

The Masterpiece

A man stands
facing a painting,

And the painting draws him
into the moment of his being alive.

Something happens,
outside memory and meaning,

He feels caught between praying
and making love.

If he calls the painting a masterpiece,
it begins to fade into definition.

I once loved a woman
of remarkable beauty,

I watched grown men
become fools in her presence.

I wanted her to be as real
as the moment of her beauty.

I wanted to bring these
lives of magic into the real

And not remain
as something we elevate

And denigrate
beyond our reach.

When my beautiful lover left me,
the woman at the grocery said,

“You lost her, she was
too much for you.”

I agreed, and I did not agree,
Instead, I saw her as one,

Like the rest of us,
who struggle

To accept the moment
of our beauty

As an expression
of our common reality.

With no other path
open to her

She pursued herself
as a career,

To make of her beauty
a profession.

This is what happens
to masterpieces.

Each of us is a masterpiece,
when we do nothing

To give ourselves
a name or a definition.

This Page, This Empty Stage

This page, this empty stage,
is a revelation of nature,

A place for the awareness
of life to be true to itself.

When I surrender to this life,
I become clear in my surrender,

But my unhooked thoughts
try to regain their grip.

Disturbing and delightful
thoughts move through,

Like steady rain on the wind
on the glass.

My incessant mind wants my
attention on the idea of love,

Where even the possibility of love
becomes another thought,

The way one carries the thought
of a new or an old love,

Until one lets go of
the very thought of love.

The Decoration of the Wind

We know our thoughts,
like breezes, cool and warm,

Like gusts and gales,
like creatures of the wind,

Until this constant,
blowing wind

Becomes the element
we inhabit,

Until every activity becomes
the decoration of the wind.

Whatever I have
within my mind

Becomes a part
of the wind,

And when I come in
out of the wind,

I bring the wind
with me,

And the wind
in the trees

Becomes the wind
in my eyes.

The wind blows
kindness from care,

Complacency
from serenity,

Until I discover
a fierce tranquility,

Or I lift my feet
and succumb to the wind.

The wind blows,

Until it seems intentional,
as if it has a will of its own,

But the wind
has no designs on my life.

I respond to the wind,

Until I give it
my fears and desires.

Claiming my thoughts and
feelings as being who I am

Is calling the wind
by a name.

I have nothing to hold,
nothing to hold onto,

And no way to hold
what can't be held.

And when the wind relents,
and when the air is calm,

I rest in the peace
of my windless being.

The wind is known
for its comings and goings,

But this silent windhouse
is my home.

And when I step out of
the dance of identification,

I see I am blown alive
in this windless being.

Living a Life

I see I'm nothing
but one living a life,

And a wind has blown
through the generations,

From the beginning
to this confluence

Of forming words
to an expression.

I speak in the voice
of this nameless energy,

That appears

In our communal parade
of character and characters.

To Let Go

To let go of our common
commitment to definition,

Feels like a betrayal,

Even when its definition
is counterfeit,

Even when
every word I speak,

In this masquerade of language,
compounds the deception.

I cling to these approximations,

But something of nothing
cuts through the charade,

Until I am the voice of stillness,

Until stillness plays
in every word I speak.

This Dramatic Life

In this dramatic life,
I grieve the loss

Of one I imagined
to be a part of my heart.

And when I hold onto my loss,
the thought of loss

Dominates the awareness
that frees my heart.

And when I resist
the transience of this life,

I become my own
temporary façade.

I'm drawn to these façades
like a dramatic pleasure.

And when I sit in agitation
and imagine the nearness of peace,

And when I neglect the awareness
that would ease my agitation,

I grip my pain
and pleasure

In the same fist
that blocks my freedom.

Imagined Freedom

The imagined
freedom of love

Soothes my pain
and feeds my pleasure,

Until I love this drama

Of neglected awareness
and postponed freedom,

This moviemaking life,
this film of reality.

