

The Exquisite Poet

The man who read my poems said,
either you're one of the great poets,
or this is parody.

I said I was imitating a poet
who didn't yet exist,
Keats said he went to a party
and came home as everyone there.

I've written social parody,
satirical one-man shows,
my father called me the Moline Mimic,
one woman said she couldn't reconcile the man
she knew with the one who wrote these poems,
I told a fellow artist, thirty years ago,
I think I'm making it all up.

I once felt I could become
the person walking in front of me,
more easily than I could become myself,
but it felt like theft, so I stopped,
my inclination became to find the truth,
I hung an admonishment on the wall,
a headline, cut from a tabloid,
Tell the Truth, Stephen,
I was struck by the advice,
Irwin Shaw gave young writers,
Tell the truth, he said.

I watched my son as a child,
clumsily imitate something I'd said,
until it became his, in his own voice.

I felt the sting,
when a man I barely knew,
said the word that came to mind,
when he thought of me, was *specious*
(appearing to be true, but false).

Whenever I'm called *genuine*,
it pleases me,
but when I was first in the city,
I described myself in language
that better fit someone else,
imitating a colloquial ideal
I imagined more acceptable,
a girlfriend said I addressed others
as if they were a roomful of people,
when only one or two were present.

I remembered what others said about me,
as if I were seeking guidance, one man said,
you're the most open person I've ever met,
but you're open to all the wrong people.

Bob Hope's wife said he had two
personae, one on stage, one at home,
until only the stage persona survived,
I've chosen to go the opposite direction,
to shed the hold of any personae,
even as they accumulate.

Another poet, when asked about me
by my new lover, said I had *the ability*
to be re-born, again and again.

I once practiced what I came to call
instant intimacy, the ability to adopt
the characteristics of anyone I was with,
so quickly it went unnoticed that I was
becoming like them.

I wrote another desired lover,
If I alone ghost the space between us,
I will succeed only in vacating myself.

After being with a teacher
of like-minded awareness,
I looked at who was sitting in my chair,
and I saw there was no one there,
yet here I am.

I thought I was without reliable identity,
unable to become anything other than
a parody of others, a parody of myself.

Our identity is lost, when we die,
except for the reality of the force
to become what we become
and be what we are.

In my search for who I was,
I stopped trying to find him,
when I found where he'd come from,
becoming like others, to become myself,
held no more sway.

These inherited and imitated selves
cry to be let go, to be reborn,
in this endless reality of who we are.

I let inherent reality declare itself,
and I see the birth of one man, undefined
by circumstance, more true to himself
than any other.

Living as a persona among others,
I wonder how to lose this addiction,
while continuing to practice it,
here, where adherence to persona,
is the way we communicate,
in this parody of reality,
I anchor myself
in the unknowable present.

When I look to see
who is sitting in my chair,
I see no persona or unformed reality,
I see a being that fills them both,
my concern is to be human,
not in imitation of what's human,
but in being what's true
at the center of it.

This parody of reality is where we live,
where I continue to live, learning to be true
to what's more present than anything
we might call true or false.

There's no imitation of reality,
that doesn't become a parody,
even the truth of what's true is a parody,
even in this clarity, I am a parody of myself.

When I don't know what persona
to show, in any state of thought or feeling,
that I might tie my behavior to, I resort to
being present, without a way to be.

This is the only way that works,
that doesn't falsify myself, in the eyes
of my own awareness, I can be at ease
without a thought, and not adopt one
to calm an errant anxiety.

My concern for being is resolved,
in the expression of my existence,
I'm at peace in its reality,
but as soon as I speak,
I begin to misrepresent myself,
I listen to find a way to speak,
that doesn't do that,
but there's no way to prevent
what's unpreventable.

I can be still,
and let reality speak,
through these clouds
of misrepresentation,
this language and this man.

The direction for knowing
is not in the world, its best advice
is not in the world and not within
what I call myself.

I wake and walk amazed,
at being here in this reality,
there's no need for the resources
of my tools in this vulnerability,
I'm made secure by what I fear.

The flood of wanting to know
everything there is to know,
drowns innocence,
until innocence returns,
knowing the clear surfeit of the heart,
this is the direction of deepest knowing,
to rely on what remains, where everything
is known by the unknown.

One lives in the unknowing,
that knows knowing itself,
from its infancy to its surrender,
this is walking in the marketplace,
in all the ways one might be,
embraced and replaced
by neither knowledge nor faith,
this is walking in the emptiness of existence,
without losing consciousness,
this is living in the brilliance
of constant wonder.

Living in awareness of inherent being,
the exquisite poet thrives in empty wonder,
and that makes him not the same as,
and the same as, everyone who's alive.

This Day on Earth

I think to describe the essence of being,
the exquisite transience of this moment on Earth,
a day in the life of this available existence.

A cardboard box, set atop another box,
leaves a shadow in its separation from the wall,
it leaves the shadow a thing itself,
wedged between the wall and the boxes.

Before I give the shadow
character it doesn't possess,
quiet resignation, fear of the light,
pride in the chiaroscuro
of beauty-defining imagery,
I see I'm already in a state
of recognition without a name.

The bare hillside, the horizon,
the blue-white clouds, color and line,
all these I enjoy, without molding them
into pets of thought and feeling,
like putting a hat and coat on the dog
and envy in the cat.

As inclined as my mind is,
to dress everything in self-serving imagery,
I'm already filled with awe to be in this
unclothed reality,
but how do I call myself a poet,
if I have nothing to say about what I see,
in language familiar as colorful costumery?

I address the world
unrecognized by its standards,
a couturier maverick on the runway,
as I perfect my line, color, and design,
to arouse the distributors' delight,
and their excitement at my salability.

Or I speak of the spirit in the room,
over here, by itself, over there,
by that other part of itself.

In the habits of my language,
by misdirection and silence,
I might draw attention
to the moment of existence,
that outperforms its players, with
the space more vibrant than the actors,
so the actors are known by their example,
and by their convenient avoidance,
of the presence the audience has
come to be a part of, the presence
that everyone is always a part of.

All our senses and all we witness
come to this stage to see what occurs,
and while it matters to make what occurs
into what matters to us,
what makes us matter, before we meet,
is the very thing we transform ourselves into.

We put ourselves in front of ourselves,
so we might exemplify what already exists,
in our unexampled original reality.

That chair, across the carpet, has a presence,
and I call attention to its acceptance of what
may come to its embrace, sunlit surface,
cut by a cast shadow, its serene service
in a servant cadre of common concern,
a resting place for the sensual leg
of a smooth-skinned visitor.

Or it has no calling and no career,
no business and no duty, we see
its presence with empty eyes,
filled with what is, not with
what we want to make it,
not with what we want it
to become, for our satisfaction.

What is,
dissatisfies our dissatisfaction,
and there begins my career,
to make something of what is,
when what is,
is greater unmade,
and not even in itself,
but in the very thing of nothing
that only, slightly better than poorly,
describes the reality of being itself.

An audience, watching, in rapt attention,
a great actor play King Lear, on stage
in front of them, sees themselves
in the old monarch's convection,
burning up the space of his life.

A mirror is held up to a mirror,
and the isness fairly crackles
with presence in the moment,
and *something of nothing* is made real,
inside the space of somebody
that only seems real.

There's no way, poet,
to describe this *isness*,
it's already been clothed in mind,
feeling, body, and some innate
wanting to be action.

The actor can only trust the audience
to see what becomes of his acting,
in the flow of still beauty, in the truth
of silent words in the wind.

Love's Errant Quest

An old lover stopped by,
and we went to dinner.

I thought I saw something,
in her presence,
that revealed a change
in this translucent reality.

She and I haven't been together
for years, and over that time,
I've struggled with the thought of her,
as if there was a question unanswered,
a relationship unresolved, to either
rejoin the love, or resolve it, with
some kind of understanding.

Now, as I write, a young woman,
across the room, makes eye contact,
as she speaks with her companion.

There is, in this kind of moment,
apparently charged with resonance,
something that happens I might call,
poetically, communing with the goddess,
but it has nothing to do with the sexual,
or any other kind of imagination.

When social commandments
override communing in the moment,
we lose recognition of our deepest self.

I thought I was seeing that recognition
with my old friend and lover.

The time we were together had seemed
fulfilling, and I so desired her, physically,
I couldn't distinguish the desire I felt
from the companionship I enjoyed.

Another sense confused my thinking,
I'd been led to believe, as an act of faith,
like an act of certainty, that I was not whole
without a woman in my life.

I had been convinced
that finding a woman to mate with,
was the answer to something missing.

You need a woman to take care of you,
my mother advised, without voicing
any alternative, I rejected being taken
care of, but I accepted the archetype.

In the company of any woman,
in the intimacy of one-night stands,
in committed relationships, or walking
down the street, I sought to resolve
an interpolated dilemma.

Until the question of love was relieved,
I suffered from this questioning,
unanswered in the world,
unasked by my inherent self,
there's no soul-mate
for the unbroken soul,
no halves are made whole.

I suspect that others have felt
the assault of my desire to find
the answer to the question
I was taught to ask.
*are you the one
I need to be with
to satisfy my need
to be with someone?*

Now I know
there's a deeper reality
I was trying to sort out
and secure, in my
wayward search.

What I felt with my old partner,
was the absence of any search,
dissolved, in its recognition.

This being,
with no need to search for anything,
carries nothing missing in its heart,
it inspires nothing missing in the mind,
and when nothing is seen to be missing,
the search is at an end, the house is full,
no one's lost in the street, or the jungle,
no one needs to be found.

This delight and relief
is an awakening,
to those whose faces
I once searched,
to discover my lost love.

She is not here in my heart,
she was never here in my heart,
she is nowhere to be found,
because she's nowhere
to have been lost.

The Luxury of Oceans

I like telling stories of the events
that have occurred in my life,
but I don't like talking about myself,
it seems odd, when I spend so much
time in attention to the subtle
shiftings of consciousness,
like maritime paths
in the sea of awareness.

Subtlety is not about
the way that life moves,
it is the nature of life, our
subtlety of thought and feeling
come to the fore, in our attention
to life's calm, its movement, its force.

My experience is in the attention
to what occurs, not in the sense
of a man who does anything.

As captain of the ship of self,
I'm more its attentive servant,
than I am the cause and control
of its course, any true captain
spends his time responding
to the shifting conditions,
inside and outside
his borrowed hull.

If he knows his position,
he may open himself
to the luxury of oceans,
to his arrivals and departures,
carrying goods between ports of call,
to the camaraderie of his crew,
the shared passage of passengers
and cargo, the land sightings,
the stars in the night sky,
the populous seas he crosses.

Like any seafarer, I love
to talk about where I've been,
and what I've seen and done,
but not with the sense
that I've swum the seas,
or hauled anything
on my back.

At the same time,
there is no ship, no
complement of others,
no sea, no destination,
in this inner reality,
yet things circumnavigate,
drop out of sight, and appear,
in the incredible voyage
of human awareness,
no less wondrous,
no less subtle,
than being at sea,
as if alone.

