

The Love I Seek

The way I love those I love the first time
I love them, is the same as the way I love
their memory once they're gone.

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

The exquisite moment of love is the same
as the terrifying moment of its loss.

I seek the love that will tear my heart out,
so I can sit in the fullness of my being,
at one with what I cannot hold.

I Awaken to This Brevity

I awaken to this brevity, where nothing occurs
but the entirety of being, when even this awareness
is caught in the vice of occurring twice.

Twice I breathe, in every breath,
once for meaning, and once for life.

I call out to her, I imagine her coming.
I'm sure she's on her way. I look at every car,
not in the sugary bitter taste of desire,
but in the life where I live and breathe,
where I have no idea what's about to happen,
and I give it her name.

I'm pulled apart by these pulls, one pull,
toward surrender in patient peace, the other,
toward the pettiest of personal fears, like a
mother with a child, and we're the same.

I have the choice to anticipate something bad
happening, or to be present, with my eyes open.

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

These Outside Things

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

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

There were amusement parks in the city, where the lights
on the Ferris wheels and roller coasters were bright colors
against the night sky, and everything beyond my heartbeat
was wiped away. Being as a child is not being what came
before but being what remains.

I might think I remain in memory or artifact like certain
scenery, but the resonant reality is the undercurrent,
that first found its place in these outside things
of wonder and beauty.

The Desire of the Habitually Homeless

Desire came on me like a storm from behind,
like a bear at my back, and gave me too much
power where I didn't need it.

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

Destination is the desire of the habitually homeless.

Driving down a certain street in my hometown,
the overhanging trees made it seem a tunnel to
somewhere, and each time I drove that street,
I entered that same tunnel to somewhere else.

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

I cared only, that for a time, on the road through the trees,
I forgot about destination, on a journey without desire.

Something of a Third

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

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

I felt foolish, talking elliptically in public, when our
private talk was this very question of intimacy.

Are we intimates of the spirit, or are we intimates of the flesh,
and why are we not intimates in all ways of being?

I've never been able to be a passenger with a designated seat,
yet I sit on the bus, hoping to find my place, alone, or in tandem.

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

A boy sits with his parents, unaware of the plans they have to
orchestrate his life into the perfect future and the glorified past.
He's too busy naming the universe that's just arrived in his eyes.

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

The Amber Cube of History

In memory, what occurs is a sense of color in similar scenes,
an amber cube of history, the spine of a leaf, an apartment
in summer, a rain wet street, the mosquito night, this redundant,
emotional coloring. I look to see these movies to a conclusion,
so no more film is made of the past that blurs the present.

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

I love the pictures that populate my mind, and I
love the reality that witnesses their appearance.

Even these verbal recordings deceive their reality.
Whenever I say whatever I say, I misrepresent
the truth of my unsaid self.

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

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

The Crunch Under Foot

There was a crunch to each step, as I crossed the snow
in the bitter winter; sounds that leap to their death in silence.

The air in the room was stifling, so I stepped outside, because I could.
I continued to desire love, until desire itself began to crunch underfoot.

Things are begun well, that may not end as well. I begin anyway,
until every beginning becomes known by an unsought ending.

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

There's no history at the core. It burns away the surface frost, as long
as I don't return to the familiar sound of footsteps on frozen snow.

No Boat on a Sea of Love

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

Every time I think love is close,
I push it away with demands on its time.

*What took you so long? Where have you been? Why don't
you come more often? Why do you look at me like that?*
I float on a sea of love, wishing I knew how to swim.

In a dream, in the middle of the ocean, in the water, with no
boat and no land in sight, I was adrift. Alone, I began to panic.

I thought about swimming to shore, but there was no shore.
I was too far at sea. It occurred to me, it was effortless to float.

I could swim in the sea. I could live in the sea as I was.
And fear disappeared, like water into water.

Stuck on an Elevator with Too Much Beauty

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

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

The men, by themselves and in pairs, adjusted to the presence of women, until the two left the bar.

Then, six men let go of their demeanor. They slumped at their tables and barstools. It had been their responsibility to respond to the presence of women, in a bar, late at night, until the pressure was gone.

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

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

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

The Wind Bends Things

Our coming together occurs in moments of utter vulnerability, not in the passion of beautiful bodies.

I can hardly bear the sadness of love, as I inch toward surrender, tasting, along the way, the entire fruit, skin and pulp and seed and stem and leaf and earth.

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

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

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

We Tie Our Wings to the Trees

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

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

You spoke of the joy that's avoided by those
who accept imitations that keep them distracted
from the gist, the gut, the gullet, the quick,
the depth and the height, and here we are,
on the verge of the thing we desire most,
and we hold back, mocking our monuments.

We anticipate the leap into freedom,
and we hesitate to make that leap a reality.
We hesitate to dirty our feet with heaven.

We look back at where we're from,
and we tie our wings to the trees.

Someone Else's Words

Three preachers, one in a bright Hawaiian shirt,
another in a tee shirt and cap, the third with a pot belly
in a checkered shirt, take a table and talk, the same as
anyone who gets together with his buddies in the same
line of work, when their talk might be what it could be
between any of us, the inside out of the soul.

At times, I fall into a workday mode in these verses,
no different from talking out the day with a friend,
when it could be the leavening of our common
terror, the addressing of our common joy.

Grace is not a manner of dress or a chosen profession.
It's what remains when everything else is taken away.

There's no special honor in waiting out this naked life,
no shared pride in being left alone with eternity.

I walk through these roses and thorns, until there's
nothing left to complain about, nothing left to praise.
God is empty of speech. His words are someone else's.

What these men call God has been inviting me to this
sacred, primal humiliation for longer than I've been alive.

A Tiny Dawn Rising

I miss what I've never known, a certain reality
I want to call tender, a way of being I want to call
cherishing, a brave vulnerability I want to call loving,
beyond what I call being in love. I want to give up my
sanctity and trust another with a likewise lethal love.

When I love in the way that threatens me, I fear I'll be
killed by love, but the experience of love doesn't kill,
even if the one I love doesn't love me, and if she does,
I can't feign my dramatic death, but live on, past what
I was, before I feared I had loved too well, or not at all.

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

It's too late to say we still love the darkness. I have loved
Before, I've lost in love, and I've been found in the loss.

I want to be, in what remains, after loss itself has been lost.

In the Glare of Our Astonishment

We love each other in the glare of our astonishment, with no respite from the brilliant focus of how we are with each other.

We don't allow ourselves to sit in the shade of our fulfillment. We use time apart to buffer the blows of unrelenting wonder.

We're afraid love would be exhausted by its constant presence. We fear that too much beauty, too much happiness, would ruin us.

People walk on burning coals, and we're afraid to fall into love. Enlightenment is when one admits one is no longer un-enlightened.

I make the case for love, yet I fear it won't survive its own truth, in the wonder I'm afraid to lose, in the practice of its brilliant presence.

Imaginary Jesus and the Leviathan

She was listening to someone speak, and as I watched,
thinking of nothing, I felt the kindness she cast near and far.

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

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

I have no enduring grasp of the eternal. I can't leave
this reality. Even upside down, it's my ground. I look
at the beauties of the world and the heavenly ones, too,
and my eyes remain in my head.

I see she isn't being kind, it's the kindness of her being I see.
I see beauty in my sight, and insight tells me to take it in,
when everything I see has already taken me from the inside.
Let it be as it is, and breathe. The leviathan needs the wind.

Escaping Gravity

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

A local band played in the market. The singer sang of a woman
he saw on the street, a magical woman, a woman of transformation,
beyond the life of the town.

It was oddly disconcerting to hear a local woman described
in such poetic language, to be caught between transfiguration
and the gravity of society.

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

Back from the distant land of my keenest awareness,
I assumed I could live here as I had in that nurturing crucible.
But here in this land of social restraints, I watch as my joy
became a smile, then a protected glance.

