

## Irish New Year

Michael, the bartender of The Little Shamrock,  
sits beside me on the narrow ledge, halfway up the wall,  
our feet on the furniture, St. Patrick's Day night,  
witness to the crush of celebratory drunkenness.

He talks about flying, Vietnam, his sense of performing  
behind the bar, and history. The Little Shamrock is now owned  
by Arabs. The old photographs on the wall are like decorations,  
but they're not. He says, *This place is eighty years of history, it's  
an Irish bar, it needs my Irish ownership, it needs to stay alive.*

Michael's exuberance is almost painful. His wife, he says,  
*understands* him, that is, she lets him do what he wants,  
*women*, the implication. Her hands are arthritic. A pretty  
woman, she suffers, some way, his suffering.

He demands to get behind the bar on his night off,  
this night of the drunken Irishmen. I give him a \$10 bill,  
he gives me 11 change, and the next Bass, he says, is on him.

I watch the revelry. There is no joy in it, until, at 1AM,  
a melding occurs, and for an hour, everyone knows  
everyone, to kiss and laugh, to move about as if  
there's a history and not merely an hysteria.

For an hour, at the end of the night, it is the end of the world.  
Eyes meet eyes, after all these hours, when names are spoken,  
not to be remembered. Katie, the waitress, sidles up to me and hides  
her face against my chest, acquiescent to holding and being held.

It takes so much drinking, so long a time, for us to come together,  
under St. Paddy's blessing. And when we do, the morning after,  
we forget, we call it a hangover, we think what's missing  
is curable with vitamins and a run in the park.

Michael twirls pint glasses in the air, points  
to me, and says, *My friend, this one's on me.*

## Dyin' Crapshooter's Blues

Some will plant a seed in your brain. It's best to notice the root as it begins to insinuate. He said, *Poets should never marry, never have a straight gig.*

He sat in his cab, dead broke, thousands in debt, when out of the Sheridan came a jeweled and well-shod man in a three-hundred dollar powder-blue suit, and as he got into his powder-blue Lincoln, my friend thought,

*I'm thirty-five years old, I've written three novels, one play, and four books of poems, and one of us is a winner, and the other is a loser. Pick one.*

*If my novel is rejected again, I'm going to stop asking permission to live, FUCK YOU is going to be my emblem, I'm going to look at life and say, 'Take this job and shove it,' I'm going to take twelve black beauties, drink a beer, and say, 'I quit.'*

This man, who prides himself in his sometimes almost maniacal optimism, who knows the salvation of laughter, who had me laughing at his tale of woe, has left me with my brain in knots. *It's a good thing you love what you do*, he said, *because no one else gives a fuck.*

Well, some do and some don't, and breakthroughs feel like breakdowns, and maybe he can quit, and maybe he can't. I had no advice to give, except to shake his hand, when he only intended to drop a quick wave in my direction.

*Eight years of busting my balls writing, and maybe it's just something I failed at.* He bumped a chair, making a raggedy exit. The guy in the john, outside the card game, asked him what he'd bet. *My marriage*, he said.

*All hell is breaking loose, or breaking loose is all hell*, I think, and try to save my own soul, sitting in the cafe,

across from an empty chair, a cyclonic image, dancing  
in front of me, like a beautiful woman with a black heart,  
*Come dance with me, she says, you know I'm right.*

But, being right doesn't make it right, as my favorite  
cousin used to say, *That's not what I'm looking for,*  
*that's only what I'm looking at.* Even so, I can't absolve  
the lingering, destructive temptation of apocalypse.

My friend had words for it, *They should put my picture up*  
*wherever gamblers are, 'This is the guy you're looking for,*  
*a born loser.'*

I was sure I had contributed to his downfall, simply because  
I understood what he meant, and when he passed by the cafe  
window, my right arm flinched to make a sign, without any  
idea how to complete it.

## Drummers' Duet

Rolling down Bush Street, in the right lane,  
the brakes went out on the car. I said, *The brakes  
have gone out*. Peter thought it was a joke, at first.  
Then he said, *Put it in low! Put it in low! I did!* I said.

A car without brakes is leaping before you look,  
and he who is lost, thinks only of hesitating. Ahead,  
the light turned red, and the Toyota, in front, stopped.

I saw not enough space between it and a parked car.  
But, somehow, the dead rolling box slipped through.

