

My New Room

My new room looks far too much like *my* room,
it's a fine room, clean, attractive, comfortable,
well out-fitted, cared for, efficient, intelligent,
stimulating in the images and ideas, peaceful,
productive, resourceful, paid for, and available,
I cannot make it more than I can make myself,
what's lacking is an other, with the same qualities,
not in duplication, or redundancy, but in alchemy.

I've stopped describing my life in common
with the common and near to great human mind,
I've passed over a line I didn't draw, a demarcation
made by the stubborn lot of people who are content
with discontent, satisfied with dissatisfaction,
bored in such a way that it's a way of life.

Teasing its borders with wit and bright images,
I could have been made rich as Rockefeller,
but without not a little effort, I am here,
teasing the waters where only a few swim.

I made the effort, but effort is a funny word,
what is effort that's a hike into the mountains,
a hard winter's survival, and then the vista
of vast land and sea, an occasional footprint
in the sand, I suppose I look the same.

The Regular Catastrophe

What is confusion, and how does someone
in the middle of it describe it, a hurricane
that dislodges a forest, a river turned to
something more than rain, the democracy
of water, anarchy in the wetter emotions.

That seems close enough, everything is close,
here at the epicenter of love's shopping mall,
I don't mean samples, but Jerrico, I don't mean
adoring crowds, hungry, but a logjam of delicate
concerns and passions, the glance of nuance in the
eyes, then like a slant-back assaulting the defense,
an orange crate passing itself off as a Maserati,
nothing original here, just the regular catastrophe.

Bend over and pull your coat up,
I hear the drunk in the next stall say,
getting ready to clean the porcelain of coke,
it's only Thursday night, but it's already been
a hell of a week, she's due any minute.

Everything People Say in Paris Seems Significant
(Louis Simpson)

From where I sit, everything I see is American,
American walls, American paint, American people,
a couple of American cops drinking American coffee.

How does a man with a gun appreciate cheese cake,
with keys and a badge, billy club, and a radio on his belt?

American music, American chairs, American talk,
what does it mean to an American to be an American?

A light American rain is falling on the American street,
the lights of the American cars are shining in the American night.

An American is holding an American umbrella, as she waits
for the American light to change to American green.

Does one become American when one is already American?

The American cafe is nearly empty, as the American patrons
head for their American homes to eat their American dinners.

Everything is American, this is an American poem.

The Day the Sparrows Came Back to San Francisco

The shower is dripping, the heater is clicking,
the birds are chirping, what the hell is happening?

There are no birds in San Francisco, she says,
rolling over in bed, in the room on Peters' Alley,
where the chickens walk the street like in Mexico,
and the kids playing football on Sunday are all related.

The gloves tossed on the chair have fallen into gestures,
the floor looks as if it has been raining clothes, and still
the singing continues, a relentless cheerfulness.

The 7AM traffic on Mission Street rumbles relentlessly,
as the sun relentlessly brightens the room by degrees.

The refrigerator hums, the heater clicks, the dogs bark,
the heels click on the sidewalk, as she burrows deeper
into the layered sheets, strewn and twisted like Paul
Bunyan's handkerchief, and the horns honk.

Some stray band of birds has wandered across the border,
migrating the wrong way in the wintertime, and she turns,
twisting and rolling in the sheets, I'm cognizant of a tune.

Let me go, let me go, lover, I sing, as her back turns, naked
to the room, striking beauty, a scene for Matisse, or Courbet,
or me and my eyes, I trace the lines over and over with my eyes,
I dream the dream that happy lovers make of everything in sight,
this day, the day the sparrows came back to San Francisco.

Twine of Life

Everything looks like something else, but in fact,
everything is what it is and not a metaphor for us to decipher
or a simile to carry us like a bobsled downhill or on to victory.

Downhill skiing is not like flying across fallen bodies
to score a touchdown, oh, no, it is a fixed mark, this life,
a poem writ on water, to dance with death until it unites us,
never the twain shall meet, unless it be on a river of realization
that connects between neurons in response to experience,
that old innocence, twine of life, in time, out of time.

I love you means you are the tree I water
that I depend on for the greening
of the leaves that I am.