The Sound of Music

Music plays
in the background of our lives,
one of the effects of modern life,
wandering minstrels play constantly,
either one's favorite tunes,
or someone else's.

Our thoughts are set to music,
like a movie with a soundtrack,
followed by another soundtrack,
the same soundtrack on a loop,
with the visuals rarely changing.

There's a small thrill,
when the music matches
the moment of our lives,
and we mark the moment
as ours, some of our lives
are layered with the din,
while others run for the hills.

As springtime approaches,
we peel off layers of clothing,
until summer is here, when we
long to lie naked by the water's edge,
to swim in warm water is stripping off
one's false skin, before disappearing.

I walked into a small
Japanese restaurant in the city,
I ate a meal so perfect, I stopped eating,
holding the morsels in my mouth,
to savor them, my eyes half-closed,
with the pleasure of recognition
on my tongue, I had the same
experience with a glass of wine,
but that didn't stop me from
guzzling the bottle.

We peel back the layers,
after we layer them on,
we want to be naked,
but we can't bear to be
without our layers, my
layered life is mine.

I'm burdened by its useless weight,
my truth is closer to the naked quiet,
but when I hear my tune playing,
I remember my coat is my skin,
and I love the weight of my layers.

Then the harsh sun
fades out of my head,
like a big truck backing
out of my living room,
and I am effortless
in my nudity.

The Quiet Death of the Sun

After many volumes of poetry,
a degree in creative writing,
awards and recognition, after
being honored as an author,
I've come to realize I believe
in the essence of poetry, and
I believe in myself as a poet.

Like coming to believe in oneself
as a homosexual, despite the denigration,
the dismissal, and the deliberate murder
of gays, in nearly every society,
since the dawn of history.

The greater challenge to self-acceptance
isn't rejection, I've never been called a scourge
or an abomination, but I've lived in the absence
of common acceptance in the world, the grudging,
smiling tolerance, the silence and casual ridicule.

Few poets have been beaten or killed
for being a poet, there's usually a political
or sexual reason to kill a poet, as with Lorca,
when death is the end of the social denial,
but the course is set for anyone who's thought
different, no matter their gift or character.

Poetry is often like a beloved old horse,
that no one dare kill, no one dare ride,
poetry is kept in a stable of thought,
without exercise and without feeding,
left to fend for itself, as if this disregard
nobilifies the profession, and some poets
apologize for imposing their poetry
on their audience.

Coming of age in a hotbed of poets,
like San Francisco, where it's said
there were five thousand poets

and five thousand I-want-to-be-a-poets,
after years of giving and attending readings,
I noticed the same crowd at every reading,
poets and their admirers, like cells
of Communists and their sympathizers,
hiding in plain view from the authorities
and the public, where they're thought of
as peculiar or odd, self-involved or useless,
suspicious, somehow un-American,
even criminal.

Picked up for sleeping in a doorway,
I told a cop I thought poets and criminals
had a lot in common, surprised, he said,
well, I never heard that one before,
a guy told a woman I found attractive,
don't ever get involved with a poet,
a man in a café said, *poets are like vampires,*
stealing love from everyone around them.

There was a time when this casual calumny
didn't occur, Homer was beloved for telling
the life of the people, Byron was an idol,
whose poems sold out every printing,
Shakespeare wrote when poetry was
the speech of the people's theatre.

Poetry can still be counted on to dignify
a politician's speech, but something has happened,
since poetry was last embraced by all, in the way
language has submitted itself to mass communication,
as someone said, *poetry uses the same language I use,*
but I don't get it, as if poetry was a conspiracy
of the poets to exclude the rest of us.

Language has been made subservient
to the commercial world, we think the same
should be true in every other part of our reality,
we impose a commercial ethic on the essential,
some who might be poets act as accomplices
in this enterprise, prostrating themselves
before a common master, for even less reward.

*If you're a diamond merchant, and nobody buys
your diamonds, you're still a diamond merchant,
but those who hold diamonds in their hands,
act as if they're holding carbon residue
or crushed glass.*

Some poets reminds us that we have serious matters to consider, as long as we don't get too serious, keep it light, maybe shed a tear or two.

Poetry is the language we've lost the ability to speak, more easily recalled than our language was first acquired, it belongs to our tongues and our hearts in our deepest self, not to the busy Babel of our marketed minds.

Poetry is open-heart surgery, performed beside the road, the poet is often the only care available when the catastrophe occurs, and he's just as likely to kick the victim as kiss him, court jesters were like poets, often the only ones to speak out, when the king raised his sword to strike the innocent.

Poets go to the border between us and the unknown, and they come back with a kind of reassurance, cold as outer-space, warm as the inside of the sun.

We Honor Ourselves at War

We honor those who return from war,
those who survive the killing fields,
and we don't ask those who kill
about the dead, we don't ask about
their time in the manufacture of death,
instead, we honor them for the sake of
our honored selves, we ask them to do
these things for us, we honor ourselves
in honoring our warriors.

I have no compunction in defense of my life,
but I shun the honor of it, as many soldiers
shun the honor of their own experience,
gained in defense of their buddies, rarely
in defense of an ideal or a government.

We like to say that war is hell, and
many accounts support that belief,
yet we elevate the participants,
in our man-made hell, to heroism,
we admit that preparation for war
is our great necessity, we know it
requires its participants to forsake
forgiveness, kindness, and their
reluctance to kill and destroy,
to not only enter hell, but to
become its legions, then we
praise them for their successes,
and their failures, too, perpetuating
this manufactured hell on earth.

When those we send to hell,
to live as hellhounds, return
to the surface of our protected lives,
we thank them for protecting us, but
not when they bring their war home,
we prefer they hide their wounded,
callused hearts in plain sight.

We love our wars,
we love our warriors,
we love our own hardened hearts,
we love our ability to take the lives
and accept the death of those we fear,
we quietly cherish our acceptance
of the residue of war,
slaughter and destruction,
devastation and dislocation,
these signs of the death we fear
become signs of our survival,
and the death we will, by our willingness,
becomes the sign of the strength of our beliefs.

We love what we're able to do,
to protect ourselves from others,
even those others who feel the same way
about themselves and those they love.

We send others to keep war
as distant from us as possible,
so that death is not our neighbor,
and when they return to us,
with death in their lungs,
we honor them for our freedom
from the very thing we fear
might be contagious.

And yet we dream of breathing
the same fatal air, so we might
honor ourselves, in our own
warring hearts, twice over,
twice removed.

Your Unknown Beauty

If we were to meet on the street,
I'd look away for a moment, looking
within, to gain the moment's reality,
to let my mind loose of the meeting,
to greet you anew, as if you were
unknown to me, or I to you.

If you were someone I feared or desired,
it'd be the same, not to run away or to
ignore what's suddenly present, but to
preface the unknown with itself.

It doesn't take a meditation
to live in prayer, or a prayer to be free.

The embraceable unknown is always present,
to brace oneself for the newest unknowing.

The experience of anything that occurs
is the knowing of it, unless the experience
of it is not grounded in its unknown origin,
but comes as a copy of a previous known.

What we take to be what we know,
is habitually cloned from a copy
of its more and more distant reality.

What we truly come to know,
comes to us unknown,
even your smiling face,
that I've seen a million times.

These Narrow Streets

*When you aren't in my life,
I eat well, I said, but when you are
in my life, everything tastes better.*

She is the other, who's become
the talisman of my being alive.

I've chosen her as the one I seek,
when she's intent on seeking herself.

She doesn't seek herself, to be rid of me,
but that's what I take it to be, I choose my plight.

Poets, in earlier times, wrote love poems
to women they would never be with,
so they might stay in the love they knew.

The object of their love remained forever
at a distance, unchanged by circumstance,
their static joy remained unchanged,
never held, never lost.

Upon reaching perfect enlightenment,
it's said, one disappears from the world.

My friend's parents told him he was better
than the neighbors, and then they said he was
worse than those same neighbors, he was pulled
to a stasis by these contraries.

When I told her I was more alive in knowing her,
we both knew it was a subtle deception.

In the stillness of our being, we know
that same joy as the joy we experience
in the other's name.

How dare we be in love without the other,
with no object for our loving hearts?

Are we afraid to disappear,
with no lover to claim our love?

What poet, walking the narrow street,
spying his inamorata, thinks to himself,
who am I fooling, what love do I speak,
when my love stays away from me,
never comes to me, leaves me alone?

We're bound by this human habit,
to believe the feeling, that we love
in ourselves, is best savored in absentia,
we love others and abandon ourselves,
to stay in a variation of love itself.

I think my love for her, at a distance,
transforms me to a lover, when I'm the one
who transforms my love to a distance.

I look across the street and leave myself,
I run toward her, to stay home in myself.

This is an old thing that men do,
this seemingly unselfish love, to
leave oneself for the love of another,
it breeds a selfish demand, that if
anyone turn around to love them back,
their love must duplicate its errant origin,
in every moment, of every day, without end,
this is another counterfeit of love's true being.

People in a Room

I look on this bed of flowers
that gets up and walks around,
that rearranges itself in bouquets
and bunches,
a single rose,
a spray,
a display,
that comes to life,
and grows,
and dies.

A cartoon
shows a boy reading a book,
the four panels show the pages,
he reads in the first panel,
A man was born,
in the second,
he lived,
in the third,
he died,
and in the fourth,
the boy says,
It almost makes you
feel like you knew him.

These people come and go,
no one finally stays, including
the one writing, or reading,
this book of illustrations,
yet in this coming together
and going apart, we bloom
in our sight, my new glasses
give my eyes enhanced clarity.

Going to get my glasses,
I heard the words in my head,
hocus pocus, there's locus in the focus,
a silly rhyme, but these words
mean what they say.

The painter
doesn't paint the subject,
he doesn't paint himself,
he paints the painting.

The garden is greater
than its yield, beauty
is not found in the eye
of the beholder, it's
found in the focus.

I live among these people,
I inhale their fragrance,
I enjoy their beauty,
I live my life
among their lives,
there is no living
that doesn't include us,
we are the garden.

Fearless Emily

When I first read
Emily Dickinson's poetry,
I wanted her to speak about
her life in Amherst, a hundred years
before I was born, I wanted to hear
some tidbit, or gentle narrative,
to help me think of her personally,
a cordial introduction to her life
that would let us be friends,
and then we could dive deep
into her oceanic awareness.

I wanted to say, let's sit awhile
on the shore, before we drop off
the continental shelf, risking lives
with no regard for ourselves,
but there was no response.

I didn't get what I wanted, and
doing detective work with her words,
hoping to discover a twisted ankle,
or a passion for orange marmalade,
which I personally dislike, didn't
work, I get nothing to ease the leap
into her fearless abandonment,
she gives me no recourse.