I thought of Hobson's Choice, not *Will I hit something?*  
but *What will I hit? Turn left!* Peter said, and I wheeled left,  
across the one-way, in front of the two rows of stopped cars,  
and came to a rest at the curb.

*Good driving*, Peter said. *Good advice*, I said. Our hearts  
were a drummers' duet. I tried to park the car, but I couldn't  
control the roll. We slammed into a large pipe against a wall.  
Peter jumped out to apologize to the old man whose house  
we shook. He smiled at our good luck, our close call,  
and the paint chipped off his plumbing.

Adrenalin pumping, we strode the two miles home. *We owe  
one to the gods*, he said. *God must love us pagans*, I said.

We catalogued the worst that did not occur. A mini-mobile  
earthquake had rattled our bones, and set a convulsive,  
contrary wave in our blood. An apprehensive mask spread  
across my face. I dumb-walked through the rest of the day.

What did not happen, with its irresolution, infected me with  
a watchfulness. I was inclined to read Thomas Hardy, and think  
of the divinity of the ordinary. The darkest foreboding creeps in,  
when life is cracked open, and mute beauty is its only fulfillment.

## A Woman With Grace

There is a woman in the cafe with one hand missing,  
covered by a long, green sleeve. I've been watching her  
and not watching, working on a cold acceptance, unpitying her.  
I imagine making love, the feeling of her blunt arm against my  
back skin, my muscles jumping, under the soft-touch blow.

I chastise myself for not knowing how to think of her,  
as if I should know, or should think anything, I think  
about the remarkable and the noticeable, not knowing.

While I'm waiting in line for a glass of wine, I see a poster  
tacked to the wall. I wince. It reads, *We're Stumping for the  
Coming Revolution in Higher Consciousness*, and above it,  
the grinning face of Elizabeth Clare Prophet, a pseudonym  
for squeaky clean, uncrippled freedom from awkward thought.

I think of the grace that accrues to the damaged and the wounded.  
She holds her book bag on the crook of an unseen wrist, as if her  
missing hand is sunk deep in her pocket. I love her graceful  
accommodation with disaster. No wonder I treat it as if it is nothing.

I think the missing hand is a guard let down. She is unprotected,  
and that unprotects me. I'm awed by the power I might have and the use  
I might be to her. But she doesn't need me. She's more than a broken-  
wing sparrow. She is as independent as everyone I admire is.

Which one reveals the other wounds? Which one shines with  
other grace? That's the higher consciousness I'm stumping for.  
The word pains me. Let it be.

## Isabel Keats

When Isabel Keats was eighteen, in Louisville, Kentucky, October 29, 1843, she shot herself. She was the niece of the English poet John Keats. Everybody said she resembled him.

The editor of the local paper, a mediocre poet, twice her age, composed a rhyme to her glory, comparing her fire to her famous uncle's. He described how that fire had consumed Keats, then called her to its power.

Two nights before Halloween, on the 22nd anniversary of her uncle's birthday, the family gathered. The boys came in from hunting, and John Henry left his gun on or near the couch, where it remained.

Isabel was her convivial self as dinner passed into evening. Guests came and went, until at 10, everyone went to bed. A short time later, Isabel came downstairs in search of a remedy for a toothache. Soon, the household was shaken by a gunshot.

Her mother entered the room to find Isabel lying wounded on the couch, with the gun nearby.

Georgiana implored of Isabel, *Why did you do it?*  
She answered, *Mother, I did not mean to.*

She survived for hours, finally expired, despite the best medical help, from a weltering of blood from the blast, that had caught her in the neck and chest. She was said to pass calmly, in the presence of her loving family.

If there is an explanation for this death, it is not known. It was common, in those days, to attribute dying to a temperament of spirit. In our day, dying of spirit is anathema. Only weakness or fault can explain it.

Perhaps she tripped on the weapon in the dark.

No blame can be put on the brother, no blame but stupidity.  
No blame can be put on the editor, no blame but romance.  
No blame can be put on the poet, no blame but genius.

John Keats, his mother, and both his brothers died of consumption,  
as did one-fourth of London, no blame but God and his illnesses.

*Isabel, why did you do it? Mother, I did not mean to.*

## **The Walk of Fame**

Los Angeles is a beautiful woman with emphysema,  
the alley behind a magician's tent, a desert town, a neon oasis.

EAT HERE! DINE HERE! BEER, BURGERS & BOOZE!

*Only the Extremely Beautiful Need Apply.*  
*There is no life east of the beach, they say.*

Take the names of famous faces, embed  
them in the sidewalk, and walk on them.