There is such gravity in our belonging to each other, we risk
losing what's ours to give. Gravity's embrace holds me down,
yet even Icarus had to come from somewhere.

His dream of flight lifted him above his place, but his story
warns of the fall, and the singer ended his song with the sop
that the sight of his muse was but a passing dream.

The Empty Hedonism of Distance

She was laid up with unexplained pain in her legs.

Her presence, lying on the couch, like a nearly naked Maja, was difficult to accept, without any sign, beyond the sweetly spiritual and the gentle slight of appreciation and admiration.

Her body glistened in the stifling summer heat, as she became loud with distance-making, the way children instinctively know how to ward off attackers they can't protect themselves from.

She told me of another man who tried to entice her, how she held her ground and became part of a life he wasn't part of.

I couldn't finally continue to court her image in my eyes.
I let go of a good thing, like letting go of water falling.

I can be the loving author of this life, without living in the empty hedonism of distance, the intoxicating imbalance of desire.

The Constant Indifference of Wonder

The light glints and glares off cars,
like stars bright in the daylight.

A sun in a silver Mercedes, half a dozen stars
in a gray Chrysler, the night sky in a blue Ford,
beyond that, a Milky Way of reflected light,
small galaxies glide by on the arterial,
shooting stars on the freeway.

The expectation of wonder
has gone out of my love of the other.

Wonder is the black night sky, lightless
behind the eyes, not the reflected blur of light.

I bring myself to wonder,
I am the sun of my expectation.

The sun in the parking lot is the same as the one in the sky,
the same as the one in my eyes. Its light never moves.

I am the field where an inner light thrives
in the constant indifference of wonder.

The Commotion of Intangible Love

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

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

I love what's always true. The objects of my
attention, the icons of my passion, fade from bliss.

*After twenty years, a priest told his Advaita teacher, in
the practice of no practice, the awareness of no beliefs,
I can't give up my belief, even though I know everything
you say is true. I'm still in love with the form of my faith.
I can't surrender, enough, to let it go, His teacher said,
Be as you are.*

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

My heart is in league with my flesh. My heart is bound
to its eternity. There's no way out of this faith, this loss,
this enduring disillusion we experience in so many ways.

Falling back into stillness is the silence of my being,
where there's no commotion of intangible love.

The Dancing Girls of the Buddha

I never had as personal a god as my love for a woman.
I was taught to run through the apostles to get to Jesus,
through Jesus to get to God, through God to get to what is.

Shopping among gods and people, for a way
to know what love is, has been my failure.

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

Warned of Buddha's dreams of dancing girls, that came
to him even after his enlightenment, I dismissed the warning
and sought a woman, as if she were the heart of my inspiration,
until, finally, when the dance ended, I didn't feel any familiar
burst of freedom, or the willingness to look for another lover.

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

When I saw spirit in a woman, I sought to embrace
her with the same joy as I embraced my essential being.

Love of another was the only worship that fit my flesh,
the only worship that matched the degree of my passion,
until worship was gone from my awareness and with it,
the dancing girls of the Buddha.

The Ruling Classes of the Soul

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

The challenge with poetry and its miracles is to penetrate
to the core of a human being, to live inside the brilliance
of another set of cells, to share the moment's intimacy,
to make love with a stranger as a close companion,
to speak from the center that my civilized self
circles at a distance.

Overridden By What Didn't Happen

A window, jutting out from the upper story,
was the only access to the eaves I needed to paint.

I found a stool in the attic and stepped out onto
the sleek metal roof with screw-heads for a foothold.
I had to find a way to paint the inaccessible.

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

I tied a stepladder to the end of the rope as a platform.
With one foot on the top of the ladder, I lay flat on the
slanted roof. I stretched out and reached to paint.

I switched the rope and ladder to the other side of the eave
and repeated the operation, but when I moved my foot,
the ladder slipped. There was a sudden jerk, and nothing
happened. Fear might have overtaken me, but nothing
of fear came to mind or body.

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

I was overridden by what didn't happen. When I got back
in the window, onto the floor, in the upstairs bedroom,
I felt the perfect nothing of the peace that has no biography.

The Congestion of Eternity

My visa needed renewal. After a week of rain, I went to the magistrate's office, in a new building, unfinished for ten years. There was standing water in the hallways. It was business-as-usual in a surreal landscape.

The building was crowded. The lawyer's office was piled high with papers. His inner office was packed floor to ceiling. He was talking to a man from Africa. They were laughing, as he took my visa and put it aside. I didn't know if he wanted a bribe. I wasn't versed in the protocol of civil bribery.

After more conversation and laughter, he held my passport and laughed. He opened it and stamped it, all the time laughing, and I left, thanking the lawyer several times, *namaste, namaste*, down four flights of stairs, with laughter ringing in the halls, into four inches of water, out into the bright, noisy, crowded street.

In the first days of teaching, my brain was stacked floor to ceiling with papers. It's odd, being a poet with a job. Reading poems at a political rally in the 70s, it seemed odd to think of poems as a call to action, when poetry brings everything to a halt. Then, maybe, something might open. Then, maybe, something might happen.

Start slowly. Slow down. Stop. Now you're getting somewhere.

The assistant warden asked if I was going to read anything subversive in the prison writer's workshop. *Only a few poems*, I said, and thought, *There's nothing more subversive than poetry.*

The brilliant sun cuts the air from its complacency. We have no choice in this unofficial act of surrender. There's a reason sought for everything, and in everything, there is no reason.

I Wince at Invisible Injuries

When I don't access the aloneness that fills me,
I begin to feel the pinch of loneliness. The identity of
aloneness suffuses fear. When I let go of my attachment
to the other, what feels like loss becomes fulfillment.

There's no familiar language for this contradiction.
You might think a man alone in his contentment
was self-satisfied, deluded, and egotistical.

As with a drunkard's approximation of bliss,
we don't easily trust any version of serenity.
We laud serenity, when discontent is the norm.

Any sense of the satisfaction of spirit is reserved
for the insane and the saintly. In the querulous mind,
a no-man's-land between insane and saintly is enjoined.

I miss the other of my attachment, when missing her
becomes the focus of my thinking. I feel attached to
what feels torn away. I wince at invisible injuries.

A forest fire burns the forest to the ground but leaves
the ground unburnt and fertile beneath the conflagration.

In the Quiet Windless Aftermath

After the hurricane between us passed, I came back to
poke among the ruins. I found traces of love that remain.

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

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

In stillness, none of the anxiety remains. I stand where rooms
once were. I stand where walls, ceilings and floors once were.
I stand where the sky remains, and the earth, and the air,
and the stillness, that didn't go anywhere.

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

What remains has the nature of what's within, its character less
defined, but closer to the nature of remaining than to anything
it might be called. I scan the littered landscape of my
permanence, where everything else has been lost.

Riding the Trees in Morgan Park

On the way to school, we walked through woods, with a stream running its length, in the middle of town. It was wild to my eyes. You couldn't see the houses, and we rode the trees to the ground.

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

A tree might have flung me into space, if I was strong enough to bend it far enough. The science didn't matter. It was only boys and trees. There was no attempt to know or learn anything.

When Frost stops by woods on a snowy evening, does anyone imagine the old poet in the buggy, or is it the reader, or the silence of winter, or the question of philosophy one imagines?

I'm nowhere in my story. I write, like everyone who reads. I walk a wooded path, I climb a silent tree, and ride.

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

Some early wisdom learned to pick the right tree, one that matches its resilient resolve to the awakening bravado of the not yet grown, sapling to sapling, contestants of strength in simple joy, riding a whip, conquering a bow with an arrow.

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

My Father and I Drove into Kansas

When I step out in front of myself, I see how far
I've come. I once barely stood at my own side.
I more often stood apart from myself.

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

When I was a boy, my father and I drove into Kansas,
on a business trip, to a nearly deserted prairie town,
and he left me alone to wander the streets.

