

## Matisse in LA

Reading *Matisse in Nice* I thought that when  
I was a boy visiting in LA I loved everything about it  
especially the air and the light which made everything  
like a movie like one imagines of Matisse in Nice

Matisse painted the outdoors from indoors  
through windows and without windows

Everywhere in the world light gets into  
everything including one's thoughts

The city is the indoors of the outdoors  
and the light gets in everywhere it goes

I wonder who or what could burst  
in my heart like a new fire

Matisse painted from an inner light  
a light he could see with his eyes closed  
the way a philosopher thinks of nothing  
and discovers the embrace of everything

We were visiting my rich uncle but it wasn't  
his neighborhood of opulence that caught  
my eye it was my eye

## Spring Comes in the Fall

I finished painting a series of abstract shapes  
and put them in a book page after page 48 in all

A year ago I opened a book of Rothko's work  
and tears came to my eyes my throat my heart

Now I have a series of my own to look through  
an album of loved ones in deep colors I love not  
his family but mine his love reminds me of my own

*Forgive me I wasn't looking at your text I was thinking  
of my own I say to the man next to me who guards  
his writing with a clucking tongue while I stare at  
a distance within myself beside myself in love itself*

My mother in Illinois at 88 goes for a drive  
with my brother who is caring for her he points out  
the colors of the falling leaves she says *oh no it's  
springtime things are just beginning to bloom*

## Living As a Genius

D.H. Lawrence's wife Frieda says to Mabel Dodge  
*try it then yourself living with a genius see what  
it is like and how easy it is*

I imagine the difficulty that determined loving well-meaning  
and noble people have living with someone who plays by  
other-than-ordinary rules

In the gift of a blink I imagine the problems encountered by  
a genius living with the rest of us why do I say *us* am I a genius  
or not am I difficult or not who has difficulty living with me and  
who do I have difficulty living with the cars go by in the street

Lawrence could live anywhere and nowhere his sexuality  
was all over the place his consciousness was unbounded  
and unbinding how do you mix water with water and still  
call it a couple

Here are two quarts to pour into an ocean of places to  
visit and people to see and very little money to play with

When I look at another human I might ask *is this  
someone I could pour myself into or vice versa*

## Being Safe in Unsafe Being

The headlights of a car turning backing slowly illuminate the street  
in a receding pool I listen to the ball game on the radio a local film director  
sits surrounded by his protégés he looks lost in the comfortable complicity  
of their youth Tim talks to Amanda and Amanda talks to Tim the country  
is fighting an endless war it's been a busy night in the cafe I have a chair  
next to the old coffee machine at the end of the poem endless poem  
there are extra innings in the ball game Amanda's tentative smile  
holds the tender hope of being safe in unsafe being

## Good Paper

Here and there one finds a poet scattered  
among the shaved and shredded timbers  
no poet has ever saved Bambi

I buy good paper from the art store use it  
like stationery write love letters to the universe  
send a package home *dear Mom and Dad*  
*find money and food enclosed*

## The Nucleotide Rushes In

Noel discusses single nucleotide polymorphisms

Apparently when genetic cells split in order to regenerate sometimes the new parts don't match up and catastrophic variations can occur the woman of my dreams appeared in my dreams again last night

I don't remember the details but I remember a sensation without explanation the burden of effect without a story a presence without a message a messenger of silence

At work today nothing remarkable happened as significance wanders like Demosthenes with a lamp looking for an honest ending a coupling a last line a beginning a catastrophe

## Preparing for the Revolution

Dr. Barry came to look at artwork he might display in his office  
he was an hour late his wife is pregnant he said he liked the colors

Last night in my dreams people were shooting at me I negotiated  
the bullets as one might negotiate a crowd avoiding elbows and  
collisions moving unobtrusively in a hail of bullets

My recent brush with death has me less inclined to put myself  
in harm's way as I have habitually done the lesson of my history  
is to not be happy to not enjoy the fruits of happiness to not  
put myself in happiness' way my recent brush with eternity  
inclines me to fall in love with my own happiness

I told Dr. Barry that some colors just feel good to look at

## The Raven's Song

There's a toy monster on the table and a small boy  
who put it there who wants to go home *now* he says  
a jazz band plays in a warmly lit room among dozens  
of attentive faces with a few children and one of them  
is restless