Los Angeles is not a dream, not a dream come true,  
but a dream of dreams, the truth gone dreamy.

LA is a plain face with good bones, done to a turn,  
sunbleached, browned, talent-tuned, coached,  
coaxed, defined, made divine, visually soothing,  
designed to caress the tendrils of the eye.

Rage is suppressed, compressed, glossed over, forgotten  
but not gone. The smog is called all the good ideas, unused.

I did not feel poor or envious or outraged, driving a beat-up  
VW in Beverly Hills, but, in the LA bus station, I felt it.

You're on your own in this great land. Great when things are  
going great. If not, it is shiftless, drifting, disconnected, self-pitying,  
a miserably alone country, a suspicious, anxious, no-home country.

There are good people, but the people are treated as if they are  
no damn good, and why should they be? The nobles sit in their  
castles and imagine that everyone outside wants in.

The coffers are filled, built on the manufacture of tiny fiefdoms,  
pre-fab kingdoms, everyman's home his domain, with court  
jesters, traveling troupes of jugglers and players, reproduced  
without flesh and blood, aristocracy for the masses.

Look, but don't touch. Touch, but don't own. Own,  
but don't keep. The best of everything once removed.  
The sign in the bar says, NO DANCING WITHOUT  
A PERMIT! The freedom we are left with is the freedom  
to think we are free, the only freedom demanded of us.  
What price dreams of glory but fears of ignominy?

I'm on my way again, on the road again, I had a good time,  
I marvel at the human race, I pretend to figure it out.  
In the supermarket, I stole glances at the women.  
I feel like a thief, sampling the merchandise.

If appearance is of value, it's for sale, the price is belief,  
those not beautiful are expendable, they represent the truth  
about the Walled City of Dreams, it has no wall.

The theatre is swarming with people, something cracks  
in the imagination, every day is the day of the locust,  
beauty has fallen, is swarmed over, the flesh devoured,  
every room ransacked, there is not enough room or  
finery in the real castle, nor enough bread to eat.

If bread is the food for souls, let them eat a donut.  
In the bus station, for a quarter, you can watch TV,  
and you still have to watch the commercials. See what  
you can have. See what you can't have. *Have you been  
to LA? No, but I saw it on TV. Stay home. You've been there.*

It's easy to be one-sided. I'm free, am I not, to say what  
I think, to think what I feel? It's like carrying a whisper  
into a cacophony.

The bus passes a valley, like thousands of others, but this one  
is called Paradise Valley. Here, it is a deception anyone can see.  
Several hundred mobile homes cover the valley floor.

All the valleys not called Paradise are startlingly beautiful,  
not for sale, of no use, arid, fertile, and alive. No name  
need remind me of their beauty.

## **The Relentless Gaze**

Every story I tell is a song to the end of stories.

A man I know by exchange of empathy, a temptation  
to nothingness, stopped by to tell me he can no longer  
imagine any desire for anything.

His curiosity is shaken down. He disclaims suicide.  
When I came back with the coffee, he was gone.

After all these years in occasions of conversation,  
I don't know his name, Tom or John, I think.

He said he's too frightened to be a poet,  
but I saw no fear in the man, only courage  
without eyelids, only strength without dreams.

## **She Reminds Me Of Things**

She buys a cup of coffee and sits down.  
She sets her chair back from the wall,  
and sits on the edge of it.

She begins her recline, until her head,  
with two bunches of hair tied at the back,  
like horns in repose, is within inches of my knee.

She holds her book up to her nose and giggles,  
like squirting water from a toy pistol in the air.

This is not a desperately lonely being. This is someone,  
like an oil leak, who spreads herself across the floor,  
and makes human contact greasy. She wears white and  
yellow, cheerful camouflage. She takes her giant bag up  
to the counter when she goes for a refill, and returns.

Her arms begin to waggle in all reachable space,  
like sunflowers in a high wind, like finger cactus  
in a slow-motion search for the sun. She moans  
like a baby seal whose mother may have died.

She is reading *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*,  
and it reminds me of the uselessness  
to which some writing can come.

## **Nurse**

She has the soft body of a nurse, dusty clean,  
orderly clothing, the eyes of one who once  
loved animals and hated bloody abuse.

She's tired of waiting for doctors, who act like  
petulant children, to grow into manly compassion,  
tired of waiting on patients to die or fight for life.