Or, I sat in the car, or else, I rode beside him. I saw
the lonely town, with a few buildings. And standing,
as if on a hill, in a copse of sturdy elm, I wanted
to dive into his body and be his flesh and bone.

I was his passenger, his boy, learning the brilliant
isolation of the heart. I was his son. I long for the arms
of a man long dead, never as alive as I dreamed him,
except when we played on the living room floor.

He was a beached whale, we boys crawled over him,
and when he stood, he let us climb his body like a tree.
We laughed until we cried. These tears are his. This
heaving chest is his. This love of mine is his.

I wanted the arms, of a man who loved me, to be my arms.
I climbed up inside the biggest tree in a small town, and
later, I wanted to buy the town. I was sure it was for sale.

A Whisper in the Cacophony

Trees, barren of leaves. Branches, like scratches on the gray plate of sky. In a warm room, looking out, the delicate lines are soft, on a brittle day.

Painters paint spirit in their art. Poets speak spirit. Image and language are cruel in their stripping of the leaves, and generous when they reveal what remains. There's no resolution sharp enough to make anything finally known.

The skyward lines begin to sing. The mesh of lines. The wafting lines. I stand on the ground. I reach into the sky. I draw myself from a tray of color into the endless gray.

I find spirit in emptiness. I see it in the company of others. Spirit binds the branches, like fresh paint at work on bare canvas. In this warm room, the view is still, on a windless day.

I hold my gaze on barren trees. I see the lines breathing. In this world of harsh abandonment and smothering abundance, a persistent joy leaps the glass and warms the sky.

When I don't speak of love, I begin to find it where it is, and not where it isn't. When I don't call the other's name, I begin to hear the song of love that never leaves, the love I can't abandon, except the fading love of my own abandonment.

The Parody of Peace

I put my thoughts on the tongue of my heart
to hear what my heart has been thinking.

Full of juices, near to exploding, I cinch the saddle
of my heart. I ride my heart like a horse. I ride my
heart at night, when I sing songs of cowboy delight.

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

I met a man in California, who suggested we divide the
world, make ourselves notorious, and fame would follow.

I acted the equal of a master, and he slaughtered me with
such alacrity, it filled my lungs and took my breath away.

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

The Evanescent Has No Chronicle

Snow melts, ice melts, water pools, desire goes away,
but not its object. Instead of desire's warm apprehension,
I feel the expanse of its failure. My forehead tightens to a
knot, but it may be barometric. The sun is out, burning
the frigid to florid. I gave my poems to another woman.

Shakespeare compared his love to a summer's day,
then erased the praise, knowing the transience of love,
believing his poem the only lasting reality, more about
death and poetry than about love, yet in our love of
the poem, we transit love to the language of love,
then to the unspoken nature of love itself.

Evanescent love has no chronicle, but the chronicle
of loving and its losses goes on and on. The poet says
his love can't be kept or described, but its occurrence
can be clothed in words. We can love the fabric
of the words in place of love.

A poem of praise to a love, that has its substance in time,
like the beauty of a flower, becomes the vase of its love,
with the flower painted on its porcelain.

A small boy, living without a father, looks in my eyes.
Some fathering is given and taken. These words are a mere
token of that moment, given and taken in a similar kind of love.
We fashion and hold these totems to love, across the distance
between the moments of love's presence.

We know what we love is fleeting. But love is not, and we are
its carriers, from flower to flower, in words told of the flower's
brilliant beauty.

The Good of Useless Prayers

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

There's a fierce tranquility in facing adversity,
until, in time, it becomes a shadow of itself.

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

Let me not slide to my demise in search of an ease,
however wise. This death and birth has no remedy.

I scattered my father's ashes in the river that ran
by our house, and the river ran away with him.

I go to the bank where I last saw him. The presence
of his absence tells me there's no good in this anxiety.

He no longer lives. He has become what he was,
before he was my father, before he was himself.

This grief and grievance has no grant,
but it helps to call my father's name.

Ordinary Drawings of Ordinary Objects

The drop in temperature turns the thawed roads to ice.
Another former president has died. In the turning of pages,
we find more pages to turn. Life turns endlessly upon itself.
Old kings come round again. We see their faces in our leaders.

I make small drawings for my daughter's daughter, halfway
around the world. She likes black ink drawings of ordinary objects
on white paper. I put my pen to the surface, and a world is born.

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

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

This last president who died was known for his pardon of the
criminal who came before him. In a photo taken in his room
in the Forbidden City, the president wears striped pajamas and
moccasins while conferring with his advisors. His wife was a
dancer who became a champion of those addicted to alcohol.
A football player on a national championship team, he
became a caricature of awkward clumsiness.

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

I Fall Awake Among the Angels

I speak of an landscape that's no less real for seeming less real.
I choose not to mistake reality for what we name as real. I look
at a thing that's not called a thing, to describe it into gentle
proximity, so its reality can be seen.

I see a doorknob, across the room, as big as a grapefruit.
I see the head of a screw, as large as a saucer. I see a face,
drawn larger than itself. It becomes a face not to be painted,
but a face to be painted on. These black and white portraits
are meant to enlarge to an array of pigmented revelation.

I see something within become a face, to see it from within
its reality, not as a fiction crafted from our joy and pain,
but to reveal itself as real as it is.

My unseen self has no physical being, but this
forensics of the unseen uncovers what seems less real.
It appears in its camouflage of language and imagery,
until what lies beneath is lifted into recognition.

I map the character of energy, as spirit sits for its likeness.
I see beyond the visible, not in projection, but in revelation.

I tell the story of my flesh, to tell the shape of its source.
An ancient beast, pulled from the muck, cleans its face
to a beauty. The imaginary beast of my unconscious fears
becomes a conscious creature of courage. I'm mistaken
to think I walk with imaginary demons, when I fall awake
among the angels of my reality.

The Second Day in Heaven

The second day is same as the first,
without the same startled fascination.

It's hard to believe that the new person I became,
or the new person I came with, on that first day,
is still new to me, this second day in heaven.

The first day in heaven breaks like no other,
but the second day comes up like replication.

An ancient bowl in the museum, once infused
with divinity, has been drained of its sacred power.
It's become a bowl, and nothing more. I pick up
the first day's bowl, on this second day.

Everything dies on the second day,
unless I let dying die with it.

Another Bright Artifact

They say of the teacher-saint of our religion that he was as human as he was eternal, and then the human self is forgotten.

This overlay of man and god is difficult to fathom. There's no simple separation to make it clear. Dualities are easy to embrace. One can move between them, like a child between one's separated mother and father.

A father moves around the table to take his daughter's picture. She resists, turning away from his light, no matter where he moves. Her bright eyes go blank. Then she agrees to his request. Unsmiling, she turns to the camera and grips her juice box in her tiny fist.

No one's ever had his picture taken. Every picture is of someone else. Tourists take pictures of each other, but no one captures the moment.

A man's pictures of his recent trip abroad fail to convince him he was ever there. This poem is another bright artifact.

Between Small Dark Towns in Illinois

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

More familiar than anything I know on its face, the greater part of it fills the room with a kind of disappearance, that takes the place of everything that takes place within it.

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

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

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

It's not hard to believe his death was not accidental, that he drove his car into a room where he was finally happy to be alive.

The Old Dairy Building

My friend's shop and gallery burned to the ground.
Life is what you expect it to be, and then one day,
nothing is the same, and never will be again.

He held images of the current war alongside the loss
of his business. Everyday life is war time in slow time.

A home to artisans, the old dairy building was a local
landmark, a genial gathering place of disparate souls,
engaged in their chosen work. I took pictures, as it
burned, and when it was a bin of charred timbers.

The capable firemen never set foot in the building.
Instead, they poured water in from trucks in fat hoses,
breaking the windows, until the roof collapsed.
Its wooden beams burned into the next day.

In war and everyday life, we see terrible death,
relentlessly ignorant of our worth and our compassion.

We wonder about those who survive cruel absurdities
with their sanity intact. How do they continue to be sane,
despite our presumed supremacy over the rampantly
meaningless. They do it by the gift of their breathing.