Desperate Dreams

I love my desperate dreams,

The way I care for characters
caught in terrible circumstance.

This engagement
binds my love of the theater,

And when I step out of the theater,
I engage my love of relief,

Just as when any fiction
ends its imaginary existence.

Rebelling at the thought
of freedom, my mind says,

"You will die without these
things you think you need."

Freedom sounds foolish
in the mind addicted to itself,

But the drama
of life and death

Is a shadow show.

In Love With Light

In love with light,
I wrap myself in shadow.

I sit in shadow
and love the light,

Until I walk out of
the contract of thought,

This belief school,

These ideas I hold close,
that soothe and savage my life.

My mind tells me

I am another example
of the failure of the mind,

This is the kind of thinking
the mind enjoys,

My mind tells me
I am the deceiver,

The deceived,
and the deception,

Bound together in the way
we are all human.

The Contract of Unbroken Illusion

To break the contract
of unbroken illusion

Makes me a traitor
to my history.

And if dropping out
of the shadow school

Is as difficult as it seems,
how can I recommend it,

When even among those
who are committed to it,

Clarity seems
arduously attained.

This is another message
from the mind's failure

To find freedom
in its own habits.

To stay in the shadow school
dims the light,

Yet even when
I don't know peace,

Even when peace
appears as another illusion,

I may still become aware
of its reality.

My Darkest Days

Even in my
darkest days,

I've known
that darkness

Is nothing more
than darkness,

And not a sign
to deny the sun.

Everywhere light
goes looking,

It cannot find
the dark.

Love's Approximations

In the earliest days
of our human awakening,

In awe and wonder,

We dwelt in thoughts
of fear and desire,

Until the yearning to know
who and what we were,

Became the romancing of gods.

In seeking the knowledge
of being with the eternal,

In the overwhelming
romance of life itself,

I grew tired of love's
approximations.

When I see the masks
that give meaning to my life,

I see I'm more alive
in the moment

That's shed
of its meaning.

And I fall awake,

And when
I'm not awake

In the reality
that lives

Beyond illusion,
beyond meaning,

I see I'm easily misled
by the habits of my life

That cling to the habits
of all our lives.

I attend to the crowded
moments of being alive,

But when I surrender
to the unseen moment,

I stop running around myself
in anxious attendance.

I Honor the Poet

I honor the poet
who died young.

Aware
of his mortality,

He lived in pain
before he died.

He lived in the truth
of beauty,

And death
was his foil.

Yet being a poet

Is not what made him
present in his life or ours.

He stood in the nowhere
of his beauty,

And he spoke
the truth of it.

His rise from the dying
fire of his life

Was a look in and through
the eyes of eternity.

He was neither
his life nor his death,

He was their
simultaneous reality.

Destined to Die

Destined to die,
our lives are often graceless.

We want to invest them
with grace and survival.

We want eternity
to be our safeguard,

And we hope to fashion
a fine mask of a life,

Until we discover the making
of masks does not save us,

Even when we divine
a mask of eternity.

I forgive myself for dying,

When I live in the identical
moment of life and death,

I forgive my fear and desire,

When I see myself thrive
in the stillness

That seems to deny
my life's definition.

When My Lover Leaves Me

*When my lover leaves me,
I'm left alone,*

*Grateful for the love
that lives in itself.*

This has been my expression,
and I have no more use for it.

Before, on such an occasion,
I might have gotten drunk,

A clumsy expression
of the romance of the body,

Camouflage

For the fear of facing myself,
alone in an empty universe.

Now I live past these addictions
and the romance of their uses,

Past the romance of love
and the love of romance,

Neither in love's memory
nor its anticipation.

I let go of balancing the imbalance
of life as something to be done.

Whatever is done in doing,
is done and undone,

Until nothing is left
to be done but nothing itself.

I discover I'm free
in this nothing doing,

Not the nothing that is
the absence of something,

But the nothing that is
the presence of everything.