She's worn down by the percentages, a few  
degrees of wonder in a great many have not  
added up to a profession of caring. She is losing  
faith in work that seemed to be grounded in it.  
Now she sits alone with coffee and reads  
the paper, absentmindedly.

Hope and cancer spring endlessly in the human  
body. A tiny, pretty amulet at the neck is all  
that's left of her dreams.

The reward for nursing is too private,  
too much a wisdom, to be of any use  
to one who works for salary in a  
virulent, half-sterile debauchery  
of vitality called Hospital.

## **When Language Was Foreign**

When meaning was a mirror, the image was startling,  
when others were a mystery that needed to be known,  
the body was the earth that shook in subtle convulsion.

Before everything came to be possible, when being  
was a fire-storm, blood coalesced in the muscles,  
made a cry in the throat that cracked the air.

It has all come back, piecemeal, since then,  
nothing has changed.

## **Instant Attraction**

I saw an older lesbian's sweet, careful head turned  
by the entrance of one younger, tough and striding.

She looked, then not-looked, then thought better.  
She turned reminiscent, or absent. She busied herself  
with the newspaper, and waiting, wiped her glasses,  
then chewed her salad.

What's to be done, but to hold her broken eye-glass  
frame and work ill-fitted dentures and think, until  
thinking finds a distraction that might hold?

## **One Who Cannot**

Her lips are not warm with welcome,  
but blistered and sticky with regret.

Her hair is wild and wiry,  
her breath half-rancid with conceit.

She is not an imagined forgetting,  
but another, in foment, still begetting.

She is wanting to be alone,  
and accident has led us together,  
not wanting to give away what will  
be welcome one day, now too soon.

She wants a certain pain, a cruelty  
in this time of passage, a misery  
that stands for growing, a fasting  
that wants a starving, when food,  
even that which love desires,  
is too near at hand.

Anger is the reward, when want is fulfilled,  
before the knowing's known has seen its face,  
boned of ease, of grace, and gaunt.

## **Chronicles of Disaster**

When each new insult comes out, all the old insults  
come out to meet it, a chorus, full-throated, struck deep,  
broad and lasting, a lifetime of insults, reverberating,  
orchestrated, liberated into the heart, lungs, tongue,

That scalpel avenger, sensor of disease, slices a wound,  
meant for cure, cuts a wide swathe in the body politic,  
or insinuates the muscles of one, well or ill-chosen for  
revenge and spreads the hatred, unsterilized, into others.

For every nurse of the heart, there are a dozen doctors  
of blood. We'd be good if we added only insult to insult,  
but injury has a way of demanding residence where  
kindness has been evicted.

## **Street Wise**

I am permeated by an unaccustomed sense of well-being,  
a peacefulness, in the midst of a warring climate.

This time the eye of the hurricane is not an emptiness  
at the center of turbulence, but a calm identification,  
in the senses, with all that does not feel its senses.

I think to make some metaphor of the street,  
yet, the sense is not of the street, but of the ease  
and warmth of the blooded animal that walks in it.

I am that man who breathes, whose heart holds  
the limbs in embrace, unbroken by thought.

All at once, in moving, I am still.

## **That Which Is Offensive In My Sight**

One small lash curls inward and brushes my right eye,  
an annoyance, now that I know it's a wayward hair, and not  
the delicate play of melancholy. I sit in the cafe and imagine  
ways to pluck it. I wonder if anyone has a tweezers,  
but who to ask?

Without wanting to, I imagine slashing it with a razor,  
but the blade slips in the mind and cuts a gash across  
the egg-white eyeball, I wince and blink, the hair plays  
at the ridge of the imagined cut.

As it seals, I tell myself, *Forget the sad slip in  
the mind's eye, and get rid of the damned hair.*

## **Standing On Fishes**

My friend, Peter, who I always thought was another swimmer, declared he'd rather have been a wrestler or a gymnast. Instead, he swam, because he liked the coach. *I've always had trouble with authority*, he said.

Of course, I thought, his wiry compression, explosive temperament, a grappling wrestler, or a bounding gymnast, but not a supple, half-drowner like I am.

He would not take instruction inside his capability. He grew to despise the water, but then, so did I, after five years. Five years of wrestling the water, bounding across it like a stone.

It took many more years to sink, to take the chance of dissolving, to stand up on myself, like Jesus upon the fishes.

## **Extreme Faces**

My fingers graze the edges of things,  
like the bullfighter's sense of the horns.

