

This Brevity

I awaken
to this brevity,

Where nothing occurs
but all of life itself,

Where even
this awareness

Is caught in the vice
of occurring twice.

Twice I breathe,
in every breath,

Once for the wind,
and once for life.

I imagine her coming,
she's on her way,

I look at every car,
not in hoary anticipation,

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 in life,

One toward surrender
in patient peace,

The other, toward
the pettiest of fears,

This pulling apart pulls
parts from the center,

That reveals
the center more clear,

Than what's been
cleared away.

These Outside Things

A child sits
with his parents,

Unaware of the
calculations they make,

To orchestrate his life

Into the perfect future
and the glorified past,

He's too busy
consuming the universe

That's just arrived
in his eyes.

I used to get on
the road and drive,

To remember who I was,
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 what isn't blown away
or found to be useless.

My family drove to the mountains
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 roller coasters

Were bright colors
against the night sky,

And everything beyond my
heartbeat was wiped away.

Being as a child is not simply
being what came before,

But being what remains,
when all has been removed.

I might think my innocent heart
resides in memory or artifact,

Like certain scenery,

But the resonant reality,
of being as a child,

Is the undercurrent
that first found its place

In these outside things
of wonder and beauty.

Desire of the Homeless

Desire
comes on me

Like a storm from behind,
like a bear at my back,

And gives me too much power
where I don't need it.

I look at the curve
of her breast,

And I lose interest
in the love we all inhabit,

That I leave to gather up
desires, doubts, and fears,

Destination is the ambition
of the habitually homeless.

Driving down a certain
street in my hometown,

The overhanging trees made it
seem a tunnel to somewhere.

I didn't care that I emerged
at a familiar intersection,

With no thought of having
arrived anywhere different.

I cared only that for a time,
I forgot about destination,

On a journey of joy
without desire.

Something of a Third

When one touches
a brush of color

To another color, when
both colors are wet,

Something of a third
takes place.

When we are wet
with each other,

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 question of intimacy.

Are we intimates of the spirit
or intimates of the flesh,

And why are we not intimates
in all our ways of being?

We're together,

Not as one, or one of two,
but as something of a third.

Together, our separate parts
lose their designation,

Yet, in the habits of our lives,
we avoid the thing we barely seek.

The Memory of Feeling

What occurs,
in the memory of feeling,

Is a sense of color and
shape in similar scenes,

An amber cube of history,
the spine of a leaf,

An apartment in summer,
a rain wet street,

This redundant,
emotional coloring.

My emotional heart
wants more film

To be made of the past
that blurs the present,

When what keeps us apart
is the film in our eyes.

I love the romance of the
pictures that populate my mind,

And I love the reality I witness
in seeing their disappearance.

The grace of these accounts
is not their shape and color,

But the invention of occasion
from the heart of vision.

I create from my history
and the unknown of who I am,

There is no true love

But what comes unseen,
into sight..

Sweet Sorrow

One can vacate oneself,
and what one leaves behind

Has to carry on,
a determined ghost.

Time stretches absence
to a presence,

Even as stillness welcomes
anything lost or unfound.

Absence
occupies stillness,

Like a specter
that spoils the calm,

I attach fear to my
sense of absence,

And my love seems
gone forever,

When I'm the one
who turns absence

To an occupation
of eternity.

The Deepest Peace

I fall into
the deepest peace,

Or I chase the object
of my fear.

My invention
of absent love

Shows me a perpetrator
of this abuse,

Encouraged by my attraction
to the occupation of sorrow.

The absence I cling to,
is one way I go

Away from who I am,
even when I'm at peace.

Absence is absinthe,
drugging sobriety

With the delusion
of the other,

I hold onto the presence
of the absence that pains me,

I hold the pain
like an old lover.

I look into the heart
of this sadness,

And it vanishes
like a ghost in the light.

Everywhere light goes looking,
it cannot find the dark.

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 the poem 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,

Where have you been?
What took you so long?

I dive and float at ease
on a sea of love,

Wishing I knew
how to swim.

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 several
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
And 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 of their
presence was gone.

The change in the room was palpable,
after the challenge had departed,

Like those breathing
a sigh of relief,

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 caught in the presence
of too much beauty

Has nothing to do
with the duties of men,

Or the fire in the blood,

The competition for female elk,
or the fantasies of lonely drunks.

It has to do with one who
fears to look in the face

Of his own existence,

When it might reveal
too much about who he is,

As if he might be looking
in the face of God,

Or a mirror without glass.

The Wind Bends Things

Our coming together occurs
in moments of vulnerability,

Not in the passion
of our bodies.

I can hardly bear
the sadness of this love,

As I inch toward its surrender,
tasting, along the way,

The entire fruit,
skin and pulp,

Seed and stem,
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 see how
the wind works,

Bathing everything
in its uncaring embrace.

I might wish that love
weren't so equally

Indiscriminate
as the elements,

But it comes up in me from
somewhere I don't know,

It comes down on me from
somewhere I don't know,

And it makes me part of
everywhere it's ever been.

This sadness is one way I am
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,

Without one step
across the jamb.

We speak 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 yet, on the verge
of the thing we desire most,

We hold back, mocking
our love of being in love,

We anticipate the leap, 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.

This Naked Life

Three preachers,
one in his Hawaiian shirt,

One in his T-shirt and ball cap,
the third with a pot belly,

Take a table and talk,
the same as all of us,

When our talk might be what
could be, between any of us,

The inside out of the soul.

The leavening of our terror,
the encouragement of our joy.

