savior of the world* Buddha sat under a tree
and said *I'm not here I'm not the savior of the world
there's nothing to be done and no one to do it*

Now I'm ready said Buddha and Jesus agreed

Have you ever read this an old girlfriend said of my baby book
your mother expected you to save the world my mother's words
didn't surprise me a billion mothers have thought
the same of a billion children

We are all children of the womb of thought making plans
for a disappearing future and they have said to us *take
this thought and make something of yourself we'll all be watching*

I make something where nothing was to pass it to another
generation in the open air on a hill in the desert under a tree
but I'm not the savior of thought I face my being I birth myself
into the void I die into the chronicle of my dramatic history

Every true poem is born in the space between poems
every mother is known by her true desire in the moment
before her desire is born

As Rough Hewn as We Make It

An artist looks at unnamed reality in the artistry
of his being and makes a sculpted shape or a
portrait in materials not as real as their model

When Pygmalion fell in love with the creation
of his desire his beauty didn't live in the stone
it lived in the unsculpted presence of his being

The statue couldn't match the being of his beauty
it was a reality most partial like the trail of a snail

Reality occurs between sheets of glass one can
see through it to the object beyond and one can
see oneself in it as in a mirror but the real is neither
window nor mirror it lives in the space between the glass

I am neither the world beyond my eyes nor the world
behind my sight I live in the space between my separated
selves this recognition rights my ship in the brilliance
of my awareness even when I am lost at sea

Brilliant Hamlet knows the play of his reality yet
he's dumb to his fate *tell my story* he tells his friend
and then silence he says and dies

Shakespeare calls angels to accompany his hero
but Hamlet calls no angels instead his presence
even in its absence outshines the angels' light

The Laughing Policeman

I neglected my studies painting at night sleeping past noon
and when I woke the president had died shot riding in a car

I crossed the college commons in an uncommon silence until I
asked a passing stranger and learned the awful news a nation wept

That night was my first date with my future wife and despite such an
inauspicious beginning we both needed a companion for adulthood
I'll go if you'll go we said to each other we held hands and jumped

Of four state cops one roars with laughter it's rare to hear anyone
laugh with such abandon let alone a man in uniform he gurgles
and bubbles coughs cackles giggles hacks and bursts with shouts

In Shakespeare class I failed to read the assigned Hamlet before a
quiz I made a joke no one appreciated and later in my reading
I discovered the prince of my own Denmark I won't live in this
body past my life no matter how my words live the good and bad
are buried with our bones *alas poor Yorick* I never knew him well

The laughing policeman fills his ears with his own laughter
as if the circle of men is laughing with him the other cops
in dulcet tones know how to handle the familiar scene

When the president died the great wide country was filled
with the deafening silence of his death it wafted across Iowa
it coated the Rockies it quieted the waves on the coast

I thought we married because we danced well together
as if everything in our marriage would be as harmonious
I left a better partner to be with her it was nothing relevant

And when Ophelia died Gertrude cried certain her son
would marry the girl if only the King hadn't been killed

Even contradiction can't explain our dualities *what are you reading*
Polonius asks Hamlet *words words words* the Prince replies

Chased from Fear to Fire

It's the same for a still mind to write a poem as it is
for the profoundly deaf to speak to take that first step off
the edge to walk in air out from and above our history

To begin to think a mechanism begins to speak
a noise begins a tinnitus of the mind the same mind
whose silent stillness reverberates with peace in the wise

We disturb our peace to make ourselves known like dogs
who bark to announce their presence until they sleep and
when they awaken they make their public pronouncement
endlessly barking their being we bark all day our presence
never assured but those at peace need no reassurance

We teach ourselves to be insecure and to communicate
our insecurities so we may live in fear with each other
and once begun the mind chases itself from fear to fire
and back from fire to fear

A cultivated mind makes things of beauty and truth from
its seeded self but the ground is complete before the bloom