My old lover's daughter died too soon. It became an
endless dying. She watched death consume her child,
as she danced on the precipice of her own sanity.

Transient death comes and goes, like bullets in the air.
We smell the unsullied air between the bullets, and we
breathe it in, with cleaner lungs than those of the fire.

The Moment of Chancy Death

The random speed of war feeds the recognition of arbitrary death without cessation. It is the sudden, prolonged occasion of reality, insistent, unrelenting, that comes without explanation or alternative.

One man in the factory, after The Big War, said he was taught to kill but not how to stop. He said they swept him up and threw him in the war, and then they threw him back out again.

He said he loved his family but he couldn't feel that love. He couldn't stop fighting and years later, he was still fighting.

Peace is time and space between separate deaths. We fill the space with time to avoid the inescapable reality.

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

Between wars, in no war raging, there's no illusion but the constant reality we have the luxury to embrace or not.

Time out is not an end to cruel awareness, but a place for the embrace of the absence that's greater than our gloried occupation of destruction. This empty moment is the moment of that enclosing truth.

Some never feel more alive than when death is their partner, not because death is such a good dancer. It's not death that teaches the amazing purity of existence, it is the absence of illusion. The moment of chancy death is the same as this prolonged presence of our precious reality.

A Small Bird Perched in a Bare Tree

A small bird is perched in a bare tree, basking in the bright sun, as if attending to an errand or waiting for the appearance of some other bird.

I begin to feel impatient. A slight wind vibrates the tree. A man walks close, and the bird takes wing, as small birds do, and it's swiftly aloft, as if flung into the air.

With the bird flown, the tree now seems companion to the wind. My attention is freed to the unseen, to witness the nature of my unseen self, in the presence of the absence of a small bird perched in a bare tree.

On the Mesa of America

People walk to their cars on the mesa of America, this flat, open vista on the world. Living on the prairie, people think nothing of driving sixty miles when they can almost see that far. When the sky is high, people walk to their waiting cars and drive away.

I am less alone in the open heart, than I am in the company of those for whom being alone is a burden.

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

When I first heard it said that a certain guru was never born, never died, it angered me. Of course, he was born. Of course he died. But his footprint was illusion, except in the reality in which he walked.

There's wisdom in these windswept steppes, an abiding impermanence that drives many into huddled masses of polite strangers. This kind of space breaks our vision open to the horizon, where no end is in sight, despite living in houses built on shifting sand under high skies of clouds, like homes of our imagination.

Nothing comes with us but what we bring to this moment. In this familiar distance, I come alone to the future. I walk to my car, and I drive on.

The Dogs of the Desert

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

I listen for the distant howling of beasts, but the
dogs of the desert come out of the desert at dawn.

Quiet fills my ears like water fills compartments
of a submerging submarine. I sink to the earth
below everything that moves in the fearless peace.

I'm at ease, with the engine off, with nothing running
but my heart. The road runs by like memory and desire.
My blood moves in its course. Everything is within reach.
Nothing lies outside such silence as this, on this night,
beside the road, on the edge of the desert's dark embrace.

I attribute love to being at peace with those I live among.
I start the car and regenerate the gravel. On the road, again,
I'm see I'm still the same as when I'm crowded together in love.

The Grace of Another's Need

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

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

In abundance, we make our need unnecessary
and unwelcome, even as we turn our charity
to the devastated and the dying.

I imagine a look in her eyes that might grant my caring.
I imagine the kindness of allowing another's kindness.

Having no need for need is another deprivation, when we
might open our need to having a place in our happiness.

Self-strength holds no door open for kindness. Being kind
is sidelined to noisy giving. An old woman sits with another
old woman in the quiet of their age, and love abounds.

In the peculiar prosperity of life, nature drops us into
degrees of ourselves we're willing to avoid in our rise.

I see what once seemed of little use, the practice of a
common kindness. Not rushing to the aid of infirmity
and weakness, but being together in quiet regard.

The Praise of Present Joy

We walk out of ourselves, displaced by change.
Unfamiliar with what we're not, we walk in rubble,
looking for what survives. So little changes,
in a world of unceasing change.

Kick us out, burn us down, destroy the present
as past, the barren future is closer to the bone
than what we've been or done.

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

Change hones us to our essential selves. True change
is an increase in clarity. A man leaves his heater on a
mattress, and a small world burns to the ground.

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

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

We invent the art of memory, when what we cherish
is no more present than a fading piece of our presence.

When we celebrate what's to come or what came before,
even in our distraction, we let loose the praise of present joy.

There is No Edge to Us

My body falls into itself, to be drawn back to its periphery by nearly impossible forces. Nothing can prevent its ultimate dissolve.

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

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

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

When our father died, I imagined his sudden absence an erasure, his rich and colorful character erased like wood is consumed and forgotten by fire.

If a man's mind can lose its own storage, where is his presence in the body? The shape we give our formless being belies our periphery. There's no edge to us.

Everything I remember of my father is not what remains.

We were parts of one being, broken apart by time and space. I cherish his being, when nothing of his shape remains. I feel compelled to let myself go, as I've done with my father.

I hold my father in effigy, as long as I hold myself in time. I die not away from my father but toward him. I act out his being, in my transient, fantastic existence.

Pulling the Heads Off Grasshoppers

Driving across the roof of the world is driving across its floor.
Over the pass, through the valley, I feel a sadness in the rain.

Something in the body tells me of something else. I come home
over the same ridge that thrills me when I see it from my house,
but riding the back of the ridge, it carries no distant thrill.

A man in the wilderness pulls the head off a grasshopper,
pulls its innards with it, cooks and eats a delicacy of necessity.

I drove many miles to stand in line next to someone I know.
The back of my hand has become familiar topography.

To know myself is to know what no longer needs to be known.
Attention no longer goes to learning the unfamiliar heart.
What is learned no longer needs training in dangerous terrain.

Being with a certain lover was like driving faster than wise,
attuned to a fearful anticipation and a false excitement.

Learning too well. what didn't need to be learned,
is like being in the desert without the right of return.

Experience teaches its own eager history of self.

Falling back into the present in life, with the past at peace
with itself and the future quietly silent, time opens its pages
for reading by moonlight. Experience becomes kindling
in a fire that tells the beasts to keep their careful distance.

Time has no anxious anticipation. Fear folds into itself.
What remains lies coiled at the ready, a light behind the night.

My Brother Runs Near a Sunny Beach

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

Walking is a careful adventure, getting to the car an event.
Going in a store becomes calculated. Arriving becomes
an accomplishment of a multitude of fears and feats.
This challenge affects who we are, in how we are.

In the world, another dictator has been put to death.
So far from our lives, it barely merits notice.

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

Whatever occurs is the grist for whatever mill that grinds
in whatever moment of time I live. It's been cold, long enough,
for the cold to become what operates in everything else.

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

My brother runs near a sunny beach. Here, the sun diffuses to
a crystalline gray. I recall living in a torment of desire. It was a fire
I danced around and through. It could have been the summer sun
that heated my passion. I am a simple creature, living in the
temperature of my life. My brother runs near a sunny beach.

Nostrils Flare in the Vigorous Air

A mountain wind, in the bright sun, leaves
the clean edge of things for what they are.

Pollution creates texture of a different beauty.
My brother's friend drove him to a ridge above
the city. A panorama spread below and beyond,
in a valley thick with the exhalation of millions.

Look how beautiful it is, his friend said, indicating
the stagnant sky with a sweep of his arm.

The setting sun lit the crowded canvas of purple, red,
and backlit yellow, to a conflagration of unnatural
riches for the eye's parochial pleasure.

How beautiful is our crowded, private sky.
No crisp wind blows away our unmixed thoughts.

In the feelings of accumulated days, I thicken myself
to a kind of beauty, until it is what I see, until it's where
I see greatness, and even my alarms become artfully designed.