Grace is not a way of dress
or a chosen profession,

There is no particular honor in
waiting out this clumsy, naked life,

No special pride in being
left alone with eternity.

I walk through these roses
and thorns, until there is

Nothing left to complain about,
nothing left to praise.

The god of these men
is empty of speech,

And his words
are someone else's.

We've all been invited
to this primal realization,

For longer than
we've been alive.

A Likewise Lethal Love

I miss what I've
never fully known,

A certain reality
I call tender,

A way of being
I call cherishing,

A brave vulnerability
I call loving,

Beyond what I call
being in love.

I want to give up the
ghost of my sanctity,

And trust another with
a likewise lethal reality.

If I enter into love, in this
way that threatens me,

I fear I'll be killed by love,
but living in 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 when I feared
I loved too well, or not at all.

I've loved, I've been lost in love,
and I've been found in the loss,

I seek to be found again, after
desire and the loss of desire

Have been lost for good.

We talk like ascetic saints,
like incipient lovers,

We tell each other
how afraid we are

Of where we so
gracefully go.

And it's too late to say
I still love the darkness.

The Glare of Astonishment

We love each other in the
glare of our astonishment,

With no relief from the brilliant
focus of how we are together.

There's respite
in who we might be,

If we allow ourselves to stay
in the shade of our fulfillment.

Instead, we use
time apart

To buffer the blows
of unrelenting wonder,

Afraid love will be exhausted
by its constant presence.

We fear that too much beauty,
too much happiness, will ruin us,

I make the case for love,

Yet I fear I won't
survive its presence,

There's wonder
I'm afraid to lose,

In the brilliant presence
of its reality.

The Leviathan

I live as a physical man,

Not as a thing to be seen
from the outside,

But as something
occurring on the inside.

When Imaginary Jesus
came down from the hills,

An allusion to the time
of his awakening,

He played dice with the boys
and kidded with the Marys.

He turned water to wine
and wine to water,

Until he was reminded
of his passion.

It was a lapse
that no one forgot,

And when he died, almost
everyone stayed away.

I have no grasp of
the eternal, it has me,

I enter it, the way love enters,
and there's no escape.

Love convinces me
of its presence,

As I'm convinced of
my own, I can't leave it,

I see the beauties of the world
and the imagined ones, too,

And my eyes
stay in my head.

When I see beauty in my sight,
insight tells me to take it in,

But beauty has already
overtaken me from the inside,

"Breathe, breathe," I tell myself,
the leviathan needs the wind.

Escaping Gravity

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
plays in the market.

The singer sings of someone
he saw on the street,

A figure of transformation,
beyond the life of the town.

In his song, a local woman is
described in mythic language,

Caught between transfiguration
and the gravity of society.

What holds me down
is not cruel or evil,

But slowly tightening
wires on a tree,

And the tree doesn't know it's
becoming a decorative grotesquerie.

Home from the land
of my keenest awareness,

I assumed I could live
the same, here,

But I watched as my
joy became a smile,

Then a protected glance,
then a kind of reserve.

There is such gravity in our
belonging to each other,

We risk losing
what's ours to give,

Gravity's embrace
holds me close,

Even Icarus came
from somewhere,

His dream of flight
lifted him above his place,

But his dream
warns of his fall.

The singer ended his song
with the sop that the sight

Of his living muse was
but a passing fantasy,

Everyone listening went
on about their day,

Delighted by something,
that rose above nothing,

For a moment
in passing.

The Empty Hedonism of Distance

She lay on the couch
like a half-naked Maja.

It was difficult to accept,
without any sign,

Beyond what felt
like the gentle slight

Of her appreciation
and admiration,

She was laid up
with unexplained pain.

Her body glistening in
the stifling summer heat.

She became loud with the
sounds of distance-making,

The way children know how
to cry to ward off attackers

They can't protect
themselves from.

She told of a man who tried
to entice her to his life,

She held her ground,
until she became

Part of a life that
wasn't part of his.

I said I didn't care, anymore, to be
living in the intoxicating imbalance.

Like letting go of water
falling through my fingers,

I opened my empty hands.

The Indifference of Wonder

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

The sun in a silver Mercedes,
a dozen stars in a gray Chrysler,

The night sky in a blue Ford,
a Milky Way of reflected light.

Small galaxies glide by on the arterial,
with shooting stars on the freeway.

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

Wonder itself is the black night sky,
behind the eyes, not the blur of lights.

I bring myself to wonder, I am
the sun of my own 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 or changes.

In the center of this being here,
no matter how bright or dark,

is the unending light that thrives in
the constant indifference of wonder.

The Commotion of Intangible Love

All bliss passes to
what's ordinary and real.

Despite my love for the fickle muse,
I trust what's always here, always true.

The objects of my attention, the icons
of my passion, fade to what's real.

A Catholic priest told his teacher,

*After twenty years of devotion
to the recognition of being itself,*

*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.*

And his teacher said, *Be as you are.*

Another teacher, who taught the
practice of faith without form,

Cried when he spoke of the god of his
faith, he couldn't forget the love he felt,

Living in the spirit, in a man's body,
my heart's in league with the flesh,

And my heart is bound to the spirit,
there's no way out of this duality,

This loss, this illusion, this disillusion,
we experience in so many ways.

I fall back in simple stillness,

Where there is no commotion
between tangible and intangible love.

The Dancing Girls of the Buddha

I never had as personal a god
as my love of the other,

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 personal failure.

The love of a woman, became
the face of my essential love,

And yet I sought to see love
more clearly, to see love

I sought to see love in life itself,

Warned of Buddha's
dreams of dancing girls,

That came to him even
after his enlightenment,

I continued to seek a woman
as the heart of my inspiration.