I had a friend, who read serious and
challenging books, and he told me
about them, until one day he said,
hey, I'm doing all the work, and I smiled,
happy to let him do what I chose not to do.

After reading Dickinson for a while,
I didn't need her to ease me into the work,
I wanted to swim out to sea and turn right,
I was grateful to her, for showing the way,
and walking away.

It would be nice to hang out
and talk personally and socially,
but that's never going to happen,
and *never going to happen*
is the implicit challenge
of her every page.

If I sat in her presence,
in casual biography,
I'd already have
too much information,
to join her in her freedom
from the social self.

The Play Within the Play

(Two old friends
sit together on the ground.)

Lear says,
We have nothing.
Gloucester replies,
I know.

(They look in each other's eyes and laugh.)

The old king's
foolish need for praise
dooms him and all he loves,
and the first chance others get
to show how much they despise
his greed, they take it.

His life, after he forsakes his power,
is a rapid decline to destruction.

He pulls his beard, and throws
his arms around his fool, who
tells him the truth all along,
as he himself tells himself
wise words of self-sight,
but wisdom is no stave
against folly.

On the beach at Dover, waiting
for his honest daughter to arrive,
Lear sits with his blind friend,
two old men in the sand,
alone with each other, torn
from their wealth and power,
and in that bereft circumstance,
they know a moment of peace
in the accident of wonder,
but the moment passes,
and tragedy rages on.

In the rage of kings,
in the wars and intrigues
of palaces, in the gain and keep
of wealth and power, wisdom
knows what's missing,
it even revels in its insight,
but nothing makes wisdom real,
until all its foils are lost in the wind.

In the Age of Wisdom,
that we've yet to witness,
the wise not only know
their better reality,
they have the courage
to live it.

In the meantime,
the rich language of wisdom
will do to be our sufficiency,
as it touches even the hearts
of the foolish, in moments
of rage and plot,
in the unwise play
of our lives.

The King of Existence

I look at others, and I wonder,
who among these is joined
in this journey,
where once I wondered,
who among these, will allow
my presence, and for how long?

I stayed apart,
asking nothing of others,
who ask nothing of themselves,
I stayed a prince,
until I became a king.

A king doesn't construct plays for others
to observe or enact, he composes a reality,
with no history to it, except the history
written by others, after he passes
from the scene.

All those in this room
have their dramatic reality,
being themselves in their own
connected universe, in which
I am but a player, playing a part,
no matter how high or low
my position might be
or become.

I see this world different
than it was, mere moments ago,
seeing my place in the journey,
when I ask, who else is here,
now, being alive?

There's no ascending a throne in this
becoming a king, to be a king is not to
extol oneself, but it is the end of denial
and consent, it is the end of pretending.

Any king,
newly crowned
by his own decree,
is free of being led,
when he's led
by the reign
of his own existence.

I am the king of existence,
I look upon this realm of kings,
where any who claim it,
are king in their own right.

The Paralysis of Place

The wife of a poet, a poet herself,
has had a stroke, and she's learning
to talk again, this once articulate lover
of language finds herself sounding drunk,
dragging, blurring, slurring the tracks
her tongue wants to make,
like cherished music.

The two are driving to the coast, on break
from the university where they both teach,
he's hoping for a chance to do some writing,
out from under the weight of their work,
and the paralysis of place, she adds,
pointing to the campus.

In the movies, the heroes are young,
in great shape, they fly through scenes
with speed and grace, even after being
beaten, shot, and drugged.

But what of the heroism
of the spirit, that sees its path
articulated, miles ahead, and
can barely take a normal step?

Buried alive, the hero fingers a spoon
and gradually shifts the ground from
front to back, moving closer and closer
to the light, all the while, learning
the nature of the earth he once never
bothered to notice, until he surfaces
from his dark clime, into a world
lighter than ever before.

On his way, he stops
and smells the roots of the roses,
like learning a foreign language
from one's parents, shortly after
being born.

The light comes brighter,
upon each emerging word,
as in her brilliant mind,
she lives again
her passage
from the womb
of unbroken silence
into the noisy dawn.

Slamming Into Barriers

The median wall is flat, I thought, it's not beveled cement, like most highway barriers, I watched my truck sliding toward the wall, as it fishtailed, coming up the inside lane, toward the summit, on my way into the city.

The snow, blowing across the lanes of traffic, steadily increased with the elevation, I kept my distance behind a big truck, moving slower than the others, I was content with the pace, in the dangerous weather.

The truck ahead of me slowed even more, as it climbed the pass, crossing the pass, then, I saw there was no one to my left, so I decided to change lanes, but as I did, I crossed the accumulated snow, a slight mound, between lanes, and began to slide.

This is going to be a multi-car pile-up, I'm going to slam into the median, then back into the truck next to me, and others will slam into us from behind, none of this was articulated, and I was calm.

My wheels slid sideways and rolled forward, as I steered, rubber tread hit wet pavement, then snow, then pavement, I expected to hit the barrier, head first, and ricochet.

In the course of the movement, my truck corrected on dry pavement, then slammed into the median, with the back end striking it hard, and bouncing back, out into the lane, still rolling forward, not hitting anyone, not being hit, I kept in the flow, back behind the truck I'd been following, now even slower, and at a greater distance, until, at the next exit, I pulled off and to a stop.

I expected to see the rear end smashed,
the tail-light assembly demolished,
but I found a small dent and scrapes,
I'd escaped with only a few scars.

I called my friend, *I'm a lucky son of a bitch*,
I said, and that night, I told my son about it,
as we sat together in a restaurant, and then
I told him something else.

I have a heavy heart, I said, *I carry a sadness*,
I'm fine, I'm at peace, but I have a heavy heart,
it was good to say what's true, and he agreed,
this weight is a condition of his heart, as well.

My unchanged sense of the world,
became clear to me, the night before,
listening to the music of old blues singers,
music I was caught by, as a young man,
before my son was born.

A white boy with no serious problems,
I heard the blues as a student in college,
listening to the music played by the kid
from Memphis, who moved in across
the hall, and my heart was caught.

My son told me of wanting to live in the dark
chasm of his awakening to the state of the world,
he dove into that darkness, as I had, years before,
and we both had emerged, but nothing changed.

We moved out of our sadness to a cheerier state,
but nothing changed in what we'd come to know,
there's no reason to carry sadness forward, misery
is not resolved by adding to what's already true.

What Buddha called the pain and suffering
of human beings, doesn't go away, when one
discovers the perfect eternity of the moment,
and dwelling in the moment doesn't take away
the awareness of what remains in the world.

Listening to old men sing with grace and beauty
in the force of their predicament, tempts me to rejoin
that heavy heartedness, to say again, I know that hell
that I do not live, it's in me, as it's in all of us who
live on this earth, without exception.

As my truck slammed into the wall between halves
of the highway, I felt the peace that's implicit.

How can anyone know these extremes of being,
except these poles are within us, there's no escape
from our constant reality, except in its denial, and
still it comes, suffering, in the guise of pleasure,
and wisdom, in the nearness of pain.

Instructions to the Wild

One's own contemplated death
is as keenly felt as the loss of a lover,
we mourn our own passing, we cling
to this love in ourselves, when there's
no one to be lost in our dying.

Being itself is an endless delight,
yet we turn away from it, as one
who leaves loving and being loved,
because we have better things to do,
making less of ourselves, making
little of too much, looking for love
in things and those we cannot hold.

A prince is born a prince, who goes out,
seeking salvation from his gilded imprisonment,
until, in his contemplation, he asks himself,
who is born a prince, who is the seeker?

In this royalty of being, we leave our
birthright, to seek it in the world,
to look for what already exists,
unfound except in its contemplation,
in this empty moment of here and now.

There is, in our awareness, a wilderness
of startling wonder, it's the home we leave
to go into rooms of thought, we leave our
boundless nature, for a house-to-house search,
looking for instruction to the untamed wild
we left behind, less than a moment ago.

The Teaching of the Teachers

There are those who learn something true
of their reality, who run to teach it to the rest,
they often live in versions of themselves, adapted
from their wisdom to the ears of their listeners.

A great teacher told his followers to embrace
their self-recognition, and they responded,
*but what food should we eat, what prayers
should we repeat, what clothing should
we wear, whatever you say, we will do.*

Be as you are, he said, and they continued
to want to be what he wanted them to be,
be as you are, he said, and they leaned in,
listening for his direction for their lives.

At the core, we talk to each other,
so our minds can be occupied,
in their familiar way,
and our shared spirit
can commune with itself.

Birds crisscross the sky,
like ropes to tie cargo to a barge,
but their wings embrace the air,
and the air embraces their wings.

The teacher shrugged his shoulders
and told his followers to eat the food
that served them best, to say the prayers
they loved the most, *be as you are*, he said,
and they were as they'd always been,
and more at peace for his presence
in our common presence.

The High Fashion of Others

It's been my habit, as if it were instinct,
to dress others in the clothing of relationship,
overlaying their costume with my own,
clothing the scant and the overdressed,
ignoring the clash of styles and colors,
the reluctance to dress as I would wish.

Once the haberdashery was complete,
I was loyal to my tailoring, ignoring
the poor fit of my desires to their desires.

There were those who sought my couture,
until it became clear I'd made them over
in my design, not theirs.

I could see the injustice of my ambition,
I could see the failure of my line of clothing,
I could wish for a compatible nudity,
but to stand naked without relationship,
is to stand naked in oneself,
if I don't dress others to my liking,
then I can't dress myself, either,
this profession of presentation
masks an amateur's embarrassment.

I sought to make this being alive
a predictable enterprise, to turn a profit
in love's private and public display,
until I found a loose thread
and pulled it to a nudity.

Naked of others, I stand naked of myself,
the thread of my design has pulled me with it,
the invisible man stands revealed by his deshabelle,
more able to see what can be seen, more able to be
what becomes of his eye's delight, with no one
draped and pinned not themselves.

The View from Diamond Head

A man gets out of his new car
and cleans his new headlamps,
he wanders around his new car,
as if he's waiting for someone,
but when his daughter arrives,
he continues to walk, as tourists
walk, on the side of Diamond Head,
above the surf, a hundred feet below,
in surprised ownership of wonder
at such astonishing beauty.

The thrill
of being thrilled
sneaks up on us,
or it overwhelms us,
and we shyly
disown
its character
as not our own.

It must be that thing we're looking at,
or that person, or that ocean that we
all agree is beyond us in its glory.

The fish who swim in the ocean we marvel at,
are not on vacation, they're busy providing
for themselves, they don't care what we think
of their neighborhood, the water is indifferent,
so is the sun, so is the dormant volcano,
on whose flank we stand.

We are the ones, full of wonder,
who notice how wonderful everything is,
and when we include ourselves in our wonder,
we begin to see.

The Rooms of the City

In the calm of daily breathing, I find the arms of love,
not where I thought they'd appear, I'm prepared to seek
the arms of love in rooms in the city, in the inclination
we have to honor our misadventures with grand design,
and I only reluctantly suspended the search.