We ask the earth for its yield we disturb it for what it
gives us it seems infertile if we take too much but we
make it so until we allow its renewal a practiced mind
crowds its ground with demands

One of my hands lifts a word and the other hand wants
to play this sort of play disturbs my peace as if once
disturbed peace can be and must be ignored

My hands drop their words I drop my hands into
openness and their fisted fear falls away

His Once African Face

I turn from the thought of dreams when I stop
dreaming of my desire the dream continues
but I don't chase it into the realm of volition

I don't chase what continues to invite pursuit
inside the unrelenting nature of thought itself

The object of my imagined desire doesn't interest
me to make it what it doesn't become on its own

On this stormy night with wind and rain summer
is weeks away but its arrival is revealed in glimpses

I sit back in easeful emptiness unrelated to current
realities that live simultaneously like sitting in the
crush of traffic in the ease of unconcerned thought

A peaceful young woman with Mayan features sits in the
modern world in the complacency of the ancient young

Her lover arrives they embrace his once African face
shows no stress their love fills them with consequence

I am consequent to my dreamless reality knowing
no dream out-dreams its origin

Twenty Years in Silence

One sees the time coming because it's already here
when I love and I'm loved for my presence in being itself

A teacher spent twenty years in silence some say it was
his best teaching and when he began to speak he began
to be less so more could know of the stillness he knew

All teaching is set apart from what might be taught
speaking separates itself from what cannot be said

Being at home in myself domiciles my being without
it ever being domesticated my clever tongue betrays
its message as it proclaims it

A simple man once upon a time in the past before the
past was invented before there was a future to color it
noticed his own being and ran to tell the others

They stared at him with incomprehension until he
invented a tongue with marvels born and enflamed
hearts began to dance around his fire

I speak of silence to quiet my noisy gift to let stillness
seep into my voice until I'm still even in my song

A Greater Being in an Uncertain Reality

We say that when our work is done we will get to
be who we are we postpone ourselves to the future

We say that when our task is finished we'll act in
the moment of our being in the center of our heart
and maybe the moment comes maybe it doesn't

True to ourselves in this moment of reality the time we
postpone to the future is no longer awaited but present

If we're taken with fear we concern ourselves with
lesser fears we shun the greater fear of who we are

I forfeit my hold on what lives by its claims
for the certainty of having no certain claim

I lose my unsure standing in this uncertain reality
by facing the emptiness of its claims and mine

Face to face with my own eternity life removes
its death mask and death removes its mask of fear

The House Detective in the Hotel of Incidental Melodies

The house dick sits in the lobby of a rundown hotel
there's nothing for him to do except he's a thief

He steals from the guests and recovers enough to prove his
worth so he can keep his job which means little to him

His room in the hotel is a cache of his pilfered swag
he's not interested in what he steals only the theft and
then only for a moment his satisfaction is short-lived

The hotel is populated by strange characters among
whom he is one of the strangest then one day he dies
under mysterious circumstances

Police detectives stand over his body discovered
in the midst of his accumulation of stolen artifacts

The owner of the hotel slumps nearby telling
the detectives of their longtime friendship

One disheveled detective looks down at
the crumpled body and says to no one in
particular *now that's a sad fuckin' story innit?*

Down by the Banks of the River

The setting sun bakes my face I remember the taste
of gin from when I drank gin that summer in Illinois

The sun was hot in the late hours of the afternoon after work
in my room in the old building in Rock Island down by the river

It was the summer after school the summer before I married
two years before the Summer of Love in San Francisco where
my marriage ended eight years later but that summer I was
still young enough to believe myself free of social definition

Now I sit in the sun in the Northwest thinking of returning to
my adult hometown called Frisco by those who don't live there

And the sun conjures images of drinking gin in my third floor room
in the dilapidated house in the town next to the town where I was born