In my failure to find what I sought,
I no longer feel any familiar burst

Of freedom from the pursuit,
or the willingness to seek another.

I dance with love itself, and leave
the dancing girls to be as they are,

My passion is left
to dance on its own.

The Ruling Classes of the Soul

My curiosity has always
been to see if the truth,

Promised by my old religion,
was to be trusted,

Or if its beliefs and rituals
were merely in place

For the sake of the
ruling classes of the soul.

This is the challenge with
poetry's miracles, as well,

To live inside the brilliance
of a particular set of cells,

To witness the deepest
intimacy, first hand,

To speak from the center one's
civilized self circles at a distance.

One discovers there are no
ruling classes, no beliefs, no rituals,

In those who step over
the bounds of thought

Into the farthest reaches
of this endless reality.

The Peace That Has No Biography

A window, jutting out
from the upper story,

Was the only access to
the dormer I sought to paint.

I stood on a stool from the attic,
and stepped onto the sleek metal roof,

With screw-heads for a foothold,
to find a way to reach the inaccessible.

I had tied a rope to a tree
on the far side of the house.

And threw it over the roof,
so it lay next to the dormer,

I tied a stepladder to the rope, to stand on,
with one foot on top of the ladder,

I lay flat on the slanted blue roof,
stretched out, and reached to paint,

But when I moved my foot,
the ladder slipped,

Fear might have overtaken me,
but nothing of fear came.

I glanced at my footing and
cleaned the spill with a rag.

I was overridden
by what did not happen.

And I felt the perfect nothing of
the peace that has no biography.

Nearly Dumbfounded

My visa needed renewal,
after a week of rain.

I went to the magistrate's office,
in a new building, unfinished for years,

I saw standing water in the hallways,
business-as-usual in a surreal landscape.

The building was crowded, with offices
piled high with papers, floor to ceiling,

The Indian lawyer was talking and
laughing with a man from Africa.

He took my visa and put it aside,
he may have wanted baksheesh,

But I wasn't versed in the
protocol of civil bribery.

After more conversation between the
two, he held my passport and laughed,

He opened and stamped it,
all the time, laughing.

And I left, thanking
him several times,

Namaste, namaste,
down four flights of stairs,

Laughter ringing in the halls,
through pools of water,

Out into the bright sun
in the crowded street.

On the first days of teaching,
after thirty years away,

My brain is stacked, floor
to ceiling, with papers,

It's odd, being a poet with
a job, even in academia.

Reading as a poet at a
political rally in the 70s,

It seemed strange to read
poems as a call to action,

When poetry brings
everything to a halt,

And then, maybe,
something might open.

*"Start slowly,
slow down, stop,"*

I tell myself, *"Now, you're
getting somewhere."*

The assistant warden asked if I was
going to read anything subversive

In the Prison Writer's Workshop.

*A few poems, I said, thinking, There's
nothing more subversive than poetry.*

The brilliant sun cuts the air
from its complacency.

I have no choice in this surrender,

There's a reason for everything,
and in everything, there is no reason.

I Wince at Invisible Injuries

I feel the pinch of loneliness,
when I'm not open

To the aloneness
that fills me.

Fear suffuses identity, until
identity does the same to fear,

A man in his contentment,
may seem self-satisfied,

Like the drunkard's
momentary bliss,

We don't trust every
version of serenity,

We laud its virtue, but
discontent is the norm.

The shadow of separation
is the master of imagination.

I feel attached to
what feels torn away,

I wince at invisible injuries.

In a Gathering of Confessors

In a gathering of confessors,
one man drones on,

Another speaks
his comfortable belief,

Another speaks
a kind of reassurance.

A fourth risks the terror
of meeting his unseen self,

The public lie of his life
is not his undoing,

But the private lie
of his secret pain is.

His path is one way to
the clearing called grace,

Where a heart clogged
with grand mal seizures,

Becomes a heart set
free in its own expanse.

This Fearful Naked Constancy

In the telling of fears
in the company of others,

We find comfort in the
prospect of living beyond fear.

Or a reason to remain secure in the
embrace of commonly held fear.

Willingness, for the worst to
occur, is a path to freedom,

Or it's a home away from
the deepest part of the heart.

Some dreamers live in dreams
and dream of still more dreams,

Some live in the absence of dreams,
some dreamers live in broken dreams,

Some live in a shattered dreamscape
of what can no longer be.

Some dreamers invent
a haven on earth,

A place to live with
bad things happening,

Freedom terrifies,
when unprotected dreams

Come true or die, in a
fearful, naked constancy.

In the Quiet Windless Aftermath

After the hurricane between
us, I walk among the ruins,

Looking for reminders of the possible,
I find traces of the love that remains

In the quiet, windless aftermath,

A startled survivor, whose flown with
the cows and the roofs and the cars.

With the airborne flotsam
and jetsam on the ground,

I find myself, as if dropped
from the sky, intact.

I stand where walls, ceilings
and floors once were,

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,

What remains has the solidity of what's
within, closer to nature than anything

That might be salvaged
from its separated parts.

Riding the Trees in Morgan Park

On the way to school,
we walked through woods,

A stream running its length,
in the middle of town.

Wild to our eyes, we
couldn't see the houses,

Young boys, we rode
the trees to the ground.

The stream was banked with
saplings as thick as our grip,

We'd climb the trees, and
our weight 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, alone,

A tree might have
flung us into space,

If we were strong enough
to bend it far enough,

There was no attempt
to learn or know anything.