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

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

It's a bracing wind that blows in the brilliant sun,
that takes nothing from the mind or the body.
Nostrils flare in the vigorous air, and the sky
is seen anew, unclouded by its welcome residue.

The Joy of Being Seen

Raised unseen in the way we're all raised, I learned to be seen for the masks I wore, until I began the pursuit of being seen for true, by god and man and my own self.

I finally saw myself in the eyes of the inherent, where there's no seer and no seen but in being. But my ancient habit of not being seen for true, clouds my revelation.

The unseen has no sight in familiar eyes, so I came to trust my being a lover. I thought her nakedness could have become the absence of a mask, that might begin the time of no more masks, but she was unprepared to be unafraid of that revelation.

The joy of being seen begins in the terror of being seen, no matter how thin the veil, no matter how beautiful the unmasked being.

Being a lover is the thinnest veil of love. It is the lightest mask in the masquerade, but it veils the real from its reality, until the veil is the only thing seen in the eyes of clouded love.

Caverns of Delicate Intricacy

After a long spell of chilling cold, in the midst of a heavy fog, the town woke to a sparkling scene, with every tree's branches covered with a delicate white fur of frost. The streets appear as caverns of delicate intricacy.

There must have been a breeze that lifted the frost to these angles. Individual branches are coiled in white, extending a million white wings, and dreary history is transformed to fantastic beauty.

The gravity of being has a greater endurance than my epiphanies. I fall in and out of love. I blame nothing and no one for dragging me down to my cold condition. To live in love's epiphany is to accept the spontaneity of the endless unknown, a perilous perfection.

The fog, at night, dulls the newly wonderful catastrophe, but its beauty remains in place, until morning, and another dawning of the miraculous follows the long night gone.

In Simple Grace

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

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

Lifting the detritus of our rooms with his long,
narrow fingers was not an act of simple grace.
It was simple grace performing an act.

It could have been any other act in its place.
He was a man in whom grace occurred.

A photograph, or these words, might seem
picturesque or the telling of another culture.
One can't claim the moment by describing it.

I contrive, at a loss to devise, a graceful thought
to take the place of a moment of simple grace.

I speak to honor that which honors itself by its
very presence. I am still, in stillness, or I am not.

Beauty Accumulates to Calamity

The beauty of the recent frost accumulates to calamity.
The fog that sits in the valley begins to burden lines and
branches. Everything hangs in the balance, waiting for worse.

A rancher walks his fence, clearing the frost from the electric lines,
so his bulls won't run the range. They hear the coyotes howling at night.

People continue to kill each other. We institutionalize our insanity.
We forbid aggression and then reward it. We elevate existence
to the sacred, then debase it. We kill to maintain the illusion
of our benevolent sanctity.

An atmosphere of dull dread hangs in the air. A barometric prison,
it is the unhappiness of molecules who live inside the acceptance
of cruelty, a cruelty that's practiced in the name of what we honor.

No one is truly in danger until the knife is at his throat.
The prevention of assault occurs before its attempt.
Too late for the cure, we make retaliation mandatory.

The foolishness of willfulness is circular. No one wins when
anyone thinks of winning. No one wins in any of the wars
between my separate selves, until winning has no more
credibility than losing does.

I Wipe My Eyes With Words

My eyes teach me their tears. My shoulders shake
like oxen shed their flies. I wipe my eyes with words.

My father would retreat to the basement, when
it was time to say goodbye to anyone he loved.

His way of loving was to leave its expression.
I take up these habits, without having a habit for them.

I teach myself, in speaking what I wasn't taught to speak,
what I never learned to speak. I learn, by walking into
the faith of not knowing. My life is a constant arrival
where it's capable of always having been.

I learned everything my father taught me. I learned what
he never admitted he was teaching. I learned what he didn't
know he knew. I learned the secrets his ignorance tried to
avoid. I learned his unseen self. I became the son of his
failures. I became the son of his perfection.

The Frightened Lover

Winter fades to dullness. No painter would come here for the light. The day wanders though itself like anonymity, without purpose, unchallenged, acting only vaguely content. These are not bad days to be at peace, when peace appears in the absence of fervor.

A circus strongman, in a surreal, deserted countryside, seethes with anger and frustration, until he kills a man who tried to love the woman he kept for himself.

Any lover, in this long winter's landscape, is at a loss, but not insane. Love born of the spirit walks quietly, until it meets a similarity.

The lover in my heart trims the soles of its shoes, until bare ground is underfoot, and the heart turns to its purpose, in the passage of peace.

The fertility of peace is underestimated, when pain and conflict stir the creative to new contemplations of pain and conflict.

Peace is disguised by a shroud. We ask how any good can come of such a vast nothing. The last days of winter are flat, gray, and dead to the eye. One can feel the ground moving out of its own way.

Slender Limbs

My friend felt a disquiet, so he built a gallery in his studio,
a compact room with a door, four walls, a few paintings,
an open room, with slender limbs of trees across the top.

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

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

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

He squints and gapes. He sprawls and jumps. He imagines
a long room for poetry, a room for those who speak to those
who choose to listen. He holds poems up to the light like fabric,
like maps, bones, babies, like a bundle of kinetic power.

His movements tend toward dance. A piece of crumpled paper
in the corner is a dance. Something needs to be out of place,
for one to dance. Something needs to be asleep, for one to
dance well. Nothing needs to be, for the dance to begin.

In the Eyes of Its Own Arrival

The hills are the bare backs of bears, whales, encrusted, frosted by time. The fruition of life is its own fulfillment, but if one dwells on it, the difficulties outweigh the reality.

If one chooses a path that few choose, others may be less welcoming of the choice. They may define any choice that seems separate, as an act of separation.

One may seek, by stepping aside, to bridge the separation one never sought. The organic doesn't reject the organ.

I look for recognition in the eyes of others, but the genuine is most clearly seen in the eyes of its own arrival.

Pollock Was a Painter

Pollock was a painter, pretending to be a painter,
drinking, fucking, fighting, talking. He tried to act
a regular guy. Then one day, he became a painter.
He couldn't go back to playing one. He'd become one.

Some might say that's what killed him; to become what he'd
been imitating in himself. We play roles akin to the reality
we scarcely recognize, until we begin to play who we are.

Pollock bought an artist's brush at the artist's market, but he
became an artist almost by accident. Everything that came
before was swept away in the first stroke of his transformation.

My desire to be with a woman is a role I have played,
until it became how I was seen, nearly who I was.

I played the role of a lover in the heart of love. I became what
I approximated, in the center of what seemed without center.
Objects lost their objectivity, including how I live in my art.

Nothing happens in love. A room is lifted from its contraries,
set back down in the same place, transcendent, still the same.

I see her, without seeing her the way I saw her.
I see her the way the light sees what it falls upon.

The trance of love plays a surrogate for love. It becomes
a way of being, but being doesn't need a way to be.

To say we are love itself becomes a paradigm of the love we define
away from its own reality. The pursuit of love is a fraud for love itself.

I love, and I am loved, and nothing occurs between us,
except there is nothing between us to name it love.

The Sweet Absence of Another's Nearness

I might wish there was a god or a lover in my immediate heaven,
but I don't surrender who I am for the taste of one to love.

All day long, all night, every day, every night, I don't surrender
who I am for the sweet sense of another's nearness. No lover,
no god, I won't give up what I have for what I don't. There's
nothing missing in what seems missing.

No god, no lover comes to me. No god, no lover, reassures me
or promises me better than this. I'm left with everything I might
imagine from them, to discover their presence in this simplicity.

I might wish there was a god in my immediate heaven, when
what I imagine missing is only missing in my wishing for it.

What's between my reality and the reality of everything
that's real, is nowhere to be seen, uncalled for, undreamt of,
and as present as the air I breathe, all day long, every night.

A Long Flatbed Truck

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

The town is visited by actors, their coaches and directors, creative people, in a profession made of the beauty of their presence. It is their protection and their freedom, to make of themselves, who they are, and what they do, a profession.