In the lore of our aboriginal self, an ancient warrior
wraps his belongings in a bundle, and walks off
into the wilderness to die alone, making of himself
in his age, the absence of a burden to his tribe,
it's an honorable demise.

I imagine the retreat into breath and stillness as
a kind of demise, a letting go of a certain loyalty,
where one's external purpose has lost its use,
but there's no greater purpose than discovery,
discovery is to look where nothing is known
by what it comes to be known, where a thing
is not yet known to be what it is.

In other times, walking toward its open arms,
I've gotten to the edge of the forest, the desert,
the jungle, and hesitated, listening to hear a voice
call me back to the arms of the rooms of the city,
where I know the approximation of love awaits,
the love that's desired by lovers everywhere.

Is there no one in my arms beside this breath of life,
is there no one who's let go of the love that wanton
lovers desire, is there no one in my stroll in paradise
who knows what I know, am I alone in being alone,
or is this only the call back to the rooms of the city,
that pulls me away from love itself, back toward
its rivals, the suitors of my heart, distracting me
from my truest love, are these the dancing girls
of the Buddha, come to his dreams to occupy
his advantage?

A Boat's a Bridge

A grandmother
walks to her waiting grandchild,
with the gait of her own children's care,
she lifts the semblance of her progeny,
not its mother, but a mother still,
a mother, no longer the possibility
of her generation, she lifts all
children in her mothering arms.

A mother cries,
when her small boy tells her
she can no longer touch his privates,
this proclaimed privacy is an intrusion
on the unseparated whole she's held
dear, since before he was born.

I cannot rush to hold those I hold dear,
there's an airy bridge between us,
where once the flow it spans
was our playground.

These boundaries protect us
from the theft of what we keep safe
in ourselves, privacy is the honor we
give ourselves, in giving it to others.

An energetic lover, I gleefully broke
the bonds of separation, it became a rite
of celebration, in honor of my freedom,
sought and fought for with gusto,
I was not gentle in my embraces,
I cared to break what held me,
I cared for carelessness.

Wholeness has its counterpart in care,
but freedom is a quiet thing, and those
who fight for it don't know what to do
with their captured bounty.

The more I surrender,
the more I succeed in surrender,
this river is a delta no bridge
can cross, but a boat's a bridge
that becomes one with
the water it bridges.

Seeing in Being

When I was early in this life,
I thought I was learning everything,
whenever I learned anything.

We can't see the unlearned other side
of what we think has no other side.

Once we've seen all the sides of anything,
we can see the no-sided center of everything.

When I hear a voice in my blood, pulling
me back to some one side of myself,
and I refuse to go, I see the good.

All the sides that compete
for being everything, have their pull,
and in their gravity, I feel openness,
as if it were a precise absence.

To be human, with this
gift of seeing, is to be at risk
of being blinded by the sights
that fill my eyes on all sides.

There's so much to see,
that seeing loses its fullness,
my eyes continually seek to be filled,
when it is this seeing in being
that fills my vision.

In Gestures Barely Born

I passed a woman
in the crowded aisle of a store,
she was a large and homely woman,
I smiled, and in that moment, I knew
my smile was familiar to her, it was
the smile that seeks to counter
the bland dishonor of her reality.

Her smile matched mine
in its tired sorrow, its worn sadness,
I hadn't intended to see her that way,
she hadn't intended to be seen that way,
and we passed each other by.

I went to see a movie with my friend,
and I touched her arm as we walked,
she noticed the touch for what it was,
the gentle communion of our ease.

The snow sits on the hills,
well past the first day of spring,
this winter's been long and slow,
and in this slowness,
lies the secret self of the soul.

I walk by the same dog,
every day,
he paces in a yard I pass,
he barks when he sees me
and turns his head to the house,
he barks again and turns his head
to the field across the road,
he stops barking,
as I cross in front of him,
looking and not looking,
as he does, his sense of smell
is greater than his sight,
my sense of him
is greater than he knows.

In this café,
in passive contact
with dozens of people a day,
I listen to the Babel
of unspoken language,
the undertone of verbal banter,
we gauge each other in silent words
of look and feel.

We know more than we say,
we say more than we speak,
we are more than we act.

I thrill to touch my friend,
as we walk in tacit understanding,
our silence together is greater
than its overt play.

We are a concise eloquence,
in gestures barely born.

In a Grove with Benches

It seemed like a good idea,
as a wine-drunk poet,
to set up a place in the park,
in a grove with benches
hewn from fallen trees,
for people to read the poetry
of their choice and pleasure,
so we might hear, at our leisure,
a range of voices, in such a setting.

I told this story to a man
who then told me to read
a poem aloud from Keats,
one of my earliest models,
the man didn't ask me
to read, he told me.

I read a few lines, and
his voice aped mine aloud,
with the lines of his memory,
I stopped reading and passed him
the book, and he read, as I listened.

Inviting others to read poems
written by their favorite authors,
is like asking strangers off the street
to join the philharmonic for a night.

The drunken composer
imagines such a thing,
as he muses in his room
before he's heard the music,
before beauty has declared itself,
before truth has been invited
from the silence of what's true.

Keats wrote *Ode to a Nightingale*
to the nightingale of his ode.

He followed it over the hill
into the next valley,
he wrote it into the flight
of his poem, unknown to him,
as well as to anyone else.

I might hope to hear Keats read
his own poem, but the words
and images fail the reality
his winged self leaves behind.

Anyone who reads a poem,
aloud, reads another poem
than the one he reads.

Anyone who hears a poem
read aloud, hears another poem,
than the one he hears unread
into the next valley.

Keats wrote himself so far into
the poem, he was gone from it.

The Statuary of an Awakening

I was dreaming and woke
too soon for the day,
so I re-entered the dream,
like re-engaging with a film,
after stepping into the lobby,
or restarting a conversation
with a friend who's been put
on hold, I felt embarrassed,
away from my organic dream.

Each of us has loyalties we ignore,
except those we challenge,
we commit ourselves
to a myriad of loves,
we build a lexicon of loyalties,
until something jars our network,
or the glue fails.

All the old loves I've held close,
all the ones I've re-engaged,
as one re-enters a dream, all
the ones I've kept in my loyalty,
have lost their adhesion,
in this awakening.

As resentments become grudges,
as grudges become cancers,
these loyalties in love
also do their damage.

The famous poet is paraded
among school children, he
sees the likeness of his love,
from early in a long life.

She's a love he's held as close as
his loyalty to all the things men praise,
a love he's immortalized, the way
the gods once loved mortals to grace.

Generations
have praised his loyalty
and raised his love to iconic,
and the old man reels in his dream,
as surely as if he'd encountered
an enemy he's kept since childhood.

What is it about our dreams
that we drag them into this reality,
what is it of this reality
that we drag it back to dreams,
anything held in the heart
become its anchor.

What would Jesus do,
if he knew his life had become
a consequential dream?

what would Buddha do,
if he knew he'd become
the statuary of an awakening?

I was embarrassed
to go back to my dream,
like a man caught in a raid,
in front of a brothel,
who runs back inside,
seeking refuge
in the velvet darkness
of a tempting dependency.

She Thrives in Joy

The sorrows of this life are real,
they pull us inside out, better than
brighter feelings are capable of doing.

I carried sorrow as a kind
of humanitarian sadness,
as if the insides of sorrow
were the same as the outsides
of happiness.

I listen to the plaintive tales
of a singer's broken heart,
of her lost love and the desire
in her heart for fullness, and her
honest sadness opens the door
to the joyfulness in her song,
there's sadness in her voice
but no pain in the music,
she thrives in the joy
of her aching heart.

This shell of a life
clings to whoever we are,
and we cling to it,
yet we're exposed
to a permanent emptiness
that clings to nothing,
that nothing can cling to.

And whenever I let go
of what won't let go of me,
I discover myself more full
than I could ever be filled.

The singer stands before my
mirror, in heartfelt despair,
and from her, rises the music
of transcendent ecstasy.

She pulls her emptiness out,
and it feeds the hungry
and staves my thirst,
as if singing itself
was the cry of the lost
in the gloom of despair.

There's laughter, between the notes
of our doom, we wear our rags of grief
with relentless élan, we're flamboyant
in the flames of any hell we celebrate
as if it's smaller than this being alive.

The Unfinished Bodhisattva

A man sits nearby, reading books
of poetry and enlightenment,
I think to make a joke of it,
but these are my concerns,
I'm tired of joking responses
to what matters to me,
especially within myself.

It might not have been so,
if I stayed in the circles of my interest,
but I walked out of the salon and the ashram,
into the streets and onto the fields of play.

An unfinished bodhisattva is an inadvertent missionary,
a silent speaker in the crowd, I'm struck by the separation
between these things of my spirit and the rest of humanity,
I'm a part of these things, and I've been separated out for it,
especially when I'm the one doing the separating.

In his example, Jesus went up into the mountains,
and the only other one there was the shadow of his spirit,
he came back down to the rest, and they killed him
for his difference, then they named a religion after him,
appropriating what they said for what he meant.

Those who read of enlightenment and poetry
rarely practice what they study, I'm better off
keeping my own counsel, not writing this poem.

I met a guru in training, who was my contemporary,
at an earlier stage than she, I was seen as her equal.

When I proposed a camaraderie, she turned away
in practiced silence, committed as she was to the path,
intent on separating her teaching from the routine
of conversation, I wanted both, and faulted myself
for not being willing to cross over, as she was
intent on doing, yet I think she was right,
for who she chose to become.

As a fledgling cab driver in the city, I was told
by veteran drivers not to pick up street people,
I defied their advice, and the stench was so great,
I had to turn in my cab, I couldn't get rid of
the smell for days.

Our language is so conditioned
to express our habits of thought,
it's almost impossible to speak any truth,
that hasn't already been incorporated
into its translation.

The homogenized milk of a once sacred cow
tastes nearly the same, but it loses its nutrition,
and we continue to drink store-bought milk,
after tasting the pure.

We long for a real conversation about what matters,
with someone who's essentially the same as everyone,
so their revelations are not limited by the awareness
of someone who's beyond our recognition.

We seek the awareness of one who's risen from
the norm, who can finally say, as the common truth,
I am alive, I am like you, and my life is the reality
of being itself.

Stunned by the Sun

On Occasion

*I forget the names of my friends
and the names of the
flowers in
my garden my friends
remind me
Grace it's us the flowers just
stand there stunned by the sun.*

Grace Paley

Something happened to our minds,
when we began to be conscious of our thinking.

Ag and Eg (Adam and Eve, if you will) were transformed into something new, from creatures with a mind, that worked in tandem with their physical being, to beings of human awareness.

The human mind took on a life of its own, Ag and Eg became gradually, suddenly, aware of being conscious of themselves, different from the functional, practical, unconscious thinking they'd done before.