When Robert Frost stops by
woods on a snowy evening,

Does one imagine
the old poet in the buggy,

Or is it the reader, or
the silence of winter?

I am nowhere in my story,

Like all readers, I walk its path,
I climb its tree, and I 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,

The perfect excuse to run
home and change clothes,

To fly out of the house on a run,
with no excuse but childhood.

Early wisdom learned
to pick the tree

That matched
its resilient resolve

To the bravado of the not
yet grown, sapling to sapling.

Contestants of strength,
riding a whip,

Conquering a bow
with an arrow,

To reach 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 timeless moment,
bent to its breaking point.

We Drove into Kansas

When I step out
in front of myself,

I see how far I've come,

I once barely
stood by my side,

I have often stood
apart from myself,

I think of the father
I never saw,

Who's here now
in the one I am.

We drove into Kansas
when I was a boy,

He took me with him on a 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 a tree, standing on
a hill, in a copse of elm.

I wanted to dive into
his body and be him,

But I was his passenger,
his boy, his son, his blood,

Learning the brilliant
isolation of the heart.

Now I long for the arms
of a man, long dead,

A man, never as alive
to me, as I dreamed him,

Except when he lay
on the living room floor.

A fallen trunk, we three
boys crawled over him,

And when he stood, he let us
climb his body like an oak.

We laughed until we cried,

These tears are his,
this heaving chest is his,

This love is his.

I want the arms of a man I loved,
who loved me, to be my arms.

I climbed inside the biggest tree
in a small town in Kansas,

Years later, I wanted
to buy the town,

I was sure
it was for sale.

A Whisper in the Cacophony

Trees, barren of leaves,
with 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 art,
poets speak spirit in words,

But language is cruel in its
stripping of the leaves,

And generous when it
reveals what remains.

Still, there's no resolution sharp
enough to make anything finally known.

The skyward lines the mesh of lines,
the still wafting lines. begin to sing,

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
and the company of others.

Spirit binds the branches,
like fresh paint on bare canvas,

In a warm room, the view
is still, on a windless day.

I see the lines breathe
on barren trees.

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 find it where it is.

When I don't
call another's name,

I hear the song of love
that never leaves.

In this love
I can't abandon,

I let go of the false
and faded love

Of my romantic
abandonment.

Handwriting the Mist

On this foggy day,
the calligraphy

Of the barren
trees blurs,

I accept its
washed-out beauty.

The only lover
left on this island

Is my own self,
inside love itself.

The fog

Fills the branches
in silent embrace,

Their lines, lost
in their everything.

The Evanescent Has No Chronicle

Shakespeare compared his
love to a summer's day,

Then erased the praise,
knowing love's transience.

His poem becomes his
love's only lasting reality,

His poem more about
death and poetry than love.

In 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 chronicles
of love are long-lasting.

The poet says his love
can't be kept or described,

But it can be clothed in words.

We can love the weave
of words in love's place.

A poem of praise to any love,
that has its substance in time,

Like the beauty of a flower,
becomes the vase of its love,

With the flower's likeness
painted on its porcelain.

We fashion totems to love,
across the distance

Between moments of
love's presence.

What we love is fleeting,
but love is not,

And we are its carrier,
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 kind
of complacency.

One step leads to a half
step, then to a stasis,

Then to a falling away
from being alive.

Let me not slide to my demise
in search of an ease.

There is a fierce tranquility
in facing adversity,

Until it becomes
a shadow of itself.

With so much pain in the world,
we don't know what to do

But complain and invent less
painful ways to end the pain.

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 place where I last saw him,

He tells me to end my concern,
that there is no good in this anxiety.

This grief and grievance has no
remedy, but it helps to call his name.

In the Circle of My Narrowing Eye

Desire gets me to an intoxication
that ignores the real.

The intoxicated vision of desire
leaves the periphery unseen,

When I might see beyond the
circle of my narrowing eye.

What acts like an insult to the other,
is a greater insult to sight.

Desire is the mask of passion
that wants to be all that passion is,

But bedrock passion
threatens the mask,

Until desire rages, from the
essential to its roiling surface.

Yeti don't go away from what I am,
even in the turbulence of my desire,

To let go of this deceit is to stand
alone, in the presence of beauty,

Without the lingering desire
for desire's entrancing eye.

An Inner Landscape

I speak of an inner landscape,
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 a thing,

To describe it into 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,
a face, not drawn, but drawn upon.

I see something large, to see it
from within, to reveal itself, real.

My unseen self
has no physical being,

But this forensics
of the unseen

Uncovers what
may seem less real,

Until what lies beneath
description,

Is lifted
into recognition.

I map the face of energy,
spirit sits for its likeness.

A mortal being,

Pulled from the muck,
cleans its face to a beauty,

And the beast of its fears
becomes a creature of courage.

We're mistaken to think we
sleep with demons and angels,

When we awaken
among ourselves.

The Second Day in Heaven

The second day in heaven
is the same as the first,

Without the same
shock of newness.

It seems impossible to believe,
the new person I was,

Or the new person I meet,
on the first day,

Is still new to me,
the day after.

Everything dies
on the second day,

Unless I let dying
die with it.

When I love someone,
and they go away,

Where does love go?

Why am I so quick
to see my love gone,

When only its object
is newly absent?

Between Small Dark Towns

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, for so long,

In such hurtful ways, he
could never 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.

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,

It fills the room
with its disappearance,

That takes the
place of everything,

That takes place within it.

The Old Dairy Building

Life is what
you expect it to be,

And then, one day, nothing is
the same, and never will be again.

