

Matisse in LA

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

Matisse painted the outdoors from indoors
through windows and without windows

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

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

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

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

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

Spring Comes in the Fall

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

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

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

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

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

Living As a Genius

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

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

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

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

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

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

Being Safe in Unsafe Being

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

Good Paper

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

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

The Nucleotide Rushes In

Noel discusses single nucleotide polymorphisms

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

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

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

Preparing for the Revolution

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

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

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

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

The Raven's Song

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

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

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

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

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

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

Living a Posthumous Existence

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

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

The Sleeping Fish

Longing is the word for longing
rain stands in for rain

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

Like *tutto*

My hand lies across my lap like a sleeping
it leaps

Advertisement on a Wall

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

Read my heart

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

Read my heart

See the world

A Detective Story

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

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

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

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

My tongue is sleeping alone these days

My Feet Hurt

There's a mist
of fatigue at eye level

My feet hurt

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

My feet hurt

The mist of fatigue
will lift in a few hours

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

My feet hurt

Nest in the Air

I open my mouth before
there is anything to say

Small birds fly in nest and
fly out with their young

Still there is nothing to say

I keep my mouth shut
and eagles nest in the air

A New Leaf

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

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

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

Her Beautiful Hands

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

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

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

The Elizabethans believed that bodily
humors were processed in the liver

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

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

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

A Portrait of the Mona Lisa

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

Warm Pool of Happiness

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

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

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

The Shadows Around the Heart

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

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

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

Looking from the shadows
makes the light seem painful

Embraced by a Fingertip

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

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

In Zoca before the Fall

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

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

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

An Unsuspecting Coconut

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

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

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

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

In the Margins of the Truth

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

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

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

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

My Paraffin Heart

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

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

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

Mirabile Dictu

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

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

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

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

The Underlying Truth

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

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

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

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

In the Advantage of My Soul

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

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

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

I write a poem in the way
of being not alone

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

As I give my words
I give my word

A Case of Vertigo

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

Illness Lingers

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

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

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

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

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

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

Waiting Room

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

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

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

The Desperate Device

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

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

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

The Old Poet's Eyes

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

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

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

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

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

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

Welcome to the Vast Pacific

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

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

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

In the Throat of the Hurricane

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

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

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

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

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

Divine Terror

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

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

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

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

The One I Love Best

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

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

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

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

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