After we learn to walk, we learn a way to walk. Then we learn a way of walking that brings a certain attention. Still, we walk from here to there, as a means of transportation.

One lovely girl, unsure of the face she was born to wear, distorts it, in the way she sucks a straw. She jerks her womanly body like a rag doll. She coolly watches those around her, with no child present in her manner. A young man, with the face of a line-drawing, calls out the time. Everyone laughs and leaves.

The low clouds bank the hills. The hills front the clouds. There's too much definition in one's sight before the self has seen its face. The brilliant light reveals the structure of the dark. The inherent has the patience of the absence of time.

A Passing Paradise in an Endless Sea

My habits have their way with themselves.
Personality is the calcification of character.

Characteristics build on themselves, like coral islands of
once-living cells, to make a passing paradise in an endless sea.

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

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

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

The wind comes up so powerful, it changes the temperature
by twenty degrees, and one small boy curls into his own legs.

Another man shouts to his son, a small copy of himself,
It's time to go home, and the boy comes running.

We divine ourselves in reproduction. Nothing more is
needed to accomplish the wondrous. Those, who live
without children, brave the singularity of their experience,
living out the lives of our common ordinary divinity.

The Fine Point of the Soul

I'm tired. My brain is full of fumes. I swore I wouldn't do anything to blunt the fine point of my soul, what Keats called the effect of modern society. A teacher said there were no wise men in the caves in the mountains. He said the only place to live free is here, in the marketplace, everywhere.

Keats admired the energy of a fight in the street below his window, in the crowded, noisy city, but he moved to the country, anyway.

He moved to the center of his being a poet. He moved to the center of his being. A poet, he gave up the life of his ambition and took up the life of his wonder.

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

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

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

The fine point of one's soul is where the music has yet to become a shape in its sound, when it's in the ground, beneath its emergency.

The Ascent of the Descent

Grace and gravity belong to everyone, in the practice of our being with words. The first leap in learning is learning to speak from knowing no words to speak.

Poetic language stirs skepticism, *Poets make obscure what should be easy to understand. Truth and beauty should not be difficult to discern or to delight in.*

A tin miner approached Neruda, *You must speak for us, who cannot speak for ourselves*, he said.

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

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

The Wu Li Heart

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

When I begin a poem, I'm no poet of words.
And as I end a poem, I'm no poet of words.

Poet is a name I use that disappears in the using.

Yet of poetry I am its champion. Indifferent to it,
there's no greater spiritual dance than a poem.

Poetry is the science of thought and feeling,
with no theory of evolution or creation, except
the good should split itself open in the telling.

The good of a poem is lost and found in its transit
from nothing to something and back again.

Death is predictable, every birth fraught with unknowns.
The Wu Li heart holds nothing for its demons to covet.

A young man in swept-wing glasses, red jacket, tanned
skin, two days of stubble, and windblown hair, sits at
a sidewalk table, drinking from a cup with a lid.

He turns his head, searching. Then, hunched over,
he throws his head back, watching and waiting.

Inside sits a man with gray hair, with white skin
and a paunch like a pregnancy, reading the paper,
turning pages with the practice of a lifetime, he
scans for something of interest, never looking up.

Men dance with their demons to ward off their demons.

Wu Li is Chinese for *patterns of organic energy, my
way, nonsense, I clutch my ideas, and enlightenment.*

*This is the way, says the poet, I dance free from my
demons, no longer in the clutch of my ideas or my way.*

Jesus Laughed

My dancing heart won't take direction. It won't stop dancing.
It doesn't listen to advice. All it wants to do is dance.

A playful heart, in prison, is still a playful heart.

My father could play, but he didn't know how. There's no
room for play in a tragic world with hired comedians for relief.

I commit to play, to plunge deep in the heart. True play
has no expositor in this world of travail and respite.

Struck in the side with a sword, Jesus laughed. He knew
there was no body to be wounded. But he had sealed
an obligation to take it seriously. He had to appear to
be born again. So he cried out and continued to die.

There's no need to be born again. No one needs to do
the impossible a second time. Being born is the sleight of
hand of existence. An empty heart is the beauty of our truth.

Deep Blue Spills in a Light Blue Sky

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

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

We gather in this room of earth to honor the wonder of our being.
We gather in this room of earth beneath the truth of its beauty.

There's humility that betters my own. There's greatness that grows
my greatness larger. These sutras of the spirit sing the nirvana of
my hopeless being. Behind every god is a reality that outshines it.

Children in a room, unable to describe what's outside,
we listen to anyone with a story of what might be beyond.

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

He neither prays nor panics. He's alone, but he knows a greater
aloneness. His humble being is at home in forgetting its parts.

Along the River and Over the Hills

I drove south on Canyon Road, along the river, on a two-lane blacktop with no traffic, over the ridge, through stunning vistas, between two small towns in the West.

In moments of anonymity, nature rises to its grandeur, and the works of man reduce to a stretch of highway, with roadside turn-outs for the rafters and fishermen.

When we're removed from the society of others, the earth's indifference is an infinite blessing. I'm not made small by size made significant. I'm made without boundaries, on the open road, under the wide sky.

To think I might learn who I am, the work is never done. I chase a chimera from the abyss of unknowable reality to a continental range of definition.

The cliffs falling away to the river bank, and the self I have tried to know becomes clear, a few miles outside Ellensburg.

When I'm among others, I'm the same as I am in myself. The variety of separate selves is made clear in the absence of any nameable self at the core, inside a silver pickup truck.

I turn to the world and see who I'm being, not from within its uncertain form, but from within its rich uncertainty, on the scenic road, rolling south toward Yakima.

The Seas Keep Themselves Separate

The great love of last year is nowhere to be found, in this fragile arrangement of lives.

We try to build institutions of solidarity. We make laws of our desires, to keep the parts of the sea from pouring in and out of each other. We're made loveless and homeless by this life's long love of its lamentations.

I become the weather of my senses. The weather becomes the weather of my body. What was true yesterday has no place today. But when something occurs like a joy, one wants it to remain in place.

The love I feel is not what it claims to be, falling from the sky like a meteor. That sort of love makes a hole in the earth, until the fire goes out, and only its crater remains.

We name the jagged emptiness. We sell reproductions of the ruins of love and the bombed-out landscapes.

I could sing about my loves. I could stop singing. I could swim in the sea. The sea sings endlessly.

A Softly Ruined Face

She has a softly ruined face, with age lines in baby skin.
Her bleached white by time. She has sparkling eyes in
protective creases. She's earned her scrimshaw beauty.
Being alive has earned her a measure of nature's peace.

A wise man listens to the litany of practices engaged in
by those eager to take on more. At the end of their long list
of devotion, he says, *That's enough. You've done enough.*
The purpose of meditation is to finally stop meditating.

They stare in disbelief at the end of their chosen path.
It's not easy to stop at the end of a devoted life. In the
acceptance of my reality, I exhaust the search. I exhaust
my mastery. I exhaust the path. I exhaust my devotion.

Aging takes away what distracts from the peace of my being.
It takes time to survive the distractions that flood my life.

Youth is an onslaught of distraction, until I see I've been
ethanizing time, until I see my freedom in this moment,
with no need to add to my list of practices, nor to bring
the orchestra to atone for its history of orchestration.

Pictures of Home

The Queen sits on her throne, fronting the family
that's ruled for four hundred years. The paragon
of stability, her visage is a calming reassurance.

Mother didn't change her demeanor in ninety years.
She was expected to be what she expected herself to be.
It drove her children to the far corners of the land.

Detachment is an imitation of what occurs naturally,
We take up its true likeness for our private peace.
Away from home, we hang pictures of home.

We fell in love with ourselves as thinking creatures.
The original awareness was thought from nothing,
a kind of generous play, but we're past young,
and the old young sometimes forget to play.

To let go of seeking home is to be at home. You
can never go home, and you cannot leave it behind.
Leaving home makes one absent from oneself.