Millimeters between grace and death, I almost  
spill glasses, not quite knock over chairs.

I'm amazed, as the muscles guide the bones,  
to know the extremities of skin and flesh,

To dance across the edges, like racing wheels  
on the cliff's edge, that drop a cup of earth  
on the rocks below, on the beach, where  
the birds and the fish meet with men  
and women, with men and women  
and the birds and the fish, and the  
sprinkling dirt like a hint of rain.

## **The Lovely Texture Of The Visible World**

The lemon seed, in the glass of sparkling water,  
with silver bubbles clinging to it, like barnacles  
of mercury, sinks to the bottom, touches, and rises  
to the surface, loses a few bubbles, and sinks again.

Any tender obstruction sends it to the top or blocks  
its rise. The pulpy underside of the lemon wedge  
is a crystal garden of bubbles.

I want another word for bubble, a word from another  
language, that means too many things to be translated  
*bubble*. I drink the water and return to my reading.

## **The Queen of the Rhumba**

The poet reading his poems has a nice voice  
but no presence to overcome the bus going by,  
the door opening, the telephone that rings,  
and the giggles from the kitchen.

Each poem's title is written in that nice way that turns  
our ordinary place lives into quintessence and melody,  
but fails to deliver any spoken feeling or any feeling  
well-spoken. Each poem, like prelude, stops,  
then nothing opens.

He drives into a town, drives into another town, enters  
another, approaches a place where people live, yet either  
he never lived there, will never, or keeps silent about it.

The Queen of the Rhumba sits across from me. Melancholy,  
she says, *Nothing. Nothing.* I tried to like his little flowers  
for an absent lover, but the Queen of the Rhumba wants  
to dance, in the poem and every way that lovers dance.

## **That Small Delicate Creature**

She's worried about losing her childlike female.  
and she's worried her breasts will disappear.

Every attack against her defense of that self  
called loved and loving, has driven it deeper  
under the flesh, to hide by the bones  
and send out cries.

## Home On The Range

*You look lower than Perseus,*  
the old bus shouter said to me,

Himself, looking for all the world  
like a caring, cajoling Dutch uncle.

*Well, not that bad,* he said,  
*You have a good day, now. OK?*

Dear Susy, When I was back home,  
I felt isolated, but never lonely.

Here, I do not feel isolated,  
but loneliness is everywhere.

A book is a companion. Friends  
will see me, early next week.

The kids come on the weekend.  
A movie from Brazil has a warm glow.

A woman wrote her number on my chest.  
It faded. Paul's long poem stirred me. It made  
me jump. I have my favorite table at the cafe.

Home is where the heart is,  
where there is a home for the heart.

## **To Hold On For Dear Life**

It's odd how thick and cruddy most of the time is, parts of which we notice as poetry, not out of being thick and cruddy ourselves, or themselves, as the case may be, but occasionally, a thin ray spade of light will come slicing through or out of the silt.

Not that anybody has a handle on it, but that it has a handle in it for us to grab, and we can't but help ourselves, to take it in hand, and hold onto it for dear life.

## **Astounded by the Forces at Work**

Inside my imagination, all wars,  
all great loves, murder and compassion,  
an embrace, that ends in strangulation,  
changes to tenderness, like a breath  
of air on the tendrils of a leaf.

I'm not surprised that all this happens.  
I know, by now, that all this happens.

What surprises me is more  
like an accident of fear.

What if it's more than me,  
which it is, and like a great pouring  
into a small vessel, the vessel is broken,  
and only in my ambitious idealization,  
is the vessel broken into spirit,  
and made clear, and not like clay,  
into shattered pieces of earthenware?

**They're Playing  
Someone's Kind Of Music**

I am being called to Good, a difficult utopia of will,  
to throw off my friendship with the weak, the foolish,  
the failed, to join with the born again, the strong,  
the virtuous, the intentional, the reformers,  
those who've lost patience with blame,  
misunderstanding, and base stupidity.

How can I admit to them, to myself, that  
I have no intention greater than embrace?

I have no more intention to save myself  
than I have to save the world.

Because I am raw of heart and mind, unformed,  
I'll have no sure throw with the dice of Heaven,  
or Hell's likewise cast of purity.

## **Joy Profound as Sorrow**

For years, I've remembered the words I said  
in the writers' workshop in Folsom Prison.