These earliest humans were conscious *in* their behavior, but they weren't conscious *of* their behavior, and one day they became conscious, no longer as behaving creatures, but as creatures of their existence, they moved from living in existence, to living in the awareness of existence.

This monumental leap hasn't been honored, even though it's the moment that transforms us, and we haven't recovered from it, we're in thrall to this happening, like an unbroken curse, and since we became conscious, we've struggled to make sense of our sudden awareness.

This blessing in the earliest humans,
is the same blessing in our lives,
we're no different, and the moment
that began their innocent wonder
is the moment that begins ours,
it never changes, never diminishes,
the power of this wonder is not in what
it witnesses, but in its very nature.

Everything that happens to all creatures,
happens to us, and then there is this,
the curse of our awareness,
we fell in love with it, and we struggle
to convert our curse to a practical blessing,
we try to use the curse's very instrument
to free us from the burden of its curse.

With this ability, we've constructed
one civilization on top of another,
always with the constant prospect
of destroying what we've built,
as recklessly, as miraculously,
as if there's no alternative, we have
codified the life and death struggle,
of our pre-conscious existence,
into an everyday acceptance.

Added to the impressive structure
of our busy and capable intelligence,
and the murder of our own kind,
we've yet to come to easy terms
with our self-awareness, it sits
like a plague of unhappiness,
of confusion, fear and conflict,
and all our solutions are kept
within our cursed thinking.

There's no return to our primal
unconscious, and becoming aware
of ourselves as creatures with a tool,
we have come to define ourselves
as the tool itself.

We became aware of ourselves
in our consciousness, we became aware
of our intelligence, we became addicted
to the yield of its invention, we love
the creativity of our thinking, we love
the thinking about ourselves, we became
possessed by ourselves, in this limitation.

Everything that's risen from this
consciousness, in the state of awareness,
has overwhelmed its simple reality.

A creature, otherwise similar
to all other creatures, has become
aware of its existence, and the further
workings of that reality, do not surpass
that original awareness. this startling
awareness is the source of the freedom
from its excesses and limitations.

The I, that we define ourselves as,
is an approximation of this awareness,
the I of this awareness is what claims
to be the creature it seems to inhabits,
the I of this awareness is also what
claims to be the product of its use,
as if what we make, is who we are.

I is the namesake of this awareness,
but this awareness is not like a thing,
this awareness is an ineffable occurrence,
indescribable, overwhelming, beyond
words, deep, and imprecise.

We identify ourselves as the I of awareness,
or we identify ourselves as a being to be freed
from the I of awareness.

I am not a man of awareness, I am not
a creature with awareness, I'm not to be
freed from this man or this creature.

I'm not what's occurs to me
in my physical being, I'm not
what occurs to me as a conscious being,
my definition is only an identification
with these things of the I.

I is a product of this abrupt awareness,
I is an attempt to link this sudden knowing
with this creature, we now see as the body
of this new awareness, but this awareness
is without name or physical shape.

This ever-occurring moment of sudden awareness
is neither a creature nor an I, it is freedom itself.

Whenever I divest myself of the I that claims me,
and I let go of the creature that claims me,
I find myself present in this awareness,
that has no claim on anything.

This awareness is the occurrence
that satisfies my identification,
it only *is*, it doesn't ask for more,
it doesn't seek to be free,
it is freedom itself.

I'm another creature, in the Garden
of Eden, or on the Serengeti Plain,
my eyes are on the world around me,
I look to eat and survive, for myself
and for my kind.

And then one day, in a moment
of awakening, I become aware of
my existence, and the awareness
transforms me.

My consciousness slips, between
being in survival and being in awareness,
until I begin to use this consciousness
to aid my creature survival.

Cities are built, and armies,
but I'm never the same,
especially when I live in
the wonder that overcame me,
especially when I recognize
who I am in that moment.

In the awareness of existence,
in the awareness of being itself,
in the awareness of myself as
this very moment of awareness,
in the awareness of being
this new thing that I call I,
I see there's no I in any creature,
there's no creature in any I,
there is no I, there is only
this awareness.

I continue to live as I have,
I have a long history as a creature,
I take this new way of thinking
as a strange difference,
I begin to attribute its presence
to a force beyond myself, the way
I've always thought of the world,
and I become afraid for my life
in a new way, I no longer feel fear
as a caution against threats, but as
an occurrence within my mind.

Millennia pass, and I still feel fear,
my thoughts don't free me from fear,
fear occurs because of the consciousness,
this sudden awareness opened in me.

The awareness of my existence mutates
into the recognition of the fragility of my life,
I begin to fear what might be, I begin to fear
what might never be, I begin to fear
the unknown, I begin to fear myself.

I experience glimpses
of my original awakening,
in natural beauty, in moments of love,
in moments of exertion and exhilaration,
but I forget the awakening at its source,
I attribute these moments to the world
around me, outside me, beyond me,
and to supernatural beings.

I seek those who speak
of this inherent reality
as a brilliant awakening,
as enlightenment,
as a glimpse of the eternal,
but most of them don't offer
the original experience.

They promise it
in place of the life I live,
they promise it in some reality
beyond who I am, they obscure
the inherent reality, the same way
I've been doing, all these millennia.

This awareness
that occurs
so perfectly
within me,
doesn't fit
the way I think
in my creature mind.
I try to make it fit,
I assign it names and shapes
that fit my creature mind,
but that only disguises
this awareness.

I think I learn more of this reality
when I learn its shapes and names,
but I miss it, until I'm free, in the
only reality that fits who I am,
I am this awareness.

Ag and Eg
said to each other,
we're human,
we're alive,
we're free,
and we're none
of these things,
these names don't
define who we are,
we're silence,
we're stillness,
we're nothing,
and these words
can't describe who we are.

We're here
when these ways of speaking cease,
we're here in this absence,
we're here in the vast emptiness
these words seem to fill.

Stillness is our being,
we're a common silence,
we're a common being,
we have nothing in common,
we are nothing in common,
we're silent singers in unison,
we're timeless dancers in time,
we're laughter without fear,
we're love so vast it has
forgotten its beginning
and can't dream its end.

We are,
and we are not,
we're not alive or dead,
we're not captive or free,
we're all these things,
we are,
before we came to be anything,
we exist, we are what is.

Ag and Eg knew,
when they spoke,
after seeing themselves
in the awareness of their existence,
that they'd become a combination
of these realities, the first was
the one they'd always known,
limited by death, the second
was the one they came to know,
that had no sense of death
within it or about it.

Their third reality became
the habit of their minds,
in self-centered ego,
they called this third reality
I and self and identity.

It became the voice of who they were,
who they thought everyone else was,
it played a part in their physical being,
in the open awareness they experienced,
in a break from the mind of the physical,
until this third self began to dominate.

The third self, with no self of its own,
neither physical being nor being itself,
lived in relation to the other realities,
it fought for its hegemony,
and the struggle began.

The generations that followed Ag and Eg
fought for the sustenance of the physical,
they fought for the self they called spirit,
and this third reality sought control
over both.

The constant reality of the physical self,
and the constant presence of awareness,
became a contest to redefine both realities,
in the thought and language of the ego.

The physical became a lesser reality,
and the spirit became something
beyond the physical, it became
an approximation of its reality.

With the ego ruling among the selves,
body and spirit became defined in the mind,
as fragile, as empty, as the ego knew itself to be,
a dominant reality projects itself on other realities,
the body became dispensable, and spirit became
the extension of an ego greater than life itself.

Descendants of Ag and Eg
had their moments of realization,
in the recognition of being itself,
in the knowledge of their own existence,
not greater, or less than, who they were,
but the habits of the mind held sway,
for so long, that it became difficult
to sustain that awareness.

What's true is always true,
what was true for Ag and Eg
is true for everyone who followed,
and nothing has changed
in the reality of who we are.

We're free in this same unchanging moment,
that has no concern for the mind, or the body,
or any pretender who poses as the arbiter
of what's true; what is, simply is.

Every day's a new day,
without budging from this spot,
this is the familiarity of innovation,
these tables and chairs aren't new,
this body I inhabit is not new.

What is new is this auburn-haired,
blond, bald, raven-haired beauty
of re-encountered reality.

An artist, all his life, he says his life is his art,
I can't remember what I am, I think of myself
as nothing that has a name, in an empty mirror,
I look long and hard, and some shape appears,
and then a name.

In my voice, I'm philosophical and poetic,
in my presence, I'm thick and large,
in my mind, I'm thoughtful and emotional,
these images appear, if I let them in,
but my eyes are empty, until I accept
the images that have enough substance
for me to honor their consistency.

Whenever we honor the consistency
of any image, we become attached
to its consistency, we become
attached to our need for it.

Mama comes in the room, Papa
comes in the door, and that becomes
the consistency of our days, the old ones,
in their dementia, lose the attachment
to consistency, and we think they go mad.

What madness is this mind, fixed
to the familiar, that losing familiarity,
loses its moorings, what moorings are these,
that attach to the water, the air, the shifting
sand of the quaking earth?

Every day we visit grandpa,
he thinks we're someone new,
and wisely wonders who we are.

The Unexpired License of Life

Life seems better when she's in it,
even knowing the roots of joy,
like knowing the table of elements
doesn't create an atomic reaction.

My life is more enjoyable in her presence
and the presence of her six billion companions
on this crowded planet, but she stands out
among the others, I can tell by this
barometer of enjoyment.

I can sense the rise in enjoyment,
when I'm among others, fluctuations
are noticeable, but when she's around,
the needle jumps to the middle,
where it registers, peacefully,
not wildly, but constantly,
like ecstasy to a Buddhist,
like rest to a fanatic,
like the center declaring itself,
and anything this positive,
that goes on for such a long time,
begins to seem extreme.

I've been waiting for an explosion
in our coming together, but the history
of explosions is not promising,
except in the short run, and
even then it's exaggerated
by expectation,
like dropping bombs
to ensure peace.

I've been forced to the tables,
where negotiations take place,
where one only imagines wild sex,
ignoring the edges, the hard surfaces,
and the precipitous fall to the floor.

Forced to stay present
and pay attention,
leaving aside
the taking of sides,
breaking for lunch and weekends,
living through four seasons,
when four seconds
seems like an eternity,
I've come up with a few good ideas,
that come down to one,
there's a kind of longevity
in this enjoyment,
that engulfs and overwhelms
all the little big joys
of desire.

I stopped looking for little big joy,
and I see how life is more enjoyable.

I no longer covet her joy in my life,
and she's become the face
of my life's enjoyment.

In the Maze of Humanity

We're all alike,
if not identical,
and yet we seldom
reveal what we know,
despite there being
no reason for secrecy,
except the keeping of
power and exclusion.

A Persian poet told me
that in his spiritual teaching,
after poet comes prophet,
and I think of Walt Whitman,
I want to hear the experience of
the awakening of his awareness,
in the passage of his poetry.

The self in secret
elevates such ideas
to continued separation,
as if being a poet and
becoming a prophet,
is best kept to oneself,
when it's only a part
of the progression
of our spirit through
the maze of humanity.

