

The Ancient Poet

The ancient poet,
with his knapsack,
is drunk,

Where did I put
my knapsack?

This is Great I Say

This is great, I say,
in the crowded airport,
reading of non-believers
living at odds in the world,
all throughout history,

We are surrounded by easy chatter,
someone behind us is playing the piano,

We're flying to San Pablo la Laguna Atitlan,
in Guatemala, but first, we'll stop in Antigua
to visit Paul, an old friend, another poet,
a journalist, an expat for forty years,

This is great, I say, this is great.

Near Three Volcanoes

We're in a house built by the owner,
off the grid, near three volcanoes,

She wants to move, I want to be still,
the lake is an imploded volcano,
deep and dark, birds fly above it,

I look across the water at a small city
on the side of one volcano with its head
in the clouds, it could be Roman, Greek,
Indonesian, but here it is Guatemalan,

The great earth arrived unnamed,

These eyes, often used for naming,
gratefully forget all but what they see.

Fruits and Vegetables

Fruits and vegetables
are for sale beside the road,

The world we left behind is far away,
now only as close as its pictures,
we are the faces of strangers,

Roads run up from the water,
and around the side of the lake,

The whole world is broken
into smaller pieces of itself.

My Nose is a Diving Board

*My nose
is a diving board
for mosquitos,*

Even a joke at life doesn't change life,
neither does life change itself,
but we change faces in life,

The wind closes the door,
the trees on the volcano's ridge
stand against the sky like tufts
of hair wrapped in twine.

Wonder asks
no questions of wonder,

One fills the bowl of vocabulary,
then dumps it out, empty bowl
once full, empty again, what fun,

Fear is full of itself,
like an empty bowl.

A Gentle Knocking

A gentle knocking, at this distance,
is the building of a house nearby, tap, tap,

The lapping of the shore is like whispering
from the deep, *I hear music*, is all I mean to say,

Amidst this wonder, I hope to say something in words,
or is music merely the music of its own making?

A Small Wooden Ladder

A small wooden ladder
leans against the side of a shed,

A young woman in blue
picks fruit from the garden,

The town across the water
seems unchanged in history,

What's close seems alive,
what's distant wraps the world
in an aura of permanence,

However we may want the near alive
to be permanent, it won't comply.

The Boat that Scouts the Lake

The boat that scouts the lake for passengers,
slows to a drift, before speeding off on its rounds,
empty, but for the captain standing at his wheel,

A wasp lingers, its body pulsing,
a lizard leaps on the path,

I lose something, something
falls out of the narrative,

I find it, later, as new as it is old,
in this inventory of images, this
history of re-invented humanity,

Like a village on the side of a volcano
with white buildings, clustered
like clay and plaster pieces.

She Walks Among the Rows

She walks among the rows
with a bowl for collecting
a meal's making,

Something bites her,
and she jumps and shouts,

Who is to say this is not the center
of civilization and the core of reality?

Tell me what country does not call itself
the home of grace and grief,

Our host goes up the hill, under the full moon
of this lake of silent volcanos, its quieted history
waited on, to repeat itself, in life and death,

*He's waiting for you to provide the grist, she says,
if only the grist for his milling mind to grind.*

Two Men Clear a Strip of Land

Two men clear a field on the shore
of the lake, hauling water in buckets,
to irrigate an already growing onion patch,

They move deliberately, in the heat,
stop to talk, then return to their work,

I sit on a small deck high above them,
reading Neruda, after the first two days here
reading my old friend's epic poem about life
and love and death, the same as Neruda,

Both look for the primordial in the mundane
and find themselves, in their looking.

It's been my journey, too, although I went
no further than my own reality, until I stopped,
to find what can only be found by no longer looking,
in the cluttered moment, shed of its clutter.

A third man appears, and the three consult a watch
that glares in the morning light, the third man shows
the others what needs to be done, tilling the ground
with sharp blows, the dusty soil billowing above
their hoes like dry clouds.

Across the Wide Lake

Across the wide lake, stand three volcanoes,
their presence beyond description,

The earth is so much greater
than those of us who work it,
than those of us who think of it,
than those of us who live and die,

The men look up from their work
to see a quiet man reading poetry,

Absorbing the massive presence
across the water, the unfathomed deep,
and the hoes at play, among these words.

Flowers Bright Yellow and Red

Flowers, bright yellow
and red for the hummingbirds,

And there below is the woman I'm with,
walking away from my aloneness, allowing
this imagined opportunity for terrifying awe,
to become so fully absent in wonder,

How can I not see her the same
as this ungraspable reach,
this unknowable depth,
this workable soil of the heart.

I've Grown Bored with This Being Old

I've grown bored with this being old,
much as I grew bored with being young,

The tropes of any stop in time
become tiresome in themselves,

And then there is the variety of places,
people, faces, languages, and weather,
but what remains the same and ever
changeable are the eyes,
les yeux, los ojos,

Not the organs in the head, of course,
my eyes grow worse as they grow old,
but what they are capable of, not what
they witness, but the witnessing itself,

I mean the simple wonder of seeing,
no child of the heart was ever born
any younger, no wise man ever old.