Human Beings

As human beings, in the first
shock of our awakening selves,

We fell in love with
the workings of the mind,

This curious separation
from everything seen and unseen,

This demanding desire to unite
with everything seen and unseen.

I have lived in a mind
that thrives

In the play of its
enticing fragments,

Until I fell in the fear
that I was alone,

Until I fell through fear,
through terror,

Into the abyss
of my own being,

Until I fell into the peace
that thrives in the vast emptiness,

That is the indescribable
fullness of life itself.

Accustomed to Living

Accustomed to living

As the physical child
of physical others,

We create structure
where no structure exists.

Hello mother,
hello father.

We want life
to have meaning,

Until meaning becomes
greater than life itself.

As a child of meaning,

I saw that even knowing
my life at its essence

Did nothing to free me
of the compulsion

To romance my reality.

Until the romancing
of my existence

Became my personal
pillar of meaning.

I saw nothing upon
which to found my life,

So I founded my life
on something of nothing,

As if formless existence
might give me meaning.

I shaped nothingness
to my liking,

We have named
this selfless self a soul.

I Became a Hero

I became a hero
of concentrated emptiness,

I lived in the fullness
of my empty being,

As a rich, romantic reality.

I kept a meaning
of meaninglessness,

I allowed myself
a spiritual version of the real.

And my mind stayed at play,
always a thing in everything.

The Thought of No Thought

I joined the thought of no thought,

Where there's no one present
to have the thought of no thought,

Where there's no one to witness
the absence of thought,

No one, except this
glorious thing of nothing.

I became at ease
in a pretense

I might have enjoyed
for a lifetime.

I kept a self

That allowed passion,
despair, and disillusion,

With all the character of anyone
one might meet on the street.

The Thought of Soul

The thought
of self as soul,

As the invisible center
of the visible universe,

Is the placeholder
of meaning,

An attempt to match,
in heart and mind,

The deepest reality
of who we've always been,

In who we are being now,

But this selfless self
is another creature

Of the mind that believes
its beliefs are authentic,

Even when it knows
that the life of the mind

Is a bundling of gossamer.

This Dominion of Thought

This dominion of thought
and feeling is no small feat,

We've done ourselves proud,

As a self-imagining creature
of belief and sensation.

This is the romancing
of existence,

This is the romance
of naming the unnamable.

This naming has gone on
for so long,

The love of existence

Has become the love
of its definition.

Here is the book of my gods,
here is the book of my passions,

Here is the book of my thinking,
they are the same book.

Brokenhearted in Love

I have been
brokenhearted in love,

But I've never been
broken in love itself.

Love has been my fullness,
my emptiness, my narcotic,

And the face of my awakening.

I've been asleep in love,
and I've been awake in love,

Until being in love
became a haven,

A respite from disappearing
in this unnamable reality.

Why should I go any deeper
in this reality, when all is love?

The eye of the hurricane
has been my home,

But I am the eye of the storm,
and I am the storm,

I refuse any refuge
from this reality.

I Lie in Stillness

One man
lay on the ground

To discover
what happens

In the death
of the body.

I lie in stillness
to see what happens

In the death
of the approximating mind.

Despair Seeks My Character

In the absence of seeking thought
from the approximating mind,

Despair seeks my character.

In this threat
to their domain,

My thoughts work
to convince me

That I am the same
as my life's despair,

But I am not the despair
that occurs in this moment,

I am the moment
in which my life occurs.

Every Mother

Every mother
is the first other,

Every mother is the one
who first bonds us

To a life of union
and separation.

Every mother's death

Reveals the bonds
of fear and desire.

Whenever anyone close dies,
or goes away, one may despair,

Until the loss of all relationship
finds its simultaneous desolation.

I despair in the death
of my love of this life,

I despair in the death
of my love of this being,

I despair in the death
of my love of the world,

I despair in the death
of my love of love itself.

But I am that one
who is no longer here

To anchor my thoughts
of love and fear.