The Lake of Love's Beauty

The most beautiful woman in San Francisco, ask anyone, is hunched over coffee nearby, her red-lined, zippered, motorcycle jacket is thrown over the back of her chair.

She's talking to her severe-faced sister, who, intent, tells a tale and touches Charmian's earring, now grins, a stretched-mouth over hard teeth, I'm signaled by my opposite number, the one who sits across from the beauty.

She smiles, her eyes fill with love, and she casts it my way, like the fisherman who throws the bait at the trees before it sails into the lake, the vast, calm, or turbulent, shallow, or deep Lake of Love's Beauty.

If I were sitting at a window by such a lake, I would look like a portrait of a man sitting the way I am now, nothing could improve such a miniature, except I might be holding a book, forever about to return to it, caught between truth and beauty, dreaming the links, unawares.

Flash Rain

The agitation that comes on a man in the presence of a woman blessed with remarkable beauty would never do to win the heart of one of love, certainly, it takes part in the stir she is part of, altogether too familiar to her, and seldom done without, and if done without, is cynical, or blind boredom.

Except where an original mind, by fate's double blow, is thrust onto the same woman, and seeks itself, the way all flowers grow wherever they grow.

There, it becomes challenge of a higher sort, or other, or odd, or never known, or alone, there, it dreams, and along with dreaming, sees, and is.

No imagination of the excitable satisfies, flash rain never soaked the soil, or the soul.

Sans Aeroplane

Since the 14th Century, and back then they said, Since All Time Began,
people have been sitting in Winchell's Donuts, staring at the table top.

She, on the other hand, has interesting friends, with whom she enjoys
the dance, theatre and films, without which she says, she would go mad.

After the movie, in the paint store parking lot, she told me she thought
she had fallen in love with someone, although it might not work out,
he lived in another country, safe as pie, I thought.

When I saw her at the performance of the famous poets, we said nothing
to each other, but we smiled and waved, there was no form, but there
was a lack of content, as all those good at neither combined them.

Later, over coffee and doughnuts, I saw the future
in those shapes that hover in or above the formica.

I, too, may find my Nadja, in another country, sans aeroplane,
sans effort, sans regret, and not like my sweet, parking lot Nadja,
more than half of both, all rolled up in less than the whole.

Half In and Half Out of Paradise

No woman has ever understood the truth
that has grown of its own necessity,
who didn't stop it with birthing or
submission to a life of belonging.

And every man who has understood it,
either made gods to worship, or divined himself,
or turned to drugs or booze, or, if lucky as rain
at the right time, these two found the other.

A man and a woman, understanding of their truth,
are like the original dream and its painful challenge,
half in and half out of paradise, they give birth
to all others, they find all others in themselves,
they bloom in the sun.

Poetry is Thought and Art in One
(Mathew Arnold)

Inventor of crisis, to match the crisis unseen,
he senses, fears, provokes, regrets, stays immersed,
learns some oddment, dislodges the needle, the sliver,
the stinger, tiny beginner of pain, nurses the mess
back to clean skin and scar.

The surgeon who cuts to cure is not loved in the mirror
or the memory, his uniform perhaps held in fearful regard,
but the body, the greater body of us, profits, as the inventor
invents what's always been true, at such a cost.

Bleeding Ceilings

Too much activity makes inactivity awkward,
it turns attention to the two kissing, like kids
play adult, like adults play lovers, like odd
birds walk through the other bunch of birds,
almost oblivious to the difference.

Having a conversational chatter
bordering on incomprehensibility,
young lovers cooing in each other's
faces, Narcissus polishing his mirror
so he won't miss a wink.

The ceilings bled all day long, nothing could
stop it, no medicine, no bandage, no hope, no
way to stop the bleeding, they bled, until it was
time for the doctors to go home and shut out the light.

I practiced felicitous rebellion all day, forerunner of habit,
it's had its dinner and a place to sleep, an idea is aborning,
a bird fallen from the nest, bounces a couple of times,
before its wings flesh the air.

Saint Stephen shakes the stones from his hair,
before heaven bound, he looks around,
begins to think of eagles taking to the air,
and why not try it, does.