The President proposes our national right to attack  
anyone we think might bring us harm if this boy who  
looks at me in complicitous expectation knocks over  
my coffee I will not try to stop him in advance of his  
moment of arrogant disregard

The music reverberates in my belly it resounds in my ears  
the fingers on the table are mine insofar as I believe them to be  
the taut and wrinkled skin has been molded from within to form  
hands that move without my willing them I marvel at their vitality

I react emotionally to everything I see and intellectually  
I pretend not to notice the trillion beads in the waterfall  
each one singing the name of my heart

A man pulls a string on the tiny monster's back and listens  
to the monster's chest in a mock exaggeration of insight

The piano keys strike my chest like ravens cawing  
in a silent night and my heart is seared by undiluted joy

## Living a Posthumous Existence

I've been twenty years living as if I could have or should have been dead living in the awareness that my life's conclusion was put on hold a long time ago

In the awareness of life as an abeyance not quite a gift more an offering to be held until it is let go an offering by open hands to be themselves let go

## The Sleeping Fish

*Longing* is the word for longing  
*rain* stands in for rain

Gregory told me from his new house in Tuscany *here*  
*in Italy they have a different word for everything*

Like *tutto*

My hand lies across my lap like a sleeping  
it leaps

## Advertisement on a Wall

The best poem is always right in front of me  
where it appears in detail from within  
like a beam of light suddenly cast against  
adobe walls in Mexico from a speeding car

*Read my heart*

Hurting pell-mell down walled corridors  
madly driving in narrow streets in a village  
in the Yucatan on the run from a hurricane

*Read my heart*

See the world

## A Detective Story

Indefatigable bespectacled disgruntled dyspeptic  
the detective has grown a beard he's decided  
to investigate something new and different  
anything but another murder

He reads the paper not looking for a job  
but a clue he doesn't know how to begin  
to be different from himself

He's murdered himself and he's looking everywhere  
for the man who's coming to take his place he can't  
stop being a detective by not being a detective

Look at the muscles on the guy eating his veggie pizza  
like a hypochondriac popping pills he burps politely

My tongue is sleeping alone these days

## My Feet Hurt

There's a mist  
of fatigue at eye level

My feet hurt

A man I know is in town accompanied  
by his ever-present cloud of misery

My feet hurt

The mist of fatigue  
will lift in a few hours

Nothing will rescue this man  
from his cloud of cherished  
misery or me from him  
unless I do it myself

My feet hurt

## Nest in the Air

I open my mouth before  
there is anything to say

Small birds fly in nest and  
fly out with their young

Still there is nothing to say

I keep my mouth shut  
and eagles nest in the air

## A New Leaf

I have it in mind to be born again  
this is my legacy being one of us  
to see a new incarnation coming  
and assume its shape

We spiral toward ourselves  
coming around again transformed  
in duplicate to a living version of our  
own past that's now dead as a doornail

I turn over a new leaf and fall to earth  
or I fly on the wind-blown fortune

## Her Beautiful Hands

She has beautiful hands her mother said were unusual  
she reads The Elizabethan World Picture while the rest of  
the coffeehouse gang engages in word play and banter

She has bare arms and shoulders happy laughter  
a direct gaze uncomplicated by gathered pain

She pushes her tongue out behind her lips pulls  
her book up below her eyes a veil to mask the grin  
that percolates in her eyes she has Middle-Eastern  
eyes if the Middle-East were Maryland and Delaware

The Elizabethans believed that bodily  
humors were processed in the liver

Hannah listens as Katy tells the sad story  
of the recent visit with her estranged father

Katy slouches her eyes dart from face to face  
for the acceptance that Hannah takes for granted

This casual café love is a communion  
or a grab-bag of unpredictable surprise

## A Portrait of the Mona Lisa

A true poem is a portrait drawn from the ether  
a likeness of gasses a simulacrum of inhalation and  
exhalation an adulation of neither and nor painted  
in remarkable detail with one foot on the floor  
a way of inviting the ear to hear what's left unsaid  
recognition of the guilty and the innocent in rhyme  
a soundalike to silence in the land of the sublime