I am what remains,

No longer anchored
in the thought of the other,

Or the thought of the soul,
that imagined other within,

That selfless self I conceived,
as a way of loving this existence.

This is the release
of the romancing of reality.

This Imagination of Love

This imagination of love
is the source of love's despair,

When there's no need to bind
what's inherently bound.

I have lived in the thrill
of thinking myself a lover,

Of being thought a lover,

of acting a lover,

And there is no more need
for this feint of the real.

Now, unheld in love,

I discover I am the same as
this love I take joy in holding,

As if it were
a passing thing,

But this reality
does not come and go.

Whoever has lost a love may
transcend these transient realities.

I accept this despair,

To see the fullness that is
greater than any loss.

I stay in this
unknowable reality,

To see the separation

That appears between
these forms of love.

I stay, to see
these forms disappear,

I stay, to see
separation disappear,

I stay, to see
distance disappear,

I stay, to see
myself disappear,

I stay, to see
disappearance disappear.

We Are Wise

We are wise
to listen to the wise,

Until we leave
the wise behind,

To go into the unknown the wise
can only describe from a distance.

We know the lush and dangerous
wilderness of our existence,

Even if we never
trek to its heart.

An Old Poet

An old poet

Tells of his time as a monk,
where the rigors of training

Are designed to break the young
of the bonds of the mind.

He discovers his aging
has done the work for him.

Nothing is seen
as clearly in the mind,

As when the mind
no longer holds it.

I stay in the
awareness of thought,

Until I'm no longer
seduced by its habits.

I stay in the mind,
until I feel the ground

Beneath its construction,
fall away.

I stay in the heart of love,

Until I release romance
from the habits of my mind.

I stay in what remains,

Until romance
becomes its occasion,

And not love's
uncertain authority.

The End of Travel

Knowing where I come from
is not the end of travel.

Being free
of the mind's romance

Is not the same
as being sent to a Gulag.

I don't love any hero,
any god, any lover, any less,

For setting them free
from the romance of reality.

Instead, I live in this wider reality
that includes them all.

I am not water,
I am not movement,

I am not the course
of my flow,

I am not the shadow
of my stream,

I am their occasion,
I am their energy.

I am the being
of this awareness,

I am the awareness
of this being.

My Favorite Sugar

I stop eating my favorite sugar,
and when I stop one thing,

I think something else
needs to take its place,

But there's nothing here in this
desert, this jungle, this crowded city,

To take the place of my entirety.

Godot has come and gone,
being is without borders,

Love leads nowhere
but to itself.

Beyond the undefined,
lies more of the undefined.

This is what's so disconcerting
about awareness,

It has no walls
to define it,

This freedom
contains no containment.

Letting go of sugar
is not a call for more sugar,

Or bitterness, or a bland diet,
without taste.

Whatever my sugar is,
it speaks of paradise,

It guarantees my seat
on the plane,

Until I discover myself,
living at my destination.

Waking up in paradise
is a disappointment to the airlines.

After living in the heart
of romance,

Now I live here.

Now, familiarity is gone from
everything I once thought familiar.

Without its romantic cast,
I lose the play of filtered light,

Sight becomes vision,
with no division between.

I Took a Trip to a Foreign Land

I took a trip to a foreign land,
it was magical.

I went a second time,
it was real.

I prefer the real,

But I might have denied it,
that first time,

Romance is a dance
that doesn't seem false.

Romance makes
the familiar miraculous

And the miraculous
familiar.

This reality comes dressed
as everything and nothing,

I drank espresso in Progreso.

Unconfined to the miraculous
or the familiar,

The real is randomly terrifying
and unbearably beautiful.

I climbed the pyramids.

In This Theatre of Life

In this theatre of life,
I see other dramatic characters,

Dancing, singing, loving, hating,
fighting, killing themselves and others,

Being born, dying,
accepting and denying life.

I see characters, true and false,
in fear and passion,

Acting in and out of control,
fully alive in their being,

Before and after thinking begins.