My friend's gallery
burned to the ground,

Now he holds images of the current war
raging, alongside the loss of his business,

Everyday life is war time in slow time.

Home to local artisans, the old
building was a beloved landmark,

A genial gathering place of disparate
souls, engaged in their chosen work.

Firemen poured water in, from trucks,
in fat hoses, breaking the windows,

Until the roof collapsed, its
wooden beams burned for hours.

In war and everyday life,
we see death and destruction,

Relentlessly ignorant
of our worth.

Like Bullets in the Air

A friend's daughter
died too soon,

It became an endless
war of dying, everyday,

The same young woman died,
before it could be accepted,

Taken, again and again,
by cruel death, in the mind

Of her mother, who danced
on the edge of sanity.

Transient death comes and
goes, like bullets in the air,

Those who survive, live by
the gift of their breathing.

They smell the unbroken
air between the bullets,

And they breathe it in,
as deep as they can.

The Moment of Chancy Death

The random speed of war

Feeds the recognition
of arbitrary death.

Occasions of reality come
without warning or alternative.

After the second world war,
one man in the factory,

Said he was taught to kill
but not how to stop,

They swept him up, threw him in
the war, then threw him back out.

He said he loved his family,
but he couldn't feel that love,

He couldn't stop fighting, and
years later, he was still at war.

Peace is time and space
between separate deaths,

We fill the space to avoid the real,
until we live in the illusion of life.

Between wars, in no war raging,
we have the luxury to embrace

The greater peace
of our reality.

But 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 joy of existence,

It is the absence of illusion.
in the moment of chancy death.

That untimed moment
can seem the same

As this prolonged presence
of exquisite reality.

On the Mesa of America

People walk to their cars
on this mesa of America,

This flat, open vista on
the world, and drive away.

I am less alone,
in the open heart,

Than among those for whom
being alone is a burden.

A rancher, alone by habit,
belongs to his family,

His bond, heightened by his
enforced aloneness.

His family rides
the fence 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.

There's wisdom in these
windswept steppes,

I come alone to the future,
I walk to my car and drive away.

The License of Life

When I say I'm alone,
to whom do I speak,

When by the nature of
speaking, I'm not alone?

We are an exchange
of listeners,

These words are the
chronicles of stillness.

I listen to what speaks within,
to hear what's difficult to say.

To speak from silence
reveals the effort of speaking,

It betrays a similarity to those
who speak to a meaning.

We listen for the voice of listening,
we look to the eyes that witness.

To look in the world,
is to look to a purpose

To witness the world is to
receive with one's eyes.

Those who pose at peace,
practice their self-assurance,

When to witness one's own being,
is to live in the license of life.

The Calm That Caused It

The wind is at rest
at its source,

Aolis emerges
from a cave of calm.

When I'm defined
by what I become,

I fall into a turbulence
and claim its identity.

In the stillness
between breaths,

I look back and forth
across the gap,

Until I no longer distinguish
myself from either,

I fall into the center
of my unregulated being.

There's a kindness
in any room of others,

In the wind, is the
calm that caused it.

In Calm Regard

Unwilling
to show 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 our abundance,
we make need unwelcome,

Even as we attend to the
devastated and the dying.

Having no need for need
is another deprivation.

An old woman sits
with another old woman

In the quiet of their age,
and love abounds.

I see what seems
of little use,

The practice
of a quiet kindness,

Not rushing to the aid
of infirmity and weakness,

But simply being
with each other,

In calm regard.

The Calendar of Creation

The sun's glare glints and reflects,
highlights, and washes away.

The hillside loses color, burnt
away in the brightest light.

Points of fire mark the
corners of metal roofs,

People lower their brims and
reconsider their faith in destiny.

The young have time,
in the sun of their fortune,

But dwelling on destiny
washes away

The moment of life,
draining it of its color.

Having no destined day,
opens the day to itself,

Where nothing is named
by the calendar of creation.

The Praise of Present Joy

Displaced by change,
we walk out of ourselves,

Unfamiliar with what
we may become.

Or we walk in the ruins
of who we have been.

Kick us out, burn us down,
destroy the present as past,

The open moment
is closer to the bone

Than what we've
been or done.

Change hones us
to our essential selves.

Nothing of the certain is lost
in the change of destruction,

Nothing we cherish is more
or less than present,

Even when
we celebrate

What's to come
or what came before,

We let loose the praise
of present joy.

My Brother Runs Near a Sunny Beach

The ground is frozen solid,

Like ancient sheathes
of opaque facade.

Walking is a careful venture,
getting to the car, an event,

Buying food becomes calculated,
and arriving, an accomplishment.

My brother runs
near a sunny beach.

My hands tighten in a grip
like being frozen from within.

My lyrical ears want its cause
to be the absence of romantic love.

I have lived in a torment of desire,
a fire I danced around and through.

It might've been the summer sun
that heated my passion,

We are simple creatures,
in the heat of our lives.

My brother runs
near a sunny beach.

Nostrils Flare in the Vigorous Air

A mountain wind
blows in the bright sun

That gives and takes
nothing from the body,

Like being near a rocky
wall or glacial waters.

It leaves seeing things
for what they are,

With nothing in the air
to cloud the senses.

My brother's friend drove him
to a ridge above a great city,

Where years of pollution created
textures of a different beauty,

A vast panorama spread
below and beyond them,

In a valley thick with
the discharge of millions.

Look how beautiful it is, he said,

Indicating the stagnant sky
with a sweep of his arm.

The setting sun lit the canvas
of purple, red, and orange,

A conflagration of unnatural
riches for the eye's imagination.