## Warm Pool of Happiness

I have lately begun to miss alcohol after eighteen years  
away from its warm pool of self-induced happiness and  
the touch of a woman my touching of her warm acceptance  
these are triggers to the illusion of a completed reality

The last time I went to Hawaii it was cold and the heat  
of dreams is sacrificed in the cool sunlight of each new day

What's missing is warmth that only occurs in one's awareness  
when it's close to occurring of its own accord

## The Shadows Around the Heart

I stepped out of the light into  
the shadows around my heart  
beside myself in doubt

The mind is a shoebox of old photographs  
where one photo gains ascendancy assumes  
a resurrected life and occupies the room

A hologram begins to dance as if in the heart  
and the ersatz love I feel puts me in shadow

Looking from the shadows  
makes the light seem painful

## Embraced by a Fingertip

People say they love me I believe them  
but I don't feel it as I feel the love  
I feel for them

If anyone touches me in the slightest way  
with unconscious affection I am consumed  
reduced expanded elevated fulfilled emptied  
of all thought but one *I have been embraced  
by a fingertip*

## In Zoca before the Fall

There's a painting of a grocery store on the wall  
a photograph of a gas station a statuette of a grizzly  
fisherman holding his creel a painting of a rowing crew  
at the shoreline posters on one wall a bank of windows  
on two and Mr. O'Meara in his chair reading a book  
this is not a home but people act at home here

Before and after this moment there is nothing but  
death and dreams but here we're at work and play  
coming at each other in desire and fear being near  
each other in body and soul as students are  
devoted to their studies as lovers love

This is a meeting place a watering hole where all  
the animals come where survival is shared without  
conflict a kind of heaven for the hapless heathen  
and other homebodies of the quiet heart

## An Unsuspecting Coconut

In order to write a poem one must remain still  
longer than it takes to get going again until  
the breath is let loose from its usual duties

She has a cartoon face caught between goofy  
and beautiful her hair like straw dropped  
in a decorous pile on top her head

She holds each page aloft in contemplative  
limbo and then *whack* she strikes on to the next

Someone sings a Bessie Smith blues and time  
is split open like an unsuspecting coconut

## In the Margins of the Truth

In this simple stupor between birth and death  
fear plays the role of bookmark dividing this part  
of the sea from that part dividing seeing from what  
I see making endless love into small fearful acts  
teaching sober judgment as a kind of drunkenness

I don't own a chair but when I sit down the ground  
rises up to meet me I try to stay in place but I drift apart  
and fall awake on cue in keeping with the blue horizon

I'm certain of one thing or two  
that I don't know what it is I know  
and there's nothing else for me to know

Young John Keats put his foot against  
the leg of his table and in that gesture  
I understood how one could discover  
beauty in the margins of the truth

## My Paraffin Heart

I had a chance to rest when all was well  
I fell apart in fear I thought I was dying but  
my collapse came in the midst of strength

I wasn't dying I was imagining it  
when it was no longer imminent  
when I could begin to fear it  
without fear

And then love came  
into my paraffin heart  
swinging her scythe of fire

## Mirabile Dictu

I can't explain the balanced state of being  
I've lost like a ball bouncing down Italian steps  
in another time

I'm able to grasp the simple joy of every moment  
but my tenuous grip on the fragile vase of my being  
terrifies my thinking

Holding anything when my fingers have shattered  
is closer to the intelligent truth but I can't call it  
a personal joy

The simple joy of every moment is felt in senses  
and sensibility but it lives in unwound parcels  
of inspired breath

## The Underlying Truth

A tall barefoot man puts on sandals  
before he comes out for the evening  
to drink coffee near two women with  
beehive bandanas next to the man  
who is the one these words represent

This one I represent tells a story that includes  
the others and his story becomes the carrier  
of the other self that is no longer who I am

In speaking I seem to pass into the  
imagination of separation and identification

Nothing could be further from the truth  
and that's what makes it attractive to the  
imagination of separation and identification  
the misleading map of the soul

## In the Advantage of My Soul

I write a poem in the way  
of becoming less alone  
by becoming more alone  
in the advantage of my soul

I hear in the ear of another  
who listens aloud in the silence  
of my desire to speak

For every tree that falls  
unseen in the forest a forest  
falls in the word that's unheard