The fear of pretension
weakens the connection
between ways of knowing.

If when I speak of what
occurs within my awareness,
and I see poetry emerging
into prophecy, it's a kind
of dawning, the sight
of what's to come
for all to see.

Nothing
is ever revealed
that can't be seen,
what's called unseen
is not yet seen,
prophecy is speaking
what's unsaid,
until what's said
becomes what's known,
in the gradual ease
of knowing oneself.

Anyone called prophet is only one
who speaks what's not fully known,
as something from our common reality,
who speaks us into a recognition
of that reality, and any prophecy
is false, if what follows doesn't
resonate in the forever
of who we are.

Anything, that comes to be known,
is knowable and can be told,
we call those voices prophetic
that tell what's knowable,
and we jump to praise or fear
what's always been true,
in what they say.

No one is a prophet by his saying so,
he's only a prophet by what he says,
and the forever of who we are
serves to prove what's said.

A prophet is a resident of forever,
who looks around and tells
what he sees.

This Beloved Landscape

I look out across this landscape,
that rewards my eyes with easy love,
this is where I am, it's where I'm from,
I know it well, this is my home,
as familiar as the houses I grew up in,
the streets I walked and drove,
the schools I attended, the towns
and cities of my life, I see features
of the face I love, everywhere I look.

I've fallen in love with the foreign faces,
of places I didn't know, where turning a
corner opened my eyes to the differences,
in lands where those who lived their lives
as I lived mine, who love their landscape,
with as much subtle depth, as I do mine.

One can't speak intimately of someone
else's family, as one doesn't speak
intimately of one's own, no one
knows what goes on in the heart
of someone else's love.

There's an inviolate surrender
in the love of one's own land,
and there's a stirring surrender
in the love of someone else's,
where the heart is revealed
more open than what it loves.

On the far side of the world,
I loved a landscape not my own,
I came home to love what was mine,
with a heart awakened to itself.

I saw a heart more open,
than whatever seeks its love
can love the open heart.

To fall in love
with what's not known,
one begins to ask,
does love come shaped
by what it loves,
or is what it loves
shaped by love itself?

This revelation of the heart,
that lives to love wherever it is,
frees me to love my home and
to love others' homes as well.

The spirit of the heart, in this body,
born as if it belonged to its place,
this flesh, this family, this town,
loves the land, that loves it back with
greater demand and less surrender,
than the heart itself requires.

I don't begrudge my land
for what it commands of me,
I love it more than it can imagine,
I regret those who say my heart,
able to love this land, so rich in form,
ought not love, in even greater degree,
a world of unlimited landscape,
where home is undiminished,
by the expanse of love itself,
in a heart that freely sails
the encircling seas.

The Clinch of Surety

My father's father worshipped
one old leader my father scorned,
we could easily exchange leaders
in the way we think of them,
generation to generation,
region to region,
town to town,
neighbor to neighbor,
the pleasures of acceptance
and dismissal are interchangeable.

Love and hate are not the same,
there's no razor's edge between them,
they're unique, what unites them, in pleasure,
is the way they so easily settle our concerns,
it's more difficult to feel neither or both,
than it is to feel one and be done with
weighing the measure of our beliefs.

My father admired a leader
I disliked, there's pleasure in being
done with a leader that others revere,
including the leader of one's loved
and loving father.

Difficult as it was to accept his judgment,
when mine was as righteously held,
my father was my beloved father,
despite our polar politics.

My brother and I disagree about
a current leader, I love my brother,
and I shake my head at his affiliations,
as he shakes his head at mine.

We may come to blows,
we may think to kill each other,
we may die in the divide,
of our common differences.

It satisfies mankind to man
the barricades of certainty,
the ease of taking sides
is a gravity greater
than the pull of love
or the fear of death, and
any man who honors war
is honored by his fellows.

Wisdom is the willing
embrace of contraries,
and, in the clinch of surety,
the adherents of wisdom are few.

In the abandonment of wisdom,
brilliance loses light, compassion dies,
and love turns to desperate indifference.

I love my brother, and I love wisdom,
more than I love his certainty or mine.

Never in Florida

A prisoner of the chair
and the wall, the entrapping
congeniality of fellow prisoners,
in this cramped cell of a body,
I seek my freedom, still
within its bounds.

I dreamt I was making love
to a woman with perfect attributes,
but her response was indifferent,
she chattered away, as I tried
to believe I loved her, this
is another windy day.

There's no arrangement of these things
that frees me from their grasp, when
their grasp is my grasp, *I had my nose
between his teeth, and I wouldn't let go,*
no distress but in the stressful mind,
no pleasure but in the pleasures of
the mind, even these thoughts
of clarity don't get me free.

I look for eternity in everything,
and nothing that's said describes it,
my love attaches to the transience
of all I see, and I look for its eternity,
I open each drawer and search it,
looking for what can't be found,
yet what I find is fascinating.

Vasco de Gama, searching
for the fountain of youth,
lives out his youth in Florida,
dies searching for what's found
on every page of his history,
he finds the never found
center of discovery,
or we do, in his image.

The Precarious Reality

We are something
not finally real to each other,
strangers in a common land,
what keeps us apart unites us,
in this reality beyond knowing.

An auctioneer holds up a toaster
and says, *what am I bid for this blender,*
if he wants to call it a shoelace, why
should I quarrel with the name, I
take it home to brown my bread
for breakfast.

What I'll never know of her
is what I love, I call it something
else, I call it by some name I know,
I call her by the name she uses,
but she's unknown to me, what
does it matter if I'm wrong
every time I call her?

There's no name I could use
that's accurate, I'm nearly blind,
but that doesn't keep me from loving
what I see of her life, her beauty,
her unreality, her most real.

The Humor of a Hillside

I look at a hillside, and my eyes
drop out of focus, and the essence
of the hillside emerges.

I drop out of schooled attention
on the definition of a hillside,
into everything and nothing,
dressed up as a hillside.

Sometimes,
when I tell her something
funny, in a funny voice,
I lose the perfect humor
of the first time I heard it
in my ear, I offer her
the performance of a voice,
instead of the voice
it was born with.

Falling asleep at night, the mind
races with fears and desires,
it's the mind, and I'm its foil,
it wants to continue its play,
as if my life were dependent on it,
it recognizes my wish for peace,
and it tries to compose
the best thought
to carry me to sleep.

Instead,
I fall back into my origin,
I drop out of focus into lucidity,
I step back from performance,
into the stillness where
thoughts are born,
where my focus sleeps wide awake,
like laughter to a funny voice.

Hobbled Angel

From the translucence of her self-protection,
she admired the free flight of everyone she saw,
determined that she was none of what they were,
but she was already aloft, in the wide expanse
of who she is.

Then, she shed the cocoon of her decades,
and stepped into the peril of her destiny.

An avian body, an aerial serpent,
an uncanny beast of the earth,
who lives in the heavens,
she's a hobbled angel,
who thought she was
bound by the ground,
but in her dreams,
she tore away the cords
that bound her, she found her
dreams were the truest part
of who she was.

She said she was no romantic, but
one who loved the passions of others,
until she left the incarceration of her
confinement, in fear and doubt,
in determined dissatisfaction,
and then in her startled amusement,
her laughter turned to deep breathing,
as she stepped off the branch into flight.

In the time before she was this woman,
she admired who I was in a poem,
but it was herself she was admiring,
it was she who shaped the words,
it was she who saw her chrysalis
of innocence, and her breaking
free from her darkening experience
into the brilliance of her nativity.

I Weigh the Weightless Wind

A woman walks to a table.
with a guide dog in tow,
the dog is gently, attentively obedient,
the woman yanks on the leash and jams her fists
in the hind quarters of the dog, to get him to obey,
she stomps the floor, to make it stay beneath her feet,
she widens her eyes, to force her failing sight to see.

I read stories by a woman I've just met,
I read to see if I need to be in love with her,
the weight of needing to love, what I might
come to love, weighs on me, the weight of loving
what I already love, weighs on me, I weigh my love.

I weigh my love, as a storm tracker weighs his life
in the balance, as if love were the most feared force
in nature, as if nature was a willful force, bent on
raging, with no care for the lives it takes, as if
good rain nourishes, and bad rain drowns, as if
good wind clears the air, and bad wind destroys.

Nature is the convergence of forces, and love
is the more to be feared, if fear is one's way
of tracking what occurs in love, love looks
across a sea of faces and finds its way
among them. with no will in its choices,
with no will in its effect, I'm at its mercy,
love is ruthless, constant, unrelenting.

I'm relieved when the storm of love
passes me by, my new friend writes
of the way love sorts her feelings
among her lovers, never as she
imagines, always as it turns
out to be.

The Debris of Our Separations

With no tradition in my heart
to honor the formalities that occur
between those of ancestral habits,
my heart bows to see ceremonies
of honor between members of a tribe.

I see something like it among those in crisis,
where petty personality is washed away
in a moment of communal reunion.

I baptize myself, in the honor
shown between ancient others,
but I see the same kind of bond
in the dishonoring of those
who are of the wrong tribe,
the wrong name, the wrong
class, the wrong face.

My life flourishes in the awareness
of its existence, but if I confine its use
to being a tool in my behavior, I honor
my habits and not their essence,
and I lose my honor.

I demean myself by my habits
of separation, I separate myself
from who I am, when I separate
who I am from anyone else.

I don't need to be everyone's intimate,
but I await the day when, in any encounter
with any man or woman, no dishonor occurs
to diminish the honor of our existence.

I fell into the anger of separation
toward a friend's wife, and the dishonor
I brought upon myself, within myself,
has worn away at the honor I need to feel,
to be free, it diminishes me in my own eyes.

Buddha felt pain in his spirit,
because he'd raised a stone to kill a bird,
seven hundred years before his last incarnation,
he felt dishonored by a thought, regardless
of its time of birth.

The honor that others show their own kind,
is an occasional opening to a larger life.

We become cluttered with the debris
of our separations, and we lose the honor
of our awareness, in the narrow honor we
practice in the habits of our familiarity.

We dishonor ourselves in the performance
of small honors and dishonors, when those acts
elevate our separations, I apologized to my friend,
not for his sake, not for the sake of his wife,
but for the sake of my uncluttered heart.

The Man Who Used to Be a Poet

As a young poet in the city,
he felt like the luckiest man alive,
his life was a constant love affair
with the changing moment,
his position gave him
the privilege of benediction,
everything that occurred
was a blessing.

When he thought, *I am a poet*,
the words disappeared in a pool
of the present, without name
or occupation, as if *I am a poet*
was read backwards, from
a poet to *I am* to stillness.

He was in the awareness of being,
with no particular shape or form,
he didn't articulate the feeling,
but there it was, an all-encompassing
reality, where everything and everyone
who was present was a gift.

And he was young, which gave him
the invulnerability and the privilege
of unlimited time, life was celebration.