How beautiful
is our private sky,

When no crisp wind blows
away its crowded thoughts.

In accumulated days, we thicken
ourselves to a kind of beauty,

Until even our alarms
become artfully designed,

Until nothing within what we
think we are, is strange,

I make a home in my conflicted air
for everything I think I am not.

It's a bracing wind that
blows in the brilliant sun,

That takes nothing away
from the mind or the body.

Nostrils flare in the vigorous air,
and the sky is taken anew,

For the home of beauty,
unclouded by its residue.

The Joy of Being Seen

Raised unseen, we learn to be
seen for the masks we wear.

I learned to live in the pains
and pleasures of being seen,

Not for myself, but for
what I might project.

I learned to be seen for
what I seemed to be

In the eyes of others,

Until I saw myself in the
eyes of the inherent,

Where there is no
seer and no seen.

My habit of not being seen
limits the revelation of sight,

I sought to be seen as the
unseen self I saw within,

But the unseen has no
sight in familiar eyes.

So I began to accept naked love
as the easy absence of masks,

But afraid of being seen naked,
she was unprepared to be unafraid.

The joy of being seen begins
in the terror of being seen,

No matter how thin the veil.

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,

Every tree's branches, covered
with a delicate white fur of frost,

Trees, plants, lines and wires, coated
in caverns of delicate intricacy.

There must have been a breeze
that lifted the frost to these angles.

Individual branches, coifed in white,
extend a million white wings,

Dreary history,
transformed to its beauty,

The dirty face of unbroken
cold, coated with fresh white,

Its cheeks powdered,
its charm restored.

The gravity of existence
has a greater endurance

Than all its epiphanies,
I fall in and out of love.

I blame no one for dragging
me down to my cold condition.

I retire to the unfamiliar,
to live in love's long epiphany,

To accept the spontaneity
of the endless unknown.

In Simple Grace

A barefoot worker
came to clean our rooms,

He swept the floor 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 watching him
work or witnessing

A performance for reward,
it didn't demean his station,

Instead, it undefined him
from caste or caricature.

Lifting detritus with his
long, narrow fingers,

Was not an act
of simple grace,

But simple grace,
performing an act.

It could have been any
other act in its place,

He was one in whom
grace occurred.

It lifted me
to wonder itself,

Nameless, pointless,
indescribable,

It might have seemed
picturesque

Or the telling of
another culture.

One cannot claim the
moment by describing it,

It's good to forget
all but simple grace,

Without even a graceful
thought to take its place.

I Wipe My Eyes With Words

I invite myself to my own arrival,
my eyes teach their own tears,

My shoulders shake like oxen
shed their sweat, their yoke,

I wipe my eyes with words.

I teach myself, in speaking
what I wasn't taught,

I learn, by walking into
the faith of not knowing.

My life is intent on arriving
where it's always been.

I have learned everything
my father taught me,

I've learned what he never
knew he was teaching,

I learned his unseen self,

I became the son of his failure,
I became the son of his perfection,

I wipe my eyes with words.

Pollock Was a Painter

Drinking, fucking,
fighting, painting,

Pollock was a painter,
waiting to be a painter,

He bought an artist's brush
at the artist's market,

But he tried to act like a
regular guy with his family,

Until he began to be an artist
and forgot to play either part,

The day he became a painter,
he couldn't go back to playing one,

Some might say that becoming
the one he had played at being,

Is what killed him,

We play roles akin to the reality
we scarcely recognize,

I've played the role of a lover,
living in the heart of love,

Until I became
what I approximated,

in the center of what
suddenly seems peripheral,

My becoming who I am,
the premonition of life itself,

Nothing Happens in Love

Nothing
happens in love.

A room is lifted
from its contraries,

To be set back down
in the same place,

Transcendent, its
furniture the same.

I see you the way the light
sees what it falls upon.

The trance of love plays
a surrogate for love,

Until it becomes
a way of being,

Someone says
we are love itself,

And it becomes a paradigm

Of the love we define
ourselves away from.

The pursuit of love
is a fraud for love,

Nothing occurs in love,
but love itself.

No Lover No God

I might wish there was a god
or a lover in my immediate being.

But I don't surrender who I am
for the absence of someone to love.

All day, all night,
every day, every night,

I don't surrender who I am for
the absence of another's nearness.

No god, no lover,
comes to me in the night,

No god, no lover, reassures me
or promises me better than this.

I'm left with everything
I might imagine from them,

To discover its presence,
here, in this simplicity.

I won't give up what I have, for
what I don't, no lover, no god.

There's nothing missing
in what only seems missing.

The Ascent of the Descent

Grace and gravity belong to all
of us, in our being able to speak..

The first leap in learning
is to speak from silence.

It's said that poets make
obscure what should be clear,

That truth and beauty should be
made clear, not more difficult.

A tin miner told Pablo Neruda,

"You must speak for those of us
who cannot speak for ourselves."

Neruda didn't know he
was so needed, to speak,

In the common language,
what may seem uncommon,

The telling of the untold,
the saying of the unsaid.

A poet is called to go
into the earth and return

With the beauty
and the truth of it,

In words that match
the ascent of the descent,

In words that mold
the ore to its metal,

In words that call the miner
to the heart of his own reality.

She Put Her Hand on His Head

My friend spent a day
with an old love,

To make new what had
never been made old.

The years found them
unchanged in the heart,

Brief lovers, she was
never not his friend,

A loving woman put her hand
on my back, without intent,

And I felt the bloom
of a kind of being.

What touches me,
makes my body

Less a body and
more than a body.

When a wise old man
put his hands on my face,

My losses were concluded
across the centuries.