I was behind bars, afraid the guards would say,  
*Wait, we recognize you. You can't leave.*

I chain-smoked, until the man next to me  
counted the butts in the can with a sharp pencil.  
Silent and kind, he grinned as he put the pencil down.

I said, to those men, incarcerated for years, for life,  
*Joy is profound as sorrow.* Yet I cultivated sorrow.

For years, I feared prison. The door swings shut.  
You cannot run. From now on, nothing changes,  
for years, for life. And I longed for it, the frenzy  
over, slow time begins. The time for joy.

## The Poet From The Poetry

Yeats is all in his poems, despite his inherent achievement of universality. Keats is more.

Despite all we know of Yeats, father, mother, lovers, and Ireland, he has manufactured himself in his verse.

Keats did not. For all that Yeats was, there is only the poetry, magnificent and wise. Keats bled better.

One lived to a greater age. The other aged to a greater life. One created strength, the other fell.

How can we tell the poet from the poetry?  
Where is the virtue in saying, *Here it is, on the page?*

Where's the rule for our lives, to make a body of work, no matter how well, or to make the body a work of soul, no matter how poorly?

Keats, no less than Yeats, did his work. Yeats, the easier read, less difficult in that difficult way, managed a survival, wrapped in a widening gyre.

Keats drove down inward, a less symbolic spire, led a life of allegory, and found, perhaps too soon, the truth.

If Yeats is a priest, Keats fell from grace, ran badly a county parish where God came, curious at one so beautiful.

Take away this Ireland, this Ledaen body, show me that broken heart, that stature of soul, that breeds in one so small.

## **Here, Try This, The Pigs Found It**

Poetry is the gourmet cooking of language.

Sometimes, that means raw vegetables  
with the dirt still on them.

Overcooking, as in love and anger,  
has its delicacy, too, requiring a sauce.

Today's haute cuisine is yesterday's  
*What do we do with these things  
that came from the ground?*

## Poison

She has set herself up, with black velvet cloth, roll of wire and cutters, plastic cups of beads and petals, and tape measure.

She banged my leg with the leg of her chair. *Oh, I'm sorry. Was that your leg or the leg of your chair?* I looked at my leg, crossed over the other, no chair leg even close.

She had a giant safety pin in the back of the brim of her straw hat. She took it off.

She has her purse. Just so. She has her bag. Just so. She has her artist's carry-all. Just so.

She took off her tennies and put on her sandals, and she sits there, staring. Tiny beads of sweat are forming on her forehead. She's shaking like a petal in the wind. She's shaking her head.

It's no damn good. She's all strung out.

## **The Old Woman With The Twisted Leg**

The old woman with the twisted leg  
humbles up the street, a thin cane  
helps her to make the walking go.

She stays near the walls, past doorways,  
by windows like an aquarium fish. Inside  
her head, prickled with grey, wrapped  
in old silk, she carries some thinking.

She undulates along, some thought  
swims like water flows, it makes a life.

## **Suicide Notes**

I see ghosts of past lives. I see life in the soon to die.  
I see God as a poltergeist of rather special dimensions.  
I see myself living a posthumous existence.

Death is a family theme. Vitality is like signs of life.  
Meaning is a pastime before dying. Everything we do  
as entertainment is like playing Baffle until dawn because  
you're mad at Ed. The most important life is unanswerable.

As a citizen of this world, I feel like a vampire of love,  
a fraudulent interviewer of loving. I believe I could be made  
to believe, if only I broke out of my dying. I am dying out of  
loyalty to the dead. Death is the camp most occupied.  
In the war that surrounds us, Death is the victor.

I won't be a suicide, I was born to die. Any attempt  
to manufacture death is a worse lie than living ever is.

## **Fierce Love**

There is a point where, when the impulse says,  
like dreams show up, *Throw this thing*  
*that's available, across the room.*

It enacts an explosion. The engine blows up.  
The same engine, that functions on tiny explosions,  
says something, beyond running the wheels.

It rares back and reels across the polite quiet,  
an object like a thrown rod, the written word.

Like the chronicles of a poltergeist, it  
demands some example of its ambition.

It overturns a table or flings an ashtray,  
managing instead of imagining a fist blow  
or kiss, a noise, a stupidity, crude and accurate,  
without nuance or gentle attention to the camaraderie  
of our shared happy misery.

It is to do something without meaning, without  
knowing its meaning, and have it end up meaning,

*I love.*

## **Tiny Bubbles**

My body does not feel ephemeral.  
Even my thinking clanks along.