Penumbra

This is self-transformation, you take yourself on,
like a boxer takes on an actor to shape him to the task,
a drill sergeant takes a raw recruit away from his mother.

To teach the new way, or at least not the old way,
instead of merely belligerently staying alive,
like weightlifting in prison, memorizing the Bible,
or pastiming a complete reworking of the Classics.

I'm waiting for the wife of the poet, everything else
is *I love you very much*, and *thank you*, and *hello again*.

I'm perfectly willing to be the husband
of the poet, it's all the same to me.

A Quiet Fathering in the Wilderness

There is a quiet fathering in the wilderness, it says,
fine, my precious fool, step there, if it's your wish
to walk half-drunk off the edge of the world,
you'll see no tears, hear no cries.

Your bones break, the branches break, you die,
but here, inside your miserable skin, you may cry
all you like, half the city cries, there are tears
to fill a dozen rivers.

Sit at your table in your room and weep,
alternate the weeping with rage, and check it out,
there's a show on HBO designed for you in your skin,
here's a supermarket of woe with discounts on pain.

Try if you like to find these things in a tree,
look under a rock, search the skies, no tears,
people are good for some things,
trees for the rest.

Tie His Hands and Cover His Eyes

There's no thrill matches standing facing the absolute end of one's being as one has come to know it, at Saturday matinees, in church, riding the bus, or killing some other sentient being.

But thinking beyond thinking, accepting that which is beyond acceptance in any vocabulary, here, at the brink of absolute end, no waiting room, no late dues, no free holiday, no second go round, nothing so stirs the investiture of vitality as does the end, why would I care to focus this incredible being on another non-being state called the next life or the after life?

As if life is not life but pre-life, every life the cartoon before the feature, not just why, but how, can I project some entertainment on the great wall of death, don't be afraid, be excited, how could this be other than being at the nearest, farthest neurons of God's experience, this, God's life, shall I tie his hands and cover his eyes?

Circling the Details

I'm tired without someone to love, running on God,
and it isn't enough, seeing God in everything, everyone,
all action, light, and sun, lying in the back of a pickup,
on I-580, watching a hawk, lying on the wind in the hills.

Scratching a cute dog, stance like a young deer, face like a wise,
sad, old man, loving my work, my friends, my coworkers, faces,
ideas, memories, lying on time like a hawk, circling, no fear,
no hatred, my eyes on tiny creature details.

The hawk is love of the air, the hawk is love in the air,
I look at my hands, conscious of the love in them,
I am love in them, I am all the things I say,
and I'm tired, without someone to love.

Strong as a young deer, face like a wise, sad, old man,
circling the details, running on God, light, and sun.

The Eternal Ruse

I want you to be mine,
and I want to be yours,
and every time I say that,
I want us to laugh at our little ruse,
I want us to merge into one,
and every time I say that,
I want us to laugh at our little ruse.

I want us to walk down Paris boulevards
and forget who we are and what we're doing
and where we're going, and then we can laugh
at our little ruse.

I want you to be here, because you're part of me,
and I'm part of you, and the hardest laugh
is to laugh alone at our little ruse.

Being so far apart for so long a time,
learning all we can about the perfect
and imperfect in the world, where learning
to be without is a greater ruse than any
we could play together or on each other,

Knowing the ruse of life
and loving the ruse in its face,
the eternal ruse of realities
and the ruse of all the rest.

Pentimento

If you think of me as someone outside the pale, unsaved,
wandering lost behind a mask of certitude, you will never
hear a word I say, the words will come like light playing
on water, shimmering, charming, ephemeral, superficial.

If I decide you are someone stuck inside, guided
by a solved system, the words will hang in the air
like touchstones, like billboards, and neither of us
will listen to hear the soul, to see the wisdom that
lives near all our souls, and shines, as it reflects
the shining light of soul itself.

The union of our souls, in union with soul itself,
will occur in its melodrama, never in poetry,
in a common shuffle, never in a dance, in banter,
never in a joyful cry, never in communion or community.

Take off your documents of glory,
I will open my eyes and see new clothing,
we are without costume and naked,
look how well dressed we are.