I put my hands
on my own face,

Like the hands of the
old man who taught me,

And my hands remind me
who I am and who I'm being.

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.

Poet is a name that disappears in the
using, yet of poetry, I am its champion.

Indifferent to it, I believe there is no
greater spiritual dance than a poem.

Poetry is the science of
spirit in thought and feeling.

With no dependable theory
of evolution or construction.

The good tears itself open,
so that good is lost and found.

The Wu Li heart holds nothing in
its hands for its demons to covet.

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.*

Poetry is how I dance
free of my demons.

The clutching of ideas, and
the nonsense of my ways.

Jesus Laughed

My dancing heart won't take
direction, won't stop dancing,

It doesn't listen to advice,
all it wants to do is dance,

I plunge deep
in the heart of play,

True play has few expositors
in this world of travail and respite.

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

With no room for play in a tragic
world with comedians for relief.

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 seem

To be killed, to die,
to be reborn.

So he cried out
and continued to die,

There's no need to be born
again, to re-do the miraculous..

Being born is the sleight
of hand of existence,

My open heart is its
passionate player.

Along the River and Over the Hills

I drove south on Canyon
Road, along the river,

On a two-lane blacktop,
with no traffic,

Back over the ridge,
through stunning vistas,

Between two small towns
in the American 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 fishermen.

Separate from
the society of others,

The earth's indifference
is a blessing.

To learn myself,
the work is never done,

It is to chase a chimera,
from the abyss

Of unknowable reality
to mountains of definition,

The cliffs fall away
to the river bank.

Rolling toward Yakima, a few
miles south of Ellensburg.

Pictures of Home

Away from home, we
hang pictures of home,

Masks of peace are hung
in empty halls of separation.

I cry in simple joy when
anything calls itself home,

In grief, in pain,
in love and recognition.

I seldom went to see my mother,
and I could not be rid of her.

I finally went to see her, and she
had disappeared in my heart.

Another Man Taught by Another Man

I watched a wise man to see
if he would betray himself

As a man, taught by another
man, to believe something

From what other men
had said, a long time ago,

Or if he was true to the original
moment of his being alive.

It's an old story that what we teach
each other might be held suspect,

That what men tell other men
as the unimpeachable truth,

Straight from the godhead,
could be held to question.

*To ask, How is this not something
written by a man for a man's purposes,*

*How is this not a way to
separate us from our reality,*

*Claiming a path to our eternal
union, when we are already*

*The real of our
original reality?*

The one I questioned
pointed past all teaching

To my unteachable origin,
and I let go of doubt,

Like a gray ghost, into
the ground beneath my feet.

When the Great Actor Died

When the great actor
died, many cried,

They said he was a being
greater than himself.

When something greater
than a man inhabits a man,

We want that greatness
to live on, in the flesh.

We're not small beings, inhabited
rarely by something greater,

We're beings of great being, living 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 wide
the gates of his being.

He puts himself inside a self
larger than himself,

And the force of his
nature opens within him.

One man 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,

So he might become what
he is, within his own nature.

The great actor was no god,
he played lives conceived by others.

His own life, among those he loved,
was a turmoil of inept concern.

He came from tragic life
and begat a life no less tragic,

But the open heart of his art
unleashed the art of life itself.

His eyes had the gleam
of the undiscovered universe,

A fleeting glance of eternity,
in the look of a moment.

He let life in,
he let life out,

He was an open conduit
of life itself.

The Old Sailor Baby

His hands were small animals
he couldn't contain,

He kept pulling them
under his care,

He tried 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,
and canvas skin,

His eyes were averted
from the room.

His was a quiet curse,
that revealed a confusion,

Like a child in a giant body,
he sat by himself, nursing a beer,

We say nursing, when it was
the beer that nursed him.

Behind a woman at the store,
I held her baby's bottle,

The baby was full of milk,
on the edge of sleep,

She was heavy-lidded,
like a sliding wall of earth.

The baby's feet were
bare in the carrier,

Two big toes with eight
tiny niblets of pink skin.

She suckled with less
and less enthusiasm,

Until her tiny hands let go of
the bottle and fell into the air.

A beautiful baby,
I said to the mother,

Stepping into the warm sun
of the busy street,

And later, watching a movie, I cried.
It helps my heart to cry,

For any reason, for no reason,
To be like a baby, like a man.

The Music of the Blooded Air

On the first
hot day of the year,

Bugs jump out of their
cocoon and flood the air.

One could plant the air
and reap a harvest.

Everything competes for
space, in what gives it life,

The air is 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, comforts and caresses,

It tears at the air, so thick
with itself, it can't be torn.

We play the music of the blooded air.

In this heat, nothing is unique, the heat
lives in what lives in the heat.

I sit where I sat, a year
ago, and little 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's becoming
a rapidly receding past.

I tell myself to write the
moment's unwritable poem,

And I laugh at foolish wisdom
that fails to daunt the daring.

The Laughing Policeman

I neglected my studies, painting
at night, sleeping past noon,

And when I awoke, the president
had died, shot riding in a car.

I crossed the college commons
in an uncommon silence,

I asked a passing student and learned
the awful news, a nation wept.

That night was my first date
with my future wife, and despite

An inauspicious beginning, we both
needed a companion for adulthood,

*I'll go, if you'll go, we said,
we held hands and jumped.*

Four state cops are on a break,
one of them roars with laughter,

it's rare to hear anyone laugh with such
abandon, let alone a man in uniform,

He gurgles, coughs, cackles,
hacks, and bursts with shouts.