Despite its open-sided envelopment,
his sense didn't find itself in the world,
he knew there were others at play,
and the shapes and forms of life
contradicted his life as a free poet.

There was no official position
for simple being, being was free,
but there was no profession for it,
there was no priesthood
for plain, unscored existence.

After many years
in the dilemma of his choices,
he found himself with a teacher
of barest awareness.

The living physical presence,
of a possible master of existence,
presented a parallel to the priory
of poetry he might have imagined
among the poets, but that too failed
the reality of existence, his existence
sought and accepted no masters.

Poetry was a form of his existence,
as much as he was a form of his existence,
existence took form in him, as it took form
in his poetry, and existence is as it is.

Existence didn't need to take form in him,
and he didn't need to call himself anything,
for existence to be true.

He no longer felt lucky, his life wasn't about
love or silence, it wasn't about being or stillness,
it wasn't about poetry or spirit, it simply was,
and nothing changed.

Poets, in their mystical and mundane desires,
are drawn to the indescribable, the man who was
the closest one he'd ever known to being a master
of existence, told him to keep trying to describe
the indescribable, even though no one had ever
been able to do it, and so he did.

It was the perfect nakedness for a naked man,
who used to be a poet, who was still alive.

Pretty As She Once Was

Pepper burns in my throat, hot
in the not quite chai of the American café,
it does the trick, the controlled burn
of heated spices.

In my sight, are people and cars, a train,
and trucks on the freeway, three women,
past middle-age, sit holding their cups,
one of them pretty as she once was,
we live past ourselves,
as we imagine ourselves to be.

A gaggle of happy children
look at a group picture of old people,
trying to find the face of their aged self,
it's a game they play, that all children play,
it's their hope to live to a ripe old age,
they look to see what they'll turn out to be,
they're curious, fascinated, eager to grow old.

Of course, this rarely happens,
we live in fantasies of our youth,
we live as if our youth is the standard,
from which we slip inexorably away,
as time ruins the image we want
to keep of ourselves.

We're born, and we run swiftly
to the shore of our fullest self,
we spend the rest of our lives
slowly drowning in deep water,
living in dreams of the water's edge,
the receding past of our setting to sea.

This water is deep, fathomless,
this water is vast, uncrossable,
there's no salvation from it, save
in the ability to swim, to float,
to dive, to loll in its embrace.

And yet we long for what we've lost,
as if this sea is not our home,
as if we belong ashore,
tan and timid,
reluctant,
on a big blanket,
bathing ourselves in oil,
mocking those who put
their toes in the surf.

Yes, the water wrinkles the skin,
and the shallow dreams of youth fade,
the oldest woman of the three, the one
in whom no sign of her fair youth remains,
what does she know of this ocean,
with its cars and trucks
and thin water like air?

Her eyes see,
like the ears of a whale,
no distance keeps her,
she lives where the seven seas
are as familiar as a small
patch of sand.

Nothing Happened

I read a story of an old man,
caught in the woods by a band of militia,
playing war games with the seriousness
of the paranoid and the powerless.

The old man becomes a pawn
of their righteousness,
they turn their aggressions
into his helplessness,
and I feel the thrill
of the nearness to cruelty.

Cheap thrills are born from fears,
created in defense of threatened lives.

Why do I enjoy being at risk in a story,
away from any real danger?

We know what it means to be at the mercy
of men with guns, it's our most common reality.

What would I do, if I were confronted
by the real danger in the world, what
would I do, if I were powerful
in the face of that threat?

What if the indifferent enormity
of that threat was here now, what if
I could no longer feel separate from it?

I don't know what I would do,
it's a pleasure to imagine I'd rise
to the occasion and thwart what's
beyond my power to defeat.

It's another kind of pleasure to imagine
one's helplessness, to die at the hands
of overwhelming forces, the way we
will, no matter what else happens.

To see it come at the hands of men
ratchets the thought of death
into a drama of being at the mercy
of death and not its willing companion.

On my grave, I see the words, *nothing
bad happened*, carved in stone, *something
bad exists*, I think, *but I'm free of it*.

I see another gravestone that reads,
nothing happened, it's not the epigram
of an empty life, but the description
of a free man's spirit.

Fear keeps the graveyards full,
fear fuels the killer's hegemony.

A free man is threatened with torture,
at the hands of one who has only power
for his freedom, the free man says to his
nemesis, *this will end for me, as if nothing
has happened, and how will it end for you?*

Courted by the Permanent

We've become such comical people,
to no one else but ourselves,
both naturally passionate,
pretending to be dispassionate,
ironic, thoughtful, distant,
we've begun to display
our passionate nature
in each other's presence,
if not toward each other.

This is a courtship of our reality,
to expose our hearts to the air,
in the presence of the other,
not to court the other, but to
find the deepest part of ourselves,
in this place where we might be free,
to be as we are, as if we believe
what's true, becomes true
in its gradual revelation.

We've proposed a virtual marriage,
we've made virtual plans in the air,
yet we've kept our plans a secret,
we've kept our union a secret,
we've kept our distance,
when distance is thing
we fail to keep, the thing
we never had to keep,
we keep secrets.

Keeping one's distance
is the irony of our bond,
it makes us comical,
we construct an elaborate
charade of distance,
inside its absence.

We play games with the truth,
when the truth chooses not to play.

The truth plays a greater game,
never wavering, when all else
is scattered to the wind.

We can't keep the wind a secret,
we can't keep secret what remains
when the wind has done its work.

We work our secrets free
from their flimsy moorings.

Secrets keep us tied
to what we're not,
and yet we're courted
by the permanent,
out into the open,
where no secret
can survive.

The Flight of the Eagle

"Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure."

Helen Keller

She's lived in a shell of her making,
protected from the exposure of who she
might be, if she weren't so well-protected.

We assume those who guard themselves
know what it is they're guarding, when
they may be more in the dark about it,
than we are, living outside them.

Still, their shield is likely to be
impenetrable to most eyes,
its final breach comes from within,
like a chick pecking away at its shell.

An eagle is a chick, before it
breaks the barrier of its birth,
and then for only a moment after,
until it works the air with the force
of its fledgling independence.

In any population, the shelled
outnumber the unshelled,
we decorate ourselves to an art,
we break our shells into pieces,
and wear the pieces as a disguises.

The best among us have broken
the shell of their gestation,
and in their fearful hesitation,
they contrive an invisible shell
to replace it.

She knows all this, she's
the one who quoted Helen Keller.

The last shell to be broken
is the shell of knowledge,
it gets in its own way
and reinvents itself.

Each chick points its way
to freedom with its beak,
poking one part of its shell
from its vision of the open sky,
and replacing it, in one adroit
gesture.

Push out knowledge
from its nesting place,
eagle woman, you're free
from its caring encasement.

Did You Write Any Poems?

“Did you write any poems?” Kenneth Koch to Hilton Obenzinger during the student protest at Columbia University, 1968.

Standing in the window of the president’s office,
in protest of the university’s plans and policies,
he could feel the surge of commitment and
camaraderie, as below him on the street,
his professor, a well-known and genial man,
yelled up at him, *did you write any poems?*

His politics are solid, developed
over many years, unerring in his eye
for hypocrisy and deceit, and bold
in response, yet he remembers
the words, *did you write any poems?*

I take them for my own use,
when I might remind myself,
of the sludgy vortex
of too much seriousness.

If I were at the mercy of love or rage,
if I didn’t like the way things were going,
if I became overheated about anything,
if I became fearful or obsessive, if I were
in distress or pain, I could ask myself,
did you write any poems?

My son has another version
of this alleviation in any situation,
where the mind has become focused
too intently, for its own good,
four for a dollar, he says.

*Four for a dollar....
look at the moon....
did you write
any poems?*

The Same Ocean

She has good teeth,
especially the lower rank
of perfect soldiers in a row,
one tooth in the upper rank
stands ever so slightly turned,
as if in thought, one thought,
that its career demands leadership,
and that trait may get its stance corrected,
to advance the appearance of perfection.

In our visit, sitting face to face,
my sight enjoys itself, wandering
over the landscape of her presence.

Our times together are always intimate,
even though our physical landscape
is still virgin, I'm as shy with her,
as I'm bold in every other way,
until she sees me scrutinize her.

My scrutiny is short-lived,
wise and fertile in its brevity,
I might write a poem from its yield,
I say, and this is that poem,
I say if I were to scrutinize her
any longer, I'd be a scholar,
I speak of another poet's analysis,
of yet another poet's work, that I
habitually don't analyze poetry.

I'd rather breathe poetry,
than analyze it,
I'd rather breathe her,
than analyze her.

I'd rather pore over
her presence, than
analyze it away.

We've swum
in each other's awareness,
prevented from scrutiny
by our separation.

Our bodies have become
transparent extensions
of our communion.

A bottle,
filled from the ocean,
is given to those
who've been to sea.

But it's not
a bottle,
it's not
the water,
it is
the
ocean.

The Mirror Dance

In a book about his life,
I read the rich remembered reality
of someone else's experience,
I think of a similar narration,
in the existence of endless others.

I read the list of those
that another friend thanks
in the back of her book, none
recognizable, in an email from a friend
I see the names of others he's addressed.

My own life is little more than
another name, after which follows
a story and prose that disappears
in the telling so that the man
is more clearly seen than
the language it employs.

But the man of a story is language,
and in some stories the man disappears
for the sake of the language, both are
fleeting and disappear for the sake
of another life, another language.

As a boy, I knew
I'd never live on in my art,
no matter how well it might
come to life in its own right,
I could paint a portrait of myself,
as lifelike as I am alive,
and only the art might live on,
in its unique vitality, I do not
and cannot denigrate art,
I love the art of this life,
but no art is a true continuation
of this simple, empty, endless
reality I call my being here.

Living on the edge
of imagined immortality,
I'm no more immortal,
than I'd be if I had,
or never had,
done anything
in anyone's notice.

Something else
jumps off the pages
of my friend's book,
and it would,
if I didn't know him
from Adam.

It is not his life or my life,
it's not his book's life, it's
not the life of my imagination,
it is this mirror dance.

A man dances
before a mirror,
he sees himself
dancing in the mirror,
he's used to seeing his image
dance for him and with him,
in their odd unison,
until one day,
he takes up a partnership
with his exact other,
lifeless in its parody,
and he recognizes
the simultaneity
of absolutely no one,
dancing with absolutely
no one else,
in this mirror
of our nameless
immortality.

Our Words in the World

How do we stop talking,
the way people have always talked,
how do we begin to talk,
the way there's no way to talk?

How do we let the exquisite reality
of our existence do the talking,
not in the distracting voices of gods
and demons, but in the voice
of trusting sound in ourselves,
and silence in others,
silence in ourselves,
and original sound
in our humanity?

Bless those,
who sit in fathomless silence,
for their efforts at essence, now
how do we let that brilliance
fill the dark passages
of our habits?