I See a Man Fishing in a Wooden Boat

I see a man fishing in a wooden boat,
I see a couple walking by the shore,
I see three men planting onions,
watering the future
with buckets from the lake,

I see the essence of life, but these are not
primitives in some idyll of primal existence,

These men work for wages, with cell phones
and motorcycles, instead, I see the way
my body might be, if it were shown
at the root, in the blood and the bone,

In movement that takes shape
before it becomes analogous,
in this fertile field we call
the poetry of the mind.

A Breeze Cools My Skin

A breeze cools my skin,
as I sweat in the morning sun,
as I sit watching men at work,

Like girls on an assembly line,
these working men converse,

As their hands move swiftly, smoothly,
to place and cover the planted seedlings,

As the sun seems caught by the edge of
the roof, a slight breeze cools my skin,

I too converse, with you, my companion gardener,
as we work these words into their grounding.

Three Men and Two Boys

Three men and two boys haul water
from the lake to the onion beds,
where they toss the water in arcs
from buckets that match their size,

She goes to ask one of the men
if it's OK to photograph them at work,
so she might paint them later, he's happy
to oblige, he thinks she wants his picture,

The boys throw water in imitation
of the men's grace, each one walks
barefoot to the shore, it doesn't matter
if a little gets spilled, the ground
will take the water, the rains
are months away.

One Man Lifts His Hat

One man lifts his hat to scratch his head,
one boy bangs his buckets to make a beat,
the other sits on his bucket to supervise,

The rapidly planted rows of seedlings
turn the brown patch to a field of green,

Bamboo is cut with a machete to make sticks
for string to mark the boundaries of the patch,

The page before me has rows of words that
turn the blank expanse to planted seedlings,

I nourish a harvest, unseen by the air above
and the ground beneath the nurturing hand,
yet both are milked and bled for this garden.

Bundles of Seedlings

Bundles of seedlings
are bought and brought
to this ground for planting
and cultivation,

What was done before
becomes part of
what's here now,

What comes of this now
will become something
somewhere else seen,

Now is only bare feet
in dirt and water,

Now is only bare feet
in the feast of time.

We Took the Tuk-Tuk to San Pedro

We took the tuk-tuk to San Pedro
and the launch back across
the lake to San Pablo,

In the market in San Pedro,
the vendor put three avocados
in the bag instead of two, three
bananas instead of two, it was
near the end of the day,

I put the tortillas from an earlier purchase
in the same black bag and down the hill
we went to the water's edge,

In San Pablo, fishermen are out in their boats,
the onion planters are nearly through
planting their third new bed,

Would it be false to say,
"Nothing is wrong with this world
that is not also right with this world?"

An Old Man and An Old Woman

An old man and an old woman
plant a garden at the top of the hillside,

She holds a watering can, he digs with a hoe,
she wears blue and white, a skirt, a blouse
and a scarf piled high on her head,

He wears a sombrero, a t-shirt and jeans,
they talk together, she more than he,
he perhaps less eager to speak,
but he responds, occasionally
with some interest,

She stirs the water of words,
and he calms the water of words,

They swim together, these old bathers
in words, they know each other's strokes,

They know their desire to sit by the side
of the garden and shade themselves in silence.

The Onion Planters Have Gone

The Onion planters have gone,
there are no workers among the stalks,

The lake is nearly calm, a wasp
attends a drying pair of socks,
the hot sun burns the air, the wasp
visits a flower and keeps its distance,

The wake from a launch ripples ashore,
A house on the far shore seems to be burning,
smoke drifts up the side of the volcano,

In two days, we leave this particular paradise,
my mind races to re-engage, killer and facilitator
of poetry, I need to calm it with stillness, its small
fires would hope to challenge the molten source,

The fire across the lake slowly burns itself out,
perhaps only the burning of what's no longer needed,

What's thought needed is called by different names,
I may call this life by that name, but what remains
is neither the name nor the naming, I am
overwhelmed by life, and yet I live.

A Family of Seven Walks By

A family of seven walks by
on the path next to the water,

A mother encourages her child to wave,
he waves, another child waves, and then
everyone waves and waves again,

They wave as they pass, then pause
to wave as they move along the path,

One young boy throws his arm in an arc,
waving it back and forth, but most wave
a gentle greeting, we wave across
the brief absence of distance,

Travel brings strangers to a moment
of simple grace in greeting, by plane,
by car, and on foot.

A Stout Woman Sits Beside the Lake

A stout woman sits beside the lake, a boy
tosses a fishing line short of the accumulation
of green growth, floating in the offshore water,

Sounds of muffled voices, birds, a motorboat,
and last night the rumble of an active volcano,
not close, but louder than anything near, this is
nature not overtaken by anything other than itself,

Can anything so great be called *humble*
when it is humbling to our kind, to become
so humble in the presence of its greatness,
that it recommends that same greatness to us?

A Bird Flies at a High Window

A bird flies at a high window
as if in love with its reflection,
as if in love with another bird,
or in the throes of competition,

Nothing it does, or discovers,
discourages its flapping, pecking,
and banging against the glass,

This seems a kind of bird pornography,
this healthy and well-fed bird has time
for pointless scrivenings and idles itself
with imagined flights and fights.

Birds, it seems, and people too, engage themselves
in activities not clearly profitable or even sane,

Perhaps there is reward and purpose in everything,
or there is nothing but the attempt to attribute
those noble virtues to our earnest pastimes,

Or else there is celebration, in this bountiful being,
embedded in everything wise or foolish we are and do.