In Senior Shakespeare, I failed to read
the assigned Hamlet before a pop quiz,

I put my paper away, and the
professor said, "Are you taking this?"

I replied, "I'm taking it in stride,"
and none of my classmates laughed

Later, I discovered, in my reading,
the prince of my own Denmark.

No matter my words,
I won't live past my life,

The laughing policeman fills
his ears with his own laughter,

As if the circle of men
is laughing with him,

The other cops know how
to handle the familiar scene,

With grim faces, they finish
their lattes and leave.

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 was tossed with
the waves on the coast.

I thought we were married
because we danced well together,

As if everything in our marriage
would be as harmonious.

When Ophelia died, Gertrude cried,
certain she and her son would be married,

if only the King hadn't been killed.

"What are you reading?"
Polonius asks Hamlet,

"Words... words... words..."
the Prince replies.

Chased from Fear to Fire

It's the same for a still
mind to write a poem,

As it is for the
deaf to speak,

To take that first
step off the edge,

To walk in air, out
and above our history.

To begin to think,
a mechanism begins,

To speak, a noise begins,
a tinnitus of the mind,

Even at peace,
stillness reverberates,

We disturb our peace
to make ourselves known.

Dogs bark, to announce
their presence, until they sleep,

And when they awaken, they
renew their pronouncement,

Endlessly barking their being,

We bark, our presence never assured,
at peace, we need no reassurance,

We communicate our insecurities
so we may live in fear with each other,

And once begun, the mind chases itself
from fear to fire and back to fear.

A mind may make things of
beauty and truth from itself,

One hand lifts a word, and
the other hand wants to play,

This sort of thing
disturbs the peace,

And once disturbed,
it's as if peace

Can be ignored,
and ought to be.

My hands drop their
words, I drop my hands,

And fisted fear
falls away.

Twenty Years in Silence

A revered teacher spent
twenty years in silence,

Some say it was
his best teaching.

When he began to speak,
he began to be less,

So more could learn
of the stillness he knew.

All teaching is set apart
from what might be taught,

The way speaking separates itself
from what might be said,

My tongue betrays its message,
even as it proclaims it.

Once upon a time in the past,
before the past was invented,

A simple man noticed his own being,
and turned to tell the others.

They stared at him with
uncomprehending eyes,

Until he invented a tongue
with marvels born,

And enflamed hearts
danced around his fire.

I speak to quiet my noisy gift,
to let stillness into my voice,

Until I'm still, even in song.

The House Detective

The house detective sits in
the lobby of a rundown hotel,

There's little for him
to do, except he's a thief.

He steals from the guests,
and recovers just enough

To prove his worth,
and keep his job.

His room is a repository
of his swag, he doesn't care,

He thinks only of the theft,,
his satisfaction is brief.

The hotel, off the beaten path,
a shuttered nightclub on the roof,

Is populated by odd characters,
and he is one among them.

Then, one day, he is found dead,
policemen stand over his body,

Discovered in the midst
of his accumulated bounty,

The owner of the hotel slumps,
telling of their longtime friendship.

One cop looks down
at the crumpled body

And says, to no one
in particular,

"Now that's a sad
fuckin' story, innit?"

Down by the Banks of the River

The setting sun bakes my face,
I remember the taste of gin,

From when I drank gin,
that summer in Illinois.

The sun was hot, in the late
afternoon, after work,

In my room, in the old building,
down by the river.

Now I sit in the sun, thinking of
moving back to my adult hometown,

Called Frisco, by those
who don't live there,

The heat of the sun conjures
images of drinking gin,

The sun is blocked
and then comes back,

It bakes me, like having a warm
liquid poured into my body,

Until it feels more
liquid than vessel.

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 living,
breathing presence of heat itself.

I write these stories backwards,
from the image to the source,

And I sit in stillness, wrapped
in the heat of life itself.

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.

She 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.

Sitting Bull complained
to the government agent,

That he was taking the
sacred lands of the Sioux,

The agent laughed, citing
the history of the Ojibwa,

Running the Sioux
out of Minnesota,

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 slaughter of native
peoples will continue,

Until the idea itself
becomes repugnant.

The spiritual accrues to the
land beneath the rampage,

And if the climate is destroyed
by our abuse, the earth will survive,

And the folly will end, along with
our temporary agency,

No matter how sacred or
profane we call it ours.

So Often Away in Paradise

A young poet reads her tale
of William Blake's wife, saying

She missed her husband, "He
was so often away in paradise,"

This is the propaganda of escape
that denies the discovered reality.

Blake and his wife entertained
spirits at their dinner table,

They sat naked in the backyard tree,

This is the propaganda
of spiritual romance,

We so habitually
cloth our freedom,

Our tales have become
costume dramas.

Rumi wrote love poems
to the Beloved,

When his honest asides
were of nameless existence.

But as a kind of spokesman
for others in his religion,

It was common for him to dress
his grace in garments of glory,

How do I admire my existence or
ours, if it's naked of any form,

Except I exclaim everything that lives,
too much beauty for these rags in words.

The Secret

I raised one hand
to the sky,

The other, I held out
to my innocent self,

I felt like a baby
on a dark highway,

I felt alone,
during that time,

I needed another
to be with,

A voice inside said,
"No more babysitters,"

I sat in loneliness,
and felt fear,

I sat in fear,
and felt terror,

I sat in terror,
and felt peace,

I sat in peace,
and felt free,

No longer separate
from who I am.

A wise elder asked me,
"Do you know the secret?"

Without thought, I answered,
"There is no secret,"

And the jeweled shards
In his tiger eyes

Became the milky eyes
Of an old man's smile.