It's in the warrior
who lowers his weapons,
in the middle of his warring,
and wonders about war itself,
at risk to himself, at greater risk
to war, as if there's no risk at all.

It's in the one who hears his voice as parody,
the voice he thinks he's learned to use well,
as it becomes false to his truest reality,
he hears his voice as it begins to repeat itself,
as it becomes unfaithful to its original awakening.

His breath is unrepeated, except in function,
can he breath his being into his language,
the way his being breathes itself
into his life?

When a man is addressed,
he answers when called,
but what if he's untrained
to breathe his words by rote?

What if breath
is the greater of the two,
what if the greatness of being
is in its recognition, what if our origin
is the medium of our exchange,
what if we spoke in the voice of our
originality, what if the truest voice
of our deepest communion
was its unspoken expression?

What if we knew, despite
our comfort in belonging
to a common language,
that in our origin,
the way of its expression
was pretended into reality
by our words in the world?

There's no way to change
the habits of a million years,
habits are changed by their changing,
the millionth monkey begins the day,
living a new way, unbeknownst to him.

His family has been around for millennia,
his generations have been busy living
their legacy, their habits continue,
monkeys need to eat, they need to
get along with the other monkeys,
the habits of survival are ingrained
in the habits of their community,
even when it denigrates their
inherent humanity, until one day
a monkey picks up a thought
and makes it a useful tool.

You get the idea, there are no
monkeys here in my vicinity,
probably none in yours,
I live among humans, I'm human,
I sat with a master human, and later,
walking around the lake, in another city,
I began to speak a new language, and I
was dissolved in a loss of definition.

I stopped talking, in that new way,
almost as soon as I started, I went
back to my customary tongue
and continued the walk,
home again in the familiar.

I sought to incorporate the awareness
of the unpracticed tongue, that's more
familiar than my habitual language,
as if I was suddenly speaking in Latin,
or Sanscrit, or Bantu, but I was only
walking with others on a path in the city.

I am the millionth monkey,
the only human being in this body,
the one body in this being that I know,
I have no desire to change my humanity,
and as radically as I might construct it,
this poem dwells in the familiar.

I saw a man who spoke, not as one
human to other humans, but as being
speaking to being, I saw love pouring
out toward itself, and I've been
heartbroken ever since.

I was broken open in front of myself,
broken down in my habitual mind,
broken free in my selfless being,
yet I strike up a conversation with
the biker sitting next to me,
in this ordinary café,
beside the road.

The exquisite poet
lives in the dust of the road,
and when we speak, our minds engage,
while the dust of our being blows free,
the exquisite poet's voice is born
from the exquisite emptiness
into words in the world.

The Empty Sky

Whoever contemplates the fullness of reality,
with no god in his prayers, is seen as praying
to himself, whoever prays to a god that's been
given a name, is seen as selfless, whoever lives
in the name of god is thought pious, whoever
lives in devotion to nameless being is thought
to be staring blindly into an empty sky.

I contemplate a throne where no god reigns,
in a castle with no throne, in a kingdom with
no castle, in greatness without a kingdom,
where nothing dwells in place of
anything I might name.

The mind that's present in prayers
wants to populate them with all these things.

We live in a place of names and things,
we expect our prayers to be as heavily populated,
when no prayer worth praying is thick and busy,
the will of prayer is to become clear at both ends,
until one is open, from end to end.

A stranger begs from a man passing through,
he doesn't look the man in the eye, until the man
gives him a few dollars, his haunted eyes
are cloudy with thwarted purpose.

The truth and beauty of pain come to the fore,
in the embrace of any pain to its relief,
sadness and sorrow are the welcome
residue of a peaceful being, joy
grieves its own pain best.

A destitute man sits stranded among
those who travel freely, in easy wealth,
in their own land, I've lived among
his fellows, in the mistaken identity
of my own fears and desires.

A good physician can see and seek
the health in a diseased body,
he speaks the language of healing,
even when disease and cancers
are screaming, when harm and hurt
refuse to leave the scene, when debility
and incapacity are the common language
of the body.

*Physician, heal thyself,
let loose the tongue
of your calling.*

I don't need to avert my eyes
from this face of the conflicted past.

I matched my sorrow to the sorrow
of those I knew, I joined my pain
to those in pain, I prepared for life
among the desolate and deserted,
pain and sorrow were the realities
of my world, I tried not to escape them.

I moved into the hotel of ordinary grief,
I took it for home, I saw I could live in
sadness and sorrow, but I could not
make it my home, the separation
we suffer keeps us homeless
in ourselves.

I thought homelessness
was in the honesty of my heart,
when it was a deception of the mind,
I carried my home within me,
on the dark streets of separation.

Looking for union in the eyes
of those who feel separate,
is futile, one must
look beyond their eyes
to the unremembered reality.

The one who sits in his weariness
is not in the image of our common being,
I don't desert him in union with the essential,
to be at peace is not desertion of the deserted,
it is an assurance of our inhabitable origin.

A lucky child, openly loved, accepted by others,
may grow old with no interest in self-knowledge,
no belief in repairing the loss known by those who
have been deprived of his cultivated sense of self.

He has no need to find a broader reality
beneath his privileged spirit, he can't
imagine why anyone else would,
he doesn't know his schooled sense
can only be gotten the way he got it.

Whoever is lost and whoever
loses his brief advantage, may find
the wellspring within, that cannot
be found by effort, that cannot
be given by care.

But love given late
can't fill, without constant refilling,
the well of love not given, and he
who drinks from surface water,
with no need to dig deep,
may never find the filling source
of what seems absent in others,
he may think such an absence
is chosen.

He may blame those
who don't get his given,
if he's never missed what seems
so easily found, and to live at ease,
with the belief in a caring god
is a rewarding life, deprived
of its profound reality.

The deepest love,
born in the lives we lead,
and nurtured among us,
can fulfill our immediate needs,
and miss the fount it emulates,
the caring we declare for each other
can help us to our sufficiency,
but nothing of a perfect life,
or an imperfect one,
teaches our origin.

Physician,
nurse your knowledge
to its source, let your acceptance,
that was in you before you knew
who you were being,
break your spirit free
from its loss
and its appearance.

The exquisite poet
is alive and well
and living among us.

The Jump in the Belly

Even in our honesty,
we perform for each other,
I can hear my voice taking on qualities,
and when I speak with no particular tenor,
I feel the uncertainty in my stomach.

I have a familiar voice in the company
of others, and that voice has a more
private voice that I seldom hear,
it's easier to perform the words
of one's thoughts aloud, when
their performance is the raising
of even the slightest stage.

No one knows what occurs,
when two others are alone together,
no one else knows what occurs,
when we're alone with ourselves,
I long to hear the voice of my
non-performing reality.

On stage, it subtly speaks,
off stage, it silence speaks.

A still, small voice, we say,
to describe this silent tongue.

It has no qualities, and as soon as
we give it qualities, it loses its voice.

The exquisite poet
sings the still small voice,
but it resists his fervor,
remaining still within him.

The jump in the belly is a sign
of the presence of the voice
that knows no performance.

She Bloomed

Dreams come true,
and there's an end to dreams,
dreams teach themselves,
and not their imagined reality,
I hesitate to say what's true,
for fear it's still a dream,
here where dreams
are the constant
state of being.

She's an enlightened being,
chasing her life in the world,
how do I know? she told me,
she drove her car to Oregon,
past banks of blooming flowers,
and she bloomed in spirit,
not in her devotion to horticulture,
not in her love of beauty,
not in her appreciation of nature,
she bloomed.

She flourished,
she blossomed,
she flowered,
she burst,
not from herself,
but into herself.

Her infinite spirit
took over all the available universe,
and the universe acted in her available self,
on a pleasant drive to Portland.

Dreams come true, and there's an end to dreams,
dreams teach themselves, not their imagined reality.

I say what's true, to say what is, not what's dreamed,
to awaken in a more constant state of awakening.

The Assassin of Separation

The exquisite poet is the voice of reality,
filtered through the life of whoever
speaks him into existence,
he's not the character of any one person,
and how we live limits his appearance.

One assumes that anything filtered is lessened,
but the life of the exquisite poet is the filter,
where the exquisite enhances what it touches,
when it's welcomed by those in whom it appears.

One assumes the exquisite itself
speaks in ornate language,
that the exquisite poet is a sensitive soul,
given to paroxysms of emotion and sensation,
that he's the describer of the finer feelings
of the human heart.

One assumes the exquisite disavows rational sense,
that its feelings are too keenly felt to appear as reason,
one assumes its attentions are on the subtly intense,
the intricacies of beauty, delicately nuanced
and passionately enjoyed.

One wants to put the exquisite in a jeweled box,
held aside and kept for a chosen few,
but the exquisite poet knows his essence
is the being within being, he knows there's no
narrow limitation on the reach of the essential.

What sets the exquisite apart, from all those
who refuse its reality, is to admit the powerful
presence that denies none of us, in its ubiquity,
even those who deny its expression.

The exquisite poet is the assassin of separation,
he carries courage into no difference
between sense and reason,
between the rational and rhapsody.

His is the decisive blade of the delicacy
of the sword and the surgeon,
his is the cut that opens the heart
to its insurgency.

His is the mutiny
against the fading
of the blinding light
of original being.

A Simple Easy Love

After I told you I loved you,
and you didn't match me,
with equal expressions
of tender devotion,
I felt alone.

I felt something else,
I felt my heart open to itself.

I was changed
by this simple revelation,
there was no more question
of the presence of love
in my own heart.

You said my love for you
was a tragic and damned endeavor,
you said you wanted to run from the county,
shouting back over your shoulder not to love
someone so damaged by love as you.

The antidote, already in your heart,
is the presence of this simple love,
until there's nothing left but its revelation,
nothing left but what's beneath the surface
that can no longer hold you in its constraints.

As for me, I'm free from seeking
my reflection in the eyes of my love.

This ordinary love is free in its
exquisite, transient, endless eternity.

I love you, and this easy love is who I am,
you've seen me, now, unmasked of my poetry,
and my masquerade has revealed itself
the same as who I am that inspires it.

The Fertile Fire

So much of what happens,
lies in hibernation,
before it emerges in time,
what comes to fruition is dormant,
longer than it's ripe for the picking,
and no amount of insistence
can make it mature any faster.

I'm tempted, against
my own practiced wisdom,
to reach into the ground
and pull the roots out,
ask them why they haven't
come up with anything lately.

Gold eventually comes
spilling out of the mountains,
but I'd rather not wait,
I'd rather level the range,
or go blasting at the substrate,
I can't wait for the tectonic plates
and surface erosion to do their work.

I've learned, and what's taught me
is the arrival of what I never expected,
the known of the unknown, always
there, biding its time before it's born.

Patience was not my virtue, but
ignorance invented patience for me,
now, when I'm at a loss for discovery,
I can sit by the volcano of my small
patch of earth, and wait.

When you don't know what's coming,
you can be sure that something is,
given the molten history
of everything.