They Say, Never Believe a Living Poet

If I toss some fresh toys on the table, do I know
how to play with them, when you do it, too,
horns, anger, death, take and eat, commitment
is the name of the game, promises are made,
fundamental truths of various lives,
summer heat relieved by misty nights,
we toss the book behind us.

I won't touch that breast, my mind is made up,
my mind is dissheveled, beautiful, beautiful woman
wanting some kind of savior, I'm going to join
the renunciates, but for one, I'm going to follow
the bicycle girls, one in particular, I'm going to
circle someone, at such a distance,
I will become inevitable.

If I buy a radio, what will I listen to,
if you buy the radio for me, I will sing,
I'm all ears and genitals, with my eyes
for a contract between us.

Joan of Arc, Reading a Book

You are, or you're very close to being, a woman,
not the postered woman at the barricades, held out
in front of the battered and budding souls of women,
that certainly grow in the fray, nor representing
all those who cannot or will not undertake
the necessary revolution of each one alone.

Life is rife for all of us, from starved to majestic,
from denied to realized, and no amount of battling
by proxy, or in phalanx, in absentia, or in rage,
substitutes for, or accomplishes, the simply done.

How simple to say and unsimple to do,
but the doing lives quietly inside the heart,
with brain for truck, and the soul, whose flag
we carry, survives, in our trusting it.

And when the generals say, *where are you*
in the war, you can say, *I'm over here, winning it.*

His Description of Her Night

Women can smell you, can smell another woman on you, the lingering stamp of approval, in its absence, can smell that, so she wasn't home when I called after our fateful encounter.

My friend told me how excited she probably was that I called, how miserable she was that she wasn't there to answer, how breathless she was in her restless, sensuous dream of sleep.

In sweet detail, he painted my new Juliet, moonbathing in delicious anticipation, while I saw her changing the locks, the phone, her residence, her name, her place of business, enlisting in the Sisterhood of Women Who've Lost the Scent.

Or she is one who has that other sense, acute awareness of the one apart, undrenched by popularity, known only to the woman apart, the one with flared nostrils, and eyes that can see the receiver rocking in its cradle, from ten miles up.

The Last Resort of Reality

Time is a room where things happen as regular as clockwork,
just hang around, here it comes, you can see it coming
from clear across the room, people coming and going,
food, no food, a fight breaks out, there's love in the kitchen.

Stand against the cool wall and choose your participation,
leave, go home, it's another time room, room for time to take place,
consider the skull, time is the most powerful stimulant, aphrodisiac,
calmative, developing agent, it must be in the air, like a pest-strip
hung by the window, breath in the aerosol agency of time's room.

Maybe it's the pine trees on the hillside, try that, it's just
breathing and time, now look at all that activity in the gaping
space, did you do that, or a friend of yours, or was it me?

You are Happy, Margaret Atwood, Margaret Atwood

The fear of happiness is the reluctance to persue it past each moment onto the next, where it leads to the bottomless pit of every emotion you ever caught in passing, like your shirt on a barbed-wire fence, a little tear and a tiny drop of blood, then, tallyho, onto the foxhunt of entertainment, but the incorporative mind is like a big bear of a jellyfish barracuda, sort of, and won't give up on anything, that would be exclusive, not inclusive, what you shit is what you ain't.

So don't drink on the weekends, when all hell breaks loose all heaven, but sit in the middle of it and let it wash all over you, here comes the heaving, heathen masses, breathing, notice how everything that's good gets you breathing deeper and deeper.

The end to all this breathing is called Dying and Going to Heaven, Do Not Pass GO, but jump on it, make a day of it, you ARE happy, but you gave it an alias and relocated it to another state, and all you got was evidence for the grand jury, next case.

In Splendid Isolation

In splendid isolation, the world opens up,
oh my, door opening, hand over the eyes,
hard to believe anyone's proclaimed majority,
even with sun and ducks and no nosey passerby.

Kiss, kiss, I love her breasts on my chest, her kiss
when she kisses me, want to touch every tiny muscle
on her body and her not-muscles too, beautiful blue
green eyes like blue-green beautiful eyes.