And when I do dance, and when I have  
a flight of fancy, I do not lose ground.

Maybe it's gravity, weighty thought,  
or maybe it's the truth. I read about  
a man who ate an automobile  
piece by piece, over the years.

And if there's any truth to Icarus,  
it is that the soul is only a bubble  
in a pound of lead. And when I die,  
and my soul ascends to body-busted  
heaven, what's left will turn to gold.

Alchemy, thy name is tiny possibility.

## **Its Breathing Was Its Secret**

The new cafes of North Beach, The Roma, The Puccini,  
and even the old one, The Trieste, are difficult children.

My anger at them is forgiving, as it turns on some  
forgiveness of myself. I saw an old man, angry  
at a painting of a bass, biting at bait bass don't bite.

There's too much to say, with nothing said, as often  
happens, when the angry demand waits too long.

A boy was dying of cancer, a monster  
he described having mouths and noses.

He made a glue gun to stuff the holes,  
the monster couldn't breathe, and died.

Now the boy dreams himself a sponge of emotion.  
He squeezes dry the hurt and talks to his dad.

I stop breathing, a crib death. The surprise of anger  
is that it's not aimed at anyone, it's aimed at the monster,  
and if it misses, the baby dies.

I must go back to the small room, talk, drag the pain out,  
inhale and exhale forgiveness, and suffocate the monster  
I've inspired with my anger.

## **He Supposed It Was Fear**

Emotions were like shells that  
fired from the inside out.

Before they reached the surface,  
long after the shot was fired,  
he could feel the abuse coming.

And then the wound, the explosion,  
the inescapable bloody mess on the skin.

It was the moment when something died,  
and something, if anything, was born.

## **On Meeting A Young Woman Who Desires To Counsel The Dying**

I have sacrificed my body to palliate my misery,  
that follows my thinking like a decrepit angel  
who carries along behind my hell-crawling.

Death is winning by degrees. My flesh holds the field.  
I make concessions to death, ignoring the count, until  
innocence sits near me, and I see how far I am lost.

My stinking breath and puckering flesh mock  
what imagined wisdom I think I have gained.

I sleep, I leave the muse behind. The sound in my mouth  
is a rattle of teeth. I remind into other graves. Bleeding fingers  
dig into earth like a swimmer. I visit a wall, against which  
is hung, stripped, dried and cured; human emotions.

A poet, not a suicide, at first I lost things, then  
forgot chunks of night, too many names and faces,  
too much intimacy with strangers, unrelented upon  
by this hesitant revolution, its inevitability.

My body began to spend time missing something.  
Binding glues, crystallized. If not that, melted.  
If not, the unconnectedness declared itself.

I had the same face. The eyes thickened, filled  
with what does not wash. I held the same mirror.  
It seemed smaller until it, windowed, grew.

A poet, not a suicide, sees death, calls it death,  
sees dying, calls it dying. Only vision goes  
past the dying. Dead eyes see again.

A poet, not a suicide, wants vision, does not  
expect to find it in drowning, drowns.

## **The Pearl**

Nothing so surprises me, after having gotten used to the aloneness of the body, as the aloneness of the soul.

The soul needs God to protect it from aloneness. Oneness is a truth, even if it is a deception. Oneness careens around in the mind like good drugs, as true as last night's drunkenness.

Only sobriety destroys the kindness of the illusion. Sobriety is a toxin, as sinful, as adjudicated as the church runs the hiding from God. There is nothing more terrible than being alone. It is the truth. How beautiful it is to be alone.

## **The Shirt That Spoke French**

Je suis un shirt.  
J'aime les pants.

Le belt est un tie that binds.  
Avec les shoes et les socks,  
nous faisons un pretty sight.

Mais, sans underwear, notre homme  
can get pretty cold dans December.  
Zut alors! It's nasty quand le wind blows.

Je suis 70% Acrilan,  
et les pants 100% Polyester.  
Sacre bleu! Mon sleeves sont froid.

Sans le topcoat,  
(Ils took it off un long temps ago)  
ils ought to freeze his tootsies off.

Mais le guy wearing moi est en amour,  
and ils doesn't care. Ils hot all over,  
despite le rotten weather.

Le skirt et le blouse  
are dans le backseat, already.

Ooh la la! Je guess que je et les pants  
will be back there, toute suite.

C'est un grande night pour l'amour,  
but not so good for nous accoutrements.

Quel dommage!