I write a poem in the way  
of being not alone

No matter who comes this way  
in the woods of my words  
I belong by my words

As I give my words  
I give my word

## A Case of Vertigo

When I imagine I'm falling in love  
I don't know if it's true but it feels  
like it's something I can't control  
falling never reaching the ground

## Illness Lingers

Illness lingers until it seems  
it's never been anywhere else  
I linger in illness until it seems  
I've never been anything else but ill

This is an analogy for good health  
which acts the same as illness  
these companions arrive in turns  
like strangers and they stick around

They remain until I'm their companion  
until I seem to be what they claim to be

My illness and good health are visitors  
who take asylum in my good graces like  
intruders in my rooms they look at me *who*  
*are you* they say and my thoughts agree

I am a landlord out of sorts with his lodgers  
but I am unattached even to this boarding house

I am not this toothache this headache  
this terminal illness this perfect health

## Waiting Room

I sat in the doctor's office  
long enough to notice the flaws  
in the housekeeping the maintenance  
the upkeep and the cleaning

I've sat in my body long enough  
to notice every neglected unrepaired  
untended and unkempt characteristic

I've sat in my soul long enough  
to not care about the rest

## The Desperate Device

When the body fails to function unnoticed  
except for its pains or pleasures  
everything that seems to matter most  
matters less or not at all

We tend the illness and the injury  
even the degradation and destruction  
but we fail to tend the loss of mattering

There is wisdom in our common collapse  
to threaten the pyramids in their construction  
in their constancy in the desperate device  
of their tombs

## The Old Poet's Eyes

He seems like any old guy on disability  
moving slowly almost apologetically  
from one room to another but his eyes  
betray him they dance despite his sadness

Living alone with an arthritic dog  
he remembers the days of his youth

Just out of the Air Force mentored  
by a renowned artist living among artists  
in the days when sex was easy as an embrace

*But these are the good old days* he says  
and his sighing eyes dance I was painting  
his sister's house he didn't remember me  
he thought I might be a musician like her

In years past we ran in the same widening circle  
we live now in the same narrowing circle now  
as then we dwell in the same unbroken circle

My eyes lit up as I recognized the heart of a poet  
that cares not for the circles of time the heart that  
jumped from his chest to mine and back again  
and his sighing eyes that danced in mine

## Welcome to the Vast Pacific

I don't paint portraits of those I love  
for fear they'd be too faithful to an ideal  
wanting to be art to honor and reveal  
to paint wings in the brush strokes earth  
and blood in the forms music in the colors

Keats wrote of Cortez he meant Balboa  
on the brink of the vast Pacific to describe  
his love of literature but he left Fanny Braun  
to the history of his soul

If I painted your face or you sitting  
close by facing me or turned away  
I might not be able to sleep alone again  
content in my fathomless art

## In the Throat of the Hurricane

I played soccer with the boys the young men  
and the older men after two weeks of viral vertigo

I fell awkwardly a time or two but otherwise I played  
like a happy man a young man a boy happy when  
my foot went where it was intended happy when  
my eyes didn't swim happy when I stumbled

Happiness is the faith of a revolutionary between  
joy and delight a calm in the throat of a hurricane

To be simply happy is not embraced  
by the mind that blows hot and cold  
in the passions of fear and desire

To be happy is to just play the game  
for the sheer and simple joy of it

## Divine Terror

How subtly we play by the same rules we have  
always played by in love and war in life and death

How like a sledgehammer we change the rules  
to match the rules we shape and mold cultivate  
and nourish pick and choose name and define  
we re-form ourselves as we've always been

Until wonder engulfs us and we scramble out  
of the familiar into a kind of divine terror

An unimagined paradise on its one night  
of existence in that one moment when it's real

## The One I Love Best

The real woman of my dreams  
sat up in bed with me and my lover

She proved herself to be my equal  
and my lover to be a dream

How little I know my desires  
when they have been my constant  
insistent companions for as long  
as I've noticed them

This one I know best is equal to the dreamer  
and truer than the fading dreams that stain  
my bed with their futile juices

The dreamer and the dreamed  
sit apart from my true love  
who comes to remind me  
I am never so alone  
as when I dream of another