*I love it, she says, when you engulf me, how great
was her language. do you know ritual, she asked me,
as we walked around the lake, one recent sunny day.*

*Watch this, I said, I would rather throw this apple
far out in the lake than eat it, even though it is good,
so she throws her apple, too.*

Geese have teeth, or a metatarsal ridge,
in their grabby little long mouths.

Sweetheart

Sweetheart, you'd go nuts in any other relationship
but this one, like the ink of the soul needs a quill
to match the need and the necessity of the words.

A runaway ball-point pen won't scratch properly,
computer screens are for other computers to love.

We need our love in our hands, as slow as our
hearts at peace, as quick as the dream flies
ahead of the body blessed to the ground.

We're in love as the mind works when
free to the colors, intent on a single petal,
hearing the fast scratch of each new breath.

These Molecular Words

These molecular words come from the sunlight
and the deadly nightshade of God and God,
photosynthesized, then onto the page,
like the fossil imprint of a leaf from a tree
or monkey bone plucked from the primordial goo.

Inbetween everything else too numerous to mention,
they live, exist, are, become, do, act, and die, running
like engines, in and of themselves, fooling us part of the time,
because we think we see their borders, like a body of work
breathes, throbs, beats, kicks out energy limbs.

And all this because the animal brain gets love.

Physician, Heal Thyself

Being a healer does not mean being a nice guy, healing is not supplying bandaids or a soft shoulder to cry on.

It is a mark of love that sits as close to the bone as the damage, wreaked on the wounded, cuts core deep.

First-aid belongs in a comfort station, being everyone's friend and confidant is like bringing coffee and donuts to the starving masses.

My teats can't fill fast enough to satisfy the many mouths that can never substitute for my breasts' need for the one and only real baby my body manufactures.

Writing placebo prescriptions for imaginery maladies may be good business for some language doctors, but the real healing engages the righteous wrath of those who wish to be strong, join in the healing, pursue the demon cells out of the body, set up an invisible city of their own, say bye-bye to the healer, and get on with it.

Color Me Beautiful

Some women are weird, man,
with rooms full of drippy, dreamy shit,
cuddly animals, hypnotic colors, soothing language,
tales of smooth sailing, baroque, roccoco, semi-gothic
bathrooms, cascading imagery, pop top-selling novels,
pregnant cats, furniture that looks like plants that never
looked like furniture, families of creatures, not found
in nature, living in cupboards, closets like dreamland
interiors gone to seed, real lives like buckboard rides,
time spent exposed to the back alley, underbelly of
cream-colored insanity, histories of magic gone rancid,
cancer-riddled fantasies, not a hard edge in the place,
not a splintered surface apparent, but inescapable
secrets of knives twisted in the heart and flesh flayed,
organs torn, memories of dreams, not a dream within
the calloused, heavily oiled, finger-grasp of remembrance,
no imagined joy in sight, but pictures of it everywhere.

True beauty is never pillowed, and true love
can live in a cardboard box under the El, truth
seeks out the mesa and finds it lush, joy is a bird
that needs only an open window to light on the sill.

Sky Swimmers

The cathedral stood on its own, no need for the flying buttress,
the butterfly put on her boots and climbed out of the quagmire,
aided by the outstretched claw of the eagle, let's fly, baby,
we're angel hawks, transformed.

I love being a poet, I fucking love it, these little telegrams
to the universe that open up like marigold volcanos.

Our love is an example, an invitation
to the multiple orgasm in the crowded basilica.

My arms, I love my arms, that swing like meat wings,
no batch of feathers, that muscle the air that muscles back.

Sky-swimmers, we go up in flames, we go down in flames,
in the Cathedral of Flames, we are flame itself.

The poetry of these days is a gossamer beast,
slaughter it and feed on it for a century.

The Four-Handed Table

I have before me that thing everyone speculates about,
root of entertainments, source of unnamed anxieties,
experienced in partial agonies, icon of the heart's
integument, loss of one in whom the sun rises and sets,
what if the sun goes out, Apollo throws down the reins?

I have mortgaged my life, willingly, without recourse,
cast my bread on the waters, all my heart's lung's mouths
have opened, new blood is coursing the body of my life.