My character
has form and substance,

Yet without a body,
costume, and language,

Nothing seems to be
holding up my performance.

An Empty Chair

I sit in an empty chair,

I see the trunk of a body,
I see arms and legs,

I hear the resonance
and echo of a voice.

Out of my mouth

Comes the call of kings,
and I become a king,

I hear a cry,

And I become a naked baby
on a dark highway.

The roar of the crowd
makes me a hero or a villain.

I sing the voices in my throat,
there seems no end to them.

Someone Enters

Someone enters
through a door,

There's a picture
on the wall.

Since I am none
of what I appear to be,

I'm free to be who I am,
in the most congenial way,

Walking
across the floor.

I See Characters

I see characters
come to the stage,

Who run the gamut
of thoughts, emotions,

Intimacy and idiocy.

I hear a clock
ticking.

I speak of reality,
and I remain no one,

Wearing a new jacket.

I Want to Know

I want to know the script
and what happens next,

I look across the footlights,
and my throat constricts.

There's stage fright
in being born human.

I become fearful
of the empty, silent stage.

I want to know
where I should stand,

And what my role
should be.

I tighten my belt.

I want to learn the comings
and goings of the other players,

I want to learn their lines and mine.

We greet each other,
I become one in their company.

Here's the director's chair,
I write, direct, and perform my part.

I stammer, when I can't
remember my lines.

I posture, I hold forth,
and when I'm speechless,

I become an extra,
holding a spear,

I fade into
the background,

I come to the front,
I tear at the scenery,

I topple the walls,
I rip out the seats,

I try to find the meaning
of my words and actions,

Yet nothing I do or say changes
the state of my awareness.

Conscious and Aware

I sit in my chair,
conscious and aware,

Witness
to the unfolding reality.

I comb my hair.

I am the essence
of my appearance,

Yet this appearance
is not mine.

I cannot find
my place on the stage,

Yet nothing of who I am
is out of character.

I cannot be
misunderstood.

I put my book down,

Something
tells the truth.

I remain on stage.

I become this art,
until I am this art,

Until nothing
surpasses the theatre

Of there being
no theatre.

I Create a Depiction

I create a depiction
of my reality,

Knowing nothing
can demonstrate what is,

But everything does.

I take a bow.

There is nothing
that does not reveal what is,

Yet I cannot tell it,

Without becoming its
unnecessary salesman.

I hear music.

I Claim this Space

I claim this space,
empty of my presence,

Yet I speak
as if I am present.

I am sound
in a shape

That composes
a soliloquy

To its own
empty reality.

I take heart
in the disappearance

Of what makes itself
seen and heard.

I hold out my empty hands.

I shout, "I am not here!"
I whisper, "Here I am."

I shout, "Here I am!"
I whisper, "I am not here."

I speak to the furthest reaches
of this empty space.

This is a big theatre,

All fall down.

My Head Swirls

My head
swirls with thoughts,

When no-thought
is thought's origin,

No-thought populates
my thinking,

No-man inhabits
my body,

No-stage supports
my performance,

No-universe stretches
to the limits of my being.

This Man

This man, born a boy
to parents in Illinois,

Is the same one
who appears on this stage,

Speaking to nothing and no one,
to everything and everyone.

We talk together, so our hearts
may commune with each other,

So our common being
may commune with itself.

This one that I am, who says
there is no one present,

Is the same one who appears
in place of his emptiness.

It is what we do.

The Art

The art that
frames me human

Is the same art
that reveals me artless.

In the art
of this artless being,

A voice comes
out of the darkness,

*Everyone is naked
and dancing all the time.*

I Dance

I dance this naked dance
every day, every night,

I go to sleep,
and yet I live,

I stop thinking,
and yet I live,

I give up my life,
and yet I live,

I am asleep
and awake

At the same time.

Everyone knows
this pain,

Everyone lives
this love,

Everyone is naked
and dancing, all the time.