The sun is blocked then comes back and the feeling comes back
with it I let it bake me like having a warm liquid poured in my body
until my body feels more liquid than vessel and my thoughts and feelings
turn to heat

This time I don't need the gin the warmth of the sun stirs the feeling
and I'm happy to feel it the feeling doesn't make me want to drink

Instead I become another presence of heat I write these stories
backwards from the image to the source and I'm done

Kicked Back to Sand

Four Tibetan monks spend a day making an intricate
sand painting in an airport lobby their mandala
protected by a ring of velvet ropes

A small boy runs under the flimsy barrier and kicks
the painting back to sand the boy's mother turns to see
where her boy has gone and she pulls him away with
no sign of alarm or regret

The monks laugh their art is temporal the boy is an agent
of the temporal like the attention of the mother for her son
neither is concerned about the consequence of their agency

Agents of the temporal run wild what remains is the airport floor
the sand and the earth beneath the land beneath the sky

Sitting Bull complained to the government agent that they
were taking the sacred lands of the Sioux for their own

The agent laughed he cited the history of the Ojibwa
running the Sioux out of Minnesota the Sioux running
the Pawnee out of the Dakotas

You may call it spiritual he said to the chief
but it's nothing new and it's certainly not sacred

The slaughter of native peoples continues apace
until the idea becomes repugnant and the spiritual
accrues to the land beneath the rampage

If the climate is destroyed by our abuse the earth will
survive and the folly will end along with our temporary
agency no matter how sacred or profane we name it ours

Cradled in the Arms of Not Knowing

As a child becoming a man I wanted to make
the unknown known until I faced the unknowable
unknown and I hesitated before I stepped into myself

It became only a matter of how far before the knowing's
known had seen its face boned of ease of grace and gaunt

I was taught to leap to the safety of others' conclusions
but I no longer deferred to those with answers

Between knowable and unknown I yearned to face
what I feared to face until I did it alone with no preparation
in a courtesy of terror in a leap of faith a leap without legs
across a chasm without character

I let go of the knowing of knowledge my champion

Leaping from an airplane strapped to someone else we try
to lose ourselves to gain ourselves but every advantage we gain
in depending on others is futile except to be done with
at the leaping off point

I leap with nothing and no one to tell me what I'll find
in the leaping the lap of eternity is not given to those
haven't left the arms of knowing

The body has no memory of this brilliance and the mind
can't be used to tool its freedom I am its only grant
its only passage and its only arrival

So Often Away in Paradise

A poet reads her tale of Blake's wife saying she
missed her husband *he was so often away in paradise*
this is the propaganda of escape that denies the reality

Blake and his wife entertained spirits at their table they
climbed naked in the backyard tree this is the propaganda
of spiritual romance we so habitually cloth our freedom
that our tales of it become costume dramas

Jelalludin Rumi wrote love poems to the Beloved
when his honest asides were of being in being itself

A trained spokesman for religious others it was customary
for him to dress his bare grace in garments of glory but
the emperor of existence is absent from the clothier

How do I admire existence if it's naked of any form
except I praise everything that might be its kingdom
in its vast empty wonder

This path of praise I allow in myself is my human urge
to clothe what I am instead of showing its naked beauty

There is too much beauty in us for these rags in words

The Pearl

After the aloneness of the body nothing
so surprised me as the aloneness of the soul

Anything that forms a soul is alone the being
of the soul needs another soul like a god
to protect it from its aloneness

Oneness is a truth and a deception it careens
in the mind like good drugs as true as last night's
drunkenness

Sobriety destroys the kindness of the illusion
of the separated soul sobriety is a toxin as sinful
and adjudicated as the church runs the hiding
from being itself by calling it god

There is nothing more terrible than being alone
it is the truth how beautiful it is to be alone

Aloneness is the opening to having no thought
of self or the self of the soul aloneness in the
soul is the last refuge of the illusion of separation

I have never been less separate I have never
been less alone how beautiful it is to be alone