I cannot return to the diet of lesser days,
I cannot live day to day on aspiration's inspiration,
the dreamed-of, prepared-for, satisfactory absence.

I look at her, and everything I am is welcome, I look at her,
and everything she is is welcome, wanted, needed, desired,
known, unknown, my curiosity is global, universal.

Death, grant us this new day, stay your hand, leave us
for a time together, we will not disrespect you, you are
resident, be companion, not intruder, life lives here,
you know each other, the integrity is inviolate.

Death, you have your chair at our four-handed table,
leave us the table.

Upon the Trellis of a Working Brain
(John Keats)

There's a shadow line across the face
that cuts the eyes like a breeze that feels
like a blade point, a water line across the mask
that defines the elements we choose to live in,
some more adeptly, bird or fish, the sky-swimmer
knows both, he fights the weight that pulls him down.

Jet pilot, flying upside down at tree level,
skimming the ceiling just above the cockpit,
out-stretched hands grazing the chandelier.

There's an attractive death in letting go
the fierce eyes that describe an Icarus,
there's a faith that keeps him aloft,
this human shape of faith and will
cannot be resolved in either.

It, too, is a line of shades,
the horizon at sea, twin blues.

Between god and beast, we are winged flesh,
swamp angels, the warm mud we plod through
makes the wings heavy, they lose purpose,
until they are tried in the compatible air.

Caked legs kick off the mire, ballast turns
to rudder, and we soar in a completed reality.

We stand on an earth whose partner is the heavens,
the fall from this grace can kill, when the fond look back
at the underworld spills the flight in backward dreams.

My Africa, My America, My Eldorado

What's to be done with the unknown, fields to cross,
I jump at every sound, flowers growing, their growth
deafening, the earth cracks under the incredible force
of new roots, the sky blackens with petals, stamen
sway like Goliath's limbs.

The wet nose of a mouse, a hundred yards from my boot,
wheezes and snorts, like a buffalo, above my awe-struck,
heaven-struck, fallen frame, I am Human, I am Conquerer
of Nature, I am Colossus, yet these blades of grass turn spire,
to make me miniscule, because I've never been here before.

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In the forest of each new square inch, I trek like Livingston,
praying Stanley is not far behind, I plunge on like Columbus
through the Ocean of the Undiscovered, my entire dream
made real at each tick of the thundering clock.

I Am Triumphant

I am triumphant, in my second-hand tennis shoes,
in my jeans, with the circle patch in the right knee,
wearing my thrift-shop shirt, my homemade haircut,
carrying my borrowed five dollars, I'm as rich as I am.

A poor, hustling man crosses the cafe, selling locks,
someone asks for the bagels, too, the fog rolls in
like the onset of glaucoma, all these breeds of people
circle some ill-defined center of self, and I am triumphant.

I am clean and clear like a glass globe lodged
in the spring soil, the sun has discovered me,
the rays like me as much as I like them.

All yearning dissolves to a curiosity when the heart
surges without obstruction, the gift of love frees the heart
to its purpose, to pump life to the myriad blood fires
in the cells, and the body becomes a constellation
in a heaven grown larger, pushing back
the edges of infinity.

Memorial Day Prayer

I want you to dig your hands in my flesh, grab great hunks of muscle and twist them, dip your fingers in my blood and reverse the flow, stir me like a pole in butter, pull my limbs like a wet towel from the sink and squeeze out the filth of old pain, I want clean muscles, clean bones, clean blood.

My body is a rug with paths of abuse worn in, with grime of neglect and denial ground in the pile, in need of cleansing, wringer cleansing, sun in the backyard beating, I am furniture sat on, sat in, damaged by too many cigarette burns, stains, vandal slices, vomit, I've taken into my shape the shapes of hurt and damage, a human repository of ghosts and demons, I need exorcising, a house, good in the wood, strong in foundation, beautiful in structure, full of history and use, open to the family of love, but tormented with spectors that bang my doors, darken my windows, inhabit my rooms without right.