Masks of peace are hung in empty halls of separation.

Come Home! cries out from the center to the parts
that have left it, until no one is left to respond.

I cry for joy when anything human calls itself home,
in grief, in pain, in love, in simple recognition.
The farthest distance home is no distance at all.

I seldom went to see my mother and I couldn't be
rid of her. When I finally went to see her, she had
disappeared into my heart.

The Privilege of Passion

Whenever I felt passionate, I thought something should happen, as if passion had a privilege. When I fell in love, something had to be done.

My passion for love separated itself from love itself. My passion became the privilege of passion. It took possession of the habit of love, until inherent love is overridden by its privilege.

I indulged the children of my passionate love with candies, until they were fat with privilege.

In this privileged mind, I own what I think, I own what I feel, I own what I am. This owning mind wants to own what these things name as their incarnations, as if desire has the right of love on its side.

Desire claims an orchard in the name of love, then claims the privilege of its harvest.

Desire appropriates the lover in the habit of passionate privilege, until the mere thought of desire becomes the stolen ownership of love, whether it is answered in kind or not.

Another Man Taught by Another Man

I watched a wise man, living as a teacher, to see if he would betray himself as another man taught by another man to believe something from what other men said to each other, a long time ago, or if he was joined with the original moment of his teaching's history.

What we teach each other can be held suspect.
What men tell other men, as the unimpeachable truth, straight from the godhead, can be held to question.

How is this not like something written by a man for a man's purposes? How is this not a way to separate us from each other and our reality, by claiming it as a pathway to reunion?

We are the real of this original reality.
We are observed and observer in one.

Separation defines desire, as desire defines separation.
Fear has a greater ability to embrace than love does.
But love doesn't come and go. Fear darts and dodges, seeking entry where it finally has none.

The play of fear will do what it can to gain its throne.
But it has no regency, except by its enthronement.

The wise man pointed past his teaching to my untaught origin.
I let go my doubting mind, and found its innate reality.

When the Greatest Actor Died

When the greatest actor died, many cried. They said he was a being greater than himself. There are many great actors but few great beings.

When something greater than a man inhabits a man, we want that greatness to live on. We see ourselves in its fulfillment.

We're not small beings, inhabited rarely by something greater, but beings of greater being, in the constraints of our limitations.

We elevate a rare being to honor its rarity, to keep that rarity from becoming the common state of our commerce.

No man is greater than any other, except he opens the heart of his being. He puts himself inside a self larger than himself. One who's called a force of nature opens to his own greater self.

My friend says he shall have no other gods before him.
He says it so his ears can hear what his heart is speaking.
He says it to lift the lid of god from the bowl of himself,
that he might become what he is, by his unbound nature.

The greatest actor was no god. He played those conceived by others. His life, among those he wanted to love, among those who loved him, was a turmoil of inept concern.

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

The greatest actor's eyes had the look of the undiscovered universe, a glance of eternity, the gleam of this fleeting moment.

With Tender Flesh the Avenue

Caught in thwarted thoughts for one who did not
match my desire, I find myself still loyal to the idea.

We seemed to have a bond, but the more we loved
in simple recognition, the less we became as lovers.
I felt a loss in the heat of the body.

Years ago, by the ocean side, in a naked commune
of spirit, mind and body, I didn't want others to see
my lover's breasts, lest I be seen in her nakedness.

Her nakedness touched my vulnerability. I couldn't bear
to recognize my desire, naked, amongst easily naked others.

This last desired love never crossed that transparency.
We were agreed as one in the spirit but not the body.
My desire longed to cross the prohibited, invisible line.

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

And I remember another love, with whom I could touch
and be touched by the flesh, if not the reality of love.

She, too, was indifferent to the moment when the spirit
runs to the surface of the skin. The spirit wears the skin
of trusting lovers. The spirit touches the body, from love to
love itself, and back to love again, with tender flesh the avenue.

A Cry Rises in the Cells

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

Choosing to live with those of the same ignorance,
I have carried and shared an ignorance in the life
of the body, but the body knows its inherency.

I impose ignorance where ignorance has no home.

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

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

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

Blunted by the historical and the personal, I catch
glimpses of the fine point of my flesh. What lies within
will seek the surface, despite all that's done to discourage it.

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

The fine point of the body is blunted, but the gift of touch
survives, despite trying to hold what can't be held, in hands
that have not listened to their cells, that cry for tender ears
to hear the voice of their clear and simple center.

The Old Sailor Baby

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

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

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

His was a quiet curse that revealed a gentle confusion.
A child in a giant body, he reminded me of my father.
He reminded me of myself.

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

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

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

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

You have a beautiful baby, I said to the mother,
stepping into the warm sun of the street.

Latyer, watching a movie, I cried. It helps my heart
to cry, for any reason, for no reason, to be like a baby,
to be like a man.

The History of the Body

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

I habitually touch myself like a dutiful nurse, rarely with the kind and gentle touch I reserve for real and imagined others.

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

We look for others, to come to us with love in their hands, to satisfy the need to touch and be touched, for our bodies to be loved.

We hire professionals to approximate a crossbred love, but to touch ourselves with loving care seems an anomaly.

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

We scrub our own skin and caress another. *Show me how to... what's it called?* We forget what we cannot remember.

I put my hand on my shoulder and feel the muscle. Curiosity in my fingers awakens my body to being cared for, genuinely.

My hand moved to my arm. I felt the muscle, beneath the skin. I feel what had not been felt before, without any agenda of the mind, here, in the flesh of this simple, grateful body.

No Idea Where to Put Her Petals

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

She looks around with the eyes of one who wishes she were
engaged in some passionate activity she has yet to name.

She pulls at her clothing, like an alien, dressed by
other aliens, to mix among these attractive people.

Summer has come too quickly in the long slow
winter of her maturation. Suddenly, she's in bloom.

She's got no idea where to put her petals.
There's a sweet pain in her demeanor.

Passions of the body flood the confusion of will, compelled,
in the midst of not knowing what to do, to do something.

In the protocol of obsession, swamped by contraries, ridden
by compulsions, fear is overwhelmed by a surging mindlessness.

Later in life, a parallel occurs. The juggernaut of passion drives itself
to an outlook above the city of experience, the engine still running.
A new history begins of one's lifelong contemplation of the essential.

Nothing changes in what changes everything. Peace appears
in what once felt like the frantic center of swirling energy.

Passion recognizes its urgency in a calm without confusion.
Obsession sheds its skin, to expose the bones of the inevitable.

The Play of Self-Delighting Pains

I watched one of the great teachers speak. He had nothing to teach, and he taught it well, but there are so few ready to hear beyond the words of such a teacher, he became an entertaining challenge to those who came to be with him.

Everything's a cliché, until there's a readiness for it,
and then it jumps outside itself, fresh and new.

Ciardi talks of Keats taking self-delighting pains to say that nothing we do has lasting significance, including ourselves. So why does he do that, if that's the way he feels?

It's play, Ciardi says, no matter the significance. Poetry is play. Life is play. Our being here is the play of all that is.

First one person speaks. Then someone else. Then more people. Then someone new comes in from outside. Then more arrive. Then there's too many. Then there's a few, or two, or one. None.

Witnessing a drama, I can't keep it straight. Who should I listen to? Who's the one speaking? Characters speak. The playwright speaks. But the play is the one speaking.

I hear my own voice in the play of self-delighting pains.
I have nothing to say, and I am finally no one to say it.

A Simple Case of Retribution

Cezanne says he's looking for a good cup of coffee, with his hands in his pockets, his shirt tied around his waist, wearing a straw hat, in frameless glasses, his beard neatly trimmed.

His short pants reveal stocky, muscled legs, hairy and tan. He seems content to be doing something mundane, and then his eyes darken, as if a thought intervenes.

A thin man stands, in a short sleeve shirt with large writing;
Life is short. Death is sure. Sins the curse. Christ the cure.