I want you to move unafraid down every passageway from attic to cellar, and see the pain, name the pain, give succor to the pain, and have it be gone, be gone from my muscle, be gone from my bone, be gone from my blood, be gone from my breath, so that your love can take up complete residence, and know that I am its home and none other's, none other can own me, none other can live in me, none other can call itself proprietor, none other but you, so that we are both companion home and heart, I am home in my heart, and my heart is home to your spirit, but I have been a house of death, and the old dead belong in the ground.

Come Down to a Common Kiss

I don't see bits and pieces of those I've known,
familiar hurts and pleasures in your semblance.

I see you as clearly as if I'd seen no other, as a bone
dragged out of Adam's chest and presented to him
as the full birth and generation of a parallel solar system,
not shadow planet, or clone amalgam, but twin genesis,
by the same hand, not deja vu, like a reworked screenplay,
but the muse's handiwork, sprung full-blown at the poles
of the wide world, I recognize the originator and the art.

You are no one I've ever known before, yet I stare, astounded,
at the inspired clay, to make a life so known and unknown,
in this visible texture, like new eyes on ancient materials,
the whole of human history come down to a common kiss.

The Challenge of Wonder

I cannot love you too much, my love falls short of you,
mortal purpose fades, this close to the ungraspable universe.

You are beyond definition and my poor matching words,
there's no safe language to dress you in, you are a window
at the peak of Mt. Olympus, beyond which the gods dance.

The casement describes the limits of comparison,
and yet how fine have inspired hands designed
the shape of your opening to the pantheon beyond.

I've been here before, but never in love, my sorted out world
has been shaken to the absolute absence of careful clothing,
without comfort of role or idea, the heart a taut membrane,
untaught by my experience.

This is the brain, packed with education, unable
to give its learning a horn-book to compare you with,
here is the soul's breath, around which everything is born,
not known, it's not that I would die for you, but that I've
given my life into you, I have surrendered to my heart,
beyond my memory of the image of it, my chronicled
existence has faded to antique paper, curious, but fragile.

With you, I am filled to immortality,
as purely real as God's gift to make us flesh.

One of the Poets

I stand in terror in the presence of my walking muse,
awesome woman, who calls me to the final declaration
of my love, easily dreamt of, in younger days.

It is no more nor less than saying, as at the bar before
the hard judge, I feel, I conceive, I act, I'm a poet, a man,
here's my pitiable self at work, here are the weak parts
of my attempt to manufacture a life, here's my belief
in the truth and how clumsily I've enacted it, here's
my fear of the derisive condemnation of my enacted life.

Held against my felt and conceived existence is the evidence
of inadequate action, I'm a poet, a man, a terrorist of self,
doubter of strength, cruel enforcer of ideals, a braying baby.

It does no good to apply to the order of the committed,
I must leap, and if I come up wanting, my failure final,
there's no excuse in time, I declare I am a poet, a man
among the poets, if for no other good reason than
to honor the declarations of my forebears.

Poets, I offer this olive to your death-drained lips,
remember its life forward to mine, I am your offspring,
I am you child, I am flesh to flesh, soul to soul, your spirit.

The Enactment of Love

I can no longer spend time trusting my nature
to rebel against the intrusions I allow upon it.

It's time to come clean, so the body at work is
unblocked, past the petty triumphs of suffering,
beyond the beaten and strained in life.

Time to complete the sentence, exonerate the spirit,
push back the stone of the confined room, admit
my entire fear and stand in front of the past.

I can no longer spend time naming the enemies
of my heart, I name myself by naming my love,
I enact myself by enacting my love.

The Full Crisis of Love

Put aside the chronicles of wasted time
when you enter this room, here is
the full crisis of love.

Where a kiss comes down on lips
like spring comes up in bloom.

As slow as the rose unfolds,
as full as each week makes a year.

Where a few ingredients make a stew
greater than the table of elements.

Do not bring old eyes and ears
to this occasion of mixture.

What is born alchemic
cannot be melted down
by argument, sorted out
by formulae.

We require a new name,
and the uses follow.

The Contract of the Theatre

There is but one place to do the work of loving others,
it is with them, in the heat of battling the confusions
of selves and histories, the many characters of our drama
must come to the stage, must give their oration, must die,
if they are to die, must triumph, if that is their fate.

In our play, we catch the conscience of our kings and beggars,
nobles and deceivers, we allow the petty lords their quarrels,
to hold the stage is the greater work, the heart of the drama.

Love of the entirety gives time and space for the enactment
of the passion, however long or brief the night, however deep
the tragedy, however foolish the comedy, to keep nothing in
the wings that speeds the realization in whatever scope it unfolds.

On the mutual boards, we discover all our character, until the truth
is spent, in horror and beauty, and the last of us remains at the curtain,
unburdened and unfettered by what we have been, to come to be.

The Dream's Awakening

By candlelight, I lie beside her, dreaming an old dream's
awakening, I love her as I've never loved another,
without possession, unpossessed, free in airy bondage,
our arms, around each other, a completed circle.

I've never loved myself as I do now, our one love,
circling, leaping the separations, binding our hearts
with completeness, a fullness upon us, each one full,
our hearts full as one.

My tongue easily releases the words, my lips the kiss,
my brain rejoices at the clear beauty of love.

The obstacles to great thought fall aside, when
the heart gives consent to the dream's awakening.

Linger and Savor

Children, linger and savor, savor each moment,
play out all your parts, love is discovery.

Learn each other like you learn yourselves,
watch over the curious movement, a stretch of muscle,
a change in shape, the colors and textures of day to night,
season to season, every small patch of the other is a garden
in cycle, be yourself, in transition, a bursting of life.

Each seed of sensation comes volcanic slow,
so is the earthquake slow, so the tidal wave,
these forces will overtake you like the dawn,
come up with such incredible speed, the mind
will lock the body's mystery in memory
like Pompeii, the population caught
forever, still alive.

Diamond in the Sky

The sky was thick with stars, they used to have skies like that when I was a kid in Nebraska, the city lights drown it out, the thickness of stars encircles the earth, but the sun is up on half and our light obscures the rest.

I shook like a rug, cleaning itself, shaking off the accumulated horror, I knew I would, I had to, it was inevitable, I wanted to flail about in the mesquite, screaming, ripping nerves out like fire-damaged wiring.

Doctor, I said, I hate medicine, I hate hospitals, I hate the entire idea of cure, heal me, she handed me the scalpel and never left the room of night.

When I awoke, she lay beside me, under a thick, wet blanket of fog, clear like crystal, I could see all the way to my heart, still weak, but pumping in my translucent ribcage, unobscured, some of the thick undergrowth pulled free from the root.

Even though I could not withstand an attack of the mongrel hoards, this morning, I knew it wasn't fear that cleared the skies but pointed the way to the cause of the fog in my eyes, eyes that work for the heart as well as the mind.

Dark Before the Dawn

It's always darkest before the dawn, your flashlight batteries die, it rains, your matches get wet, the sky portends total eclipse, dark-furred bears come crashing, the tent collapses, rocks slide, an indeterminate bestial howling commences, you die a thousand deaths, to replace the ticking of your busted Timex, childhood fears are overshadowed by adult fears, your left side numbs, angina begins its pincer attack.

I write this, the next day, after the deluge, post-trauma, re-trusting fate, which needs trust, like saying, I love you, every morning in her still sleeping ears, despite the turned back, cruel snorts, cold shoulder, and the rancid winds of bad food, fate is an inescapable marriage of one's life to life, all the irreconcilable differences intact, and she's reborn in your eyes, a goddess, she shines like Apollo's gift incarnate, it's always brightest before the night.

Only the Mayfly Has a Shorter Lifespan

Adam and Eve were monkeys, or apes, if you prefer,
they lived a million years in the Garden of Eden.

They quarreled over the checkbook for a split second,
until more bananas fell past their satisfaction.

One day, they looked at each other in a wondrous way,
the look echoed in their eyes like mirror on mirror.

Suddenly, it was time for God to write the Bible,
thought and sin became simultaneous that fateful day.

Now we are familiar with such moments, but, my,
how much that familiarity resembles bananas.

We are still living in that same garden, and yes,
we have more bananas, everyday, all day long,
and God must now remainder the instructions.

The wondrous never died, but we die
when we forget the look in the eyes that
teeters on and defines our pristine origin.