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

The setting sun illuminates the East, reflecting on walls and windows. It builds shadows on the far side. A smudged yellow orb hangs in the haze of the horizon.

Cezanne calls his child. The boy runs around him like a firefly to its flame. A woman taller than trees sails by like a schooner on a smooth sea.

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

I paint until I laugh, I hear myself say. These words come and go, sometimes with a weight that lightens, sometimes with a light that fades, sometimes with weight and light that give life to itself.

The Music of the Blooded Air

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

Everything competes for space in what gives it life.
The air feels kneaded like dough in muscled hands.

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

The music seeps and squeezes out of the air. It hangs and grips the air. It cries and moans. It comforts and caresses. It tears the air, so thick with itself, it can't be torn. We sing the music of the blooded air. In this fertile heat, nothing is unique. The heat lives in what lives in the heat.

In the tropics, there's no birth and death in mythic cycle. Both are constant, with no separation to want metaphor. Seasons don't follow each other like discriminated egos. They pile on top each other in the same time-warped self.

Television makes it difficult to know what's present or past, with everything playing at the same time. The movies started it, when dead actors appear alive in their images. Books started it, when characters come alive as they once lived. Myth started it, when those we eulogize never died and never die. We started it, in the life of our open minds and hearts, without borders in time.

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

I am here, at ease, in the moment of this moment. I tell myself to write this moment's un-writable poem, and I laugh at wisdom that fails to daunt the daring.

You Should Save the World

Someone said, *Hey, Jesus, hey, Buddha, you should be a preacher. You should find a mount and deliver a sermon. You should write four principals. You should save the world.*

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

Have you ever read this? a friend said of my baby book, *Your mother expected you to save the world.* I looked at the words. It was no surprise.

A billion mothers have thought the same of a billion children. We are all children of the womb of thought, making plans for a disappearing future.

Take this thought and make something of yourself. We'll be watching you. I take pains to make something where nothing was, to pass it to another generation, in the air, on a hill, in the desert, under a tree.

I'm not the savior of a single thought. I face my being. I birth myself back into the void, not forward into the anticipation of unfolding history.

Every poem points to the space between poems. Every mother is known by her own true desire, in the moment before her desire is born.

As Rough Hewn as We Make It

In the art of being, an artist looks at unnamed reality, and makes a sculpted shape, a portrait, in materials not as real as their model.

When Pygmalion fell in love with the creation of his desire, his beauty emerged in the stone, but it lived in the unsculpted presence of his being.

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

I am neither the world beyond my eyes, nor the world behind my sight. I live in the space between my separated selves. Recognition rights my ship, in the brilliance of its awareness, even when I'm lost at sea.

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

Shakespeare calls angels to accompany his prince. But Hamlet calls no angels. His presence outshines the angels' light, even in his dying spark.

The Laughing Policeman

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

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

A nation wept. That night was my first date with my future wife.
Despite an inauspicious beginning, we both sought a companion
for adulthood. *I'll go, if you'll go.* We held hands and jumped.

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

In Shakespeare class, I failed to read the assigned Hamlet,
before a quiz. I made a joke that no one else enjoyed, and later,
I discovered, in private reading, the prince of my own Denmark.

I won't live in this body past my life, no matter how my words live.
The good and bad are buried with our bones. *Alas, poor Yorick.*

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

When the president died, the great, wide country was filled
with the deafening silence of his death. It wafted across Iowa.
It coated the Rockies. It swelled with the waves on the coast.

I thought we married because we danced well together,
as if everything in our marriage would be as harmonious.

When Ophelia died, Gertrude cried, certain her son
would marry the girl, if only the King hadn't been killed.

Even contradiction can't explain our dualities. *What are you reading,*
Polonius asks Hamlet. *Words... words... words...* the Prince replies.

Four men finish their coffee and leave the café. Three men carry
themselves with sad dignity out the door. The fourth is laughing.

The House Detective

The house detective sits in the lobby of a rundown hotel. There's nothing for him to do, except he's a thief. He steals from the guests and recovers enough to prove his worth. He acts to keep his job, which means very little to him.

His room in the hotel is a repository of his stolen bounty. He doesn't care. He's not interested in what he steals, only the theft, and then only for a moment. His satisfaction is short-lived.

The hotel is populated by odd characters, of whom he is one of the strangest. Then, one day, he dies, under mysterious circumstances.

Police detectives stand over his body, discovered in the midst of his accumulation of stolen artifacts. The owner of the hotel slumps nearby, telling the detectives of their longtime friendship.

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

Down by the Banks of the River

As the setting sun bakes my face, I remember the taste of gin, that summer in Illinois. The sun was still hot, in the late hours of the afternoon, after work, in my room, in the old building, in Rock Island, down by the banks of the Mississippi River.

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

Now I sit in the sun in the Northwest, thinking of moving back to my adult hometown, called Frisco, by those who don't live there, and the sun conjures images of drinking gin, in my third floor room in the dilapidated house, in the town next to the town where I was born.

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

This time, I don't need the gin. The warmth of the sun stirs the feeling I'm happy to feel. It doesn't make me want to drink. Instead, I become another presence of heat itself, and I'm home again. I write these stories backwards, from the image to their source. and I'm done.

Kicked Back to Sand

Four Tibetan monks spend a day making an intricate sand painting in an airport lobby, their mandala protected by a ring of velvet ropes, until a small boy runs under the flimsy barrier and kicks the painting back to sand.

The boy's mother turns to see where her boy has gone, and pulls him away, with no sign of alarm or regret.

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

Agents of the temporal run wild. What remains is the airport floor, the sand, and the earth beneath the land beneath the sky.

Sitting Bull complained to the government agent, that they were taking the sacred lands of the Sioux for their own, and the agent laughed. He cited the history of the Ojibwa, running the Sioux out of Minnesota, and the Sioux, running the Pawnee out of the Dakotas.

You may call it spiritual, he said to the old chief, *but it's nothing new, and it's certainly not sacred*. The old chief looked at the man and sighed. The slaughter of native peoples continues, until the idea becomes repugnant.

The spiritual accrues to the land beneath the rampage. And if the climate is destroyed by our abuse, the earth will survive. The folly will end, along with our temporary agency, no matter how sacred or profane we name it ours.

So Often Away in Paradise.

A poet reads her tale of Blake's wife, saying she missed her husband, *He was so often away in paradise*. This is the mythology of escape, that denies the discoverable reality.

Blake and his wife entertained spirits at their table. Together, they climbed naked in the backyard tree. This is the mythology of spiritual romance. We so habitually cloth our freedom, that our tales of it have become costume dramas.

Rumi wrote love poems to the Beloved, when his honest asides were of unnamed being. As a trained spokesman for religious others, it was customary for him to dress his bare grace in garments of glory.

The emperor of existence is absent from the clothier. How do I admire existence, if it's naked of any form, except I praise everything that might be its kingdom, in all its vast, empty wonder.

This path of praise I allow myself, is my human urge to clothe what I am, instead of showing its naked beauty. There is too much beauty in this life for these rags in words.

How Beautiful It Is

After the aloneness of the body, nothing so surprised me as the aloneness of the soul. Anything that forms a soul is alone.

The being of the soul needs another soul, like a god, to protect it from its aloneness.

Oneness is a truth and a deception. It careens in the mind, like good drugs, as true as last night's drunkenness. Sobriety destroys the kindness of the illusion of the separated soul.

Sobriety is a toxin, as sinful and adjudicated as the church runs the hiding from the truth about God. There's nothing more terrible than being alone. It is the truth. How beautiful it is to be alone.

Aloneness is the opening to having no thought of self or the self of the soul. Aloneness, in the soul, is the last refuge of the illusion of separation. How beautiful it is to be alone, to be a soul alone.

Beyond being alone, beyond being a soul, is to be in the awareness of being itself. In my being of awareness, I am no one to think myself alone. I've never been less alone. I am never alone, in this being that we are.