

I Awaken to the Moment

I awaken to the moment where
nothing occurs but the wholeness

Of being, where even this
awareness is caught in the vice

Of occurring twice. Twice I breathe,
in every breath, once for meaning,

And once for life. I imagine
her coming, she's on her way,

I look at every car, not in hoary
expectation or the sugary

Bitter taste of desire,
but where I have no idea

What will happen and give it her
name. I am pulled apart by these

Pulls, one toward surrender in patient
peace, the other toward the smallest

Of fears, like a mother and child.
This pulling apart pulls parts from

The center that reveals itself more
clearly than what's been cleared away.

These Outside Things

I used to get on the road and drive,
to remember who I have been.

Alone, clean, and simple, in need
of others but content alone. like

Towns in the mountainous west, perched
on slanted ground, where all that remains

is what isn't blown away or found
to be useless. My family

Drove to the mountains, each summer,
and I would feel at 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 alone in my heart, no more
separate from myself or anyone.

Amusement parks in the city were
bright colors against the night sky,

Where everything beyond my sight
and my heartbeat, was wiped away.

Being as a child is not simply
recalling what came before.

The resonant reality of being
as a child, is the undercurrent

That first found its place in these
outside things of peace and wonder.

The Desire of the Habitually Homeless

Desire comes upon me, a storm
from behind, like a bear at my back,

And gives me power I don't need, I look
at the curve of her breast and lose

Interest in the love we all share, that
I leave to collect doubts and fears.

Destination is the desire
of the habitually homeless.

A Tunnel to Somewhere

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, on the road,

Through the trees, I arrived at a
sense of destination, without desire.

Something of a Third

We touch one color to another color,
when both colors are wet,

And something of a third occurs.
When we are wet with each other

We're destroyed, the way Matisse
destroyed the empty canvas with color.

We're together, not as one, or one
of two, but something of a third.

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

What Occurs

What occurs, in the memory
of feeling, is a sense of color

With shape, in similar scenes, an
amber cube of history, the spine

Of a leaf, a rain wet street,
this redundant emotion's coloring.

I want no more film to be made
of the past that blurs the present,

Even as I love the romance of
the pictures that color my mind,

Even as I love the reality
I see in their appearance,

The grace of these poetic images
is not in their shape and color,

But the invention of the occasion
from our place of vision.

We create from our history
and the unknown of who we are,

Nothing is real but what comes unseen.
This moment is what brings us here.

The Attraction of Sweet Sorrow

One can vacate oneself, and what
is left behind has to carry on,

A determined ghost. Time stretches
absence to a presence, as stillness

Welcomes anything lost or unseen.
This absence occupies the real,

Love's gone, when absence
becomes the occupation of eternity.

I Fall Into Deepest Peace

I fall into the deepest peace,
or I chase the object of my fear.

Were she truly gone, I could mourn,
it's said mourning soothes the depressed.

Holding onto my absent love shows me
to be a perpetrator of cruel 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,

Absence is absinthe, drugging one
with the delusion of the other,

I hold onto a presence of absence
that pains me, I grip the pain.

I look into the heart of this
sadness, and it vanishes, a ghost

In the light. Everywhere light goes
looking, it cannot find the dark.

When I Think Love is Close

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

"I see you now, but where have you
been? What took you so long to arrive?"

I float at ease on a ocean of love,
wishing I knew how to swim.

Stuck on an Elevator

A man went to visit his sister,
when on the elevator came

A woman of such beauty, more than
he thought he could bear, he covered

His face and sank to the floor, crying
out, "No, no, no - too much beauty."

Two women came in The Little Shamrock
when there were half a dozen other

Patrons, all men, the two women
sat together for half an hour,

Shared a drink and talked in private
conversation, the men, by themselves,

And in pairs, adjusted to the
presence of women, until the two

Left the bar, then, six men let go of
their demeanor and slumped at their

Tables and barstools. It had been their
task to respond to the presence

Of women, in a bar, at night, until
the pressure of their presence

Was gone. The change in the room
was palpable, after the challenge had

Departed, like men breathing
a sigh of relief after a traffic

Accident had 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, but being caught

In the presence of too much beauty
has nothing to do with the duties

Of men, or the fire in the blood,
or the competition for female

Elk, or the foolish fantasies of
lonely drunks. It has to do with

One who fears to look in the face
of his own existence, when it might

Reveal too much about who he is,
a clean mirror, without glass,

The Wind Bends Things

Our togetherness occurs
in moments of vulnerability,

While we're tasting the entire fruit,
skin, pulp, seed, stem, leaf, and earth.

The wind bends things, as if it wants
them broken, cradles and caresses them,

Then bends them, as if it wants them
broken, until we see how the wind

Works, bathing everything in its
uncaring embrace, I might wish

Love were not so equally
indiscriminate as the elements,

I might wish love were something
I could buy, like a tree in a bundle,

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

From somewhere I don't know, and it
makes me part of everywhere it's been.

This sadness must be how I'm kept
from my disappearance, in the way

Everything seems 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

Cannot have it, unless we're together.
Apart, we're connoisseurs

Of distant wonders, scholars,
without one step across the jamb.

We speak of the joy avoided
by those who accept imitations

That keep them from the gist, the gut,
the gullet, the quick, the depth, and the height.

On the verge of what we desire most, we
hold back, mocking our dedication to love.

We anticipate the leap into freedom,
yet we hesitate to make that leap real.

With fresh wings we pause to fly,
afraid to dirty our feet with heaven.

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

This Clumsy Naked Life

Three preachers, one in his Hawaiian
shirt, another in his T-shirt and

Ball cap, the third preacher with a
pot belly, take a table and talk,

The same as those who get together
with their buddies in the same line of

Work, when their talk could be what
might be, 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

Notable honor in waiting out
this clumsy, naked life, no pride

In being left alone with eternity.
We walk through these roses

And thorns, until there's nothing
left to complain about, nothing left

To praise, the god of these men is empty
of speech, his words are someone else's,

We've all been invited to this
common, sacred humiliation,

For longer than we have been
alive, without any dress or doctrine.

A Likewise Lethal Love

I miss what I have never fully
known, a certain reality

I call tenderness, 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 will be killed by love, but the

Experience of love does not
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 have 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 how afraid we are
of where we so gracefully go.

This light in my heart is dawn, and it's
too late to say I still love the dark.

In the Glare of Our Astonishment

We love each other in the glare
of our astonishment, and we love

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 sit in

The shade of our fulfillment. Instead,
we use time apart to buffer

The blows of unrelenting wonder.
We're afraid love will be exhausted

by its constant presence, we fear
too much beauty, too much happiness,

Will ruin us, but enlightenment
only comes when one admits one

is no longer un-enlightened. We fear
we won't survive its presence,

There's wonder we're afraid to lose,
in the brilliant practice of the real.

The Leviathan Needs the Wind

I live my life as a man, a thing
to be, not a thing to be seen.

When Imaginary Jesus came down
from the hills, an allusion

To his time of awakening, he played
dice with the boys and Kiddled

With the Marys. He turned water
to wine and wine to water, until

He was reminded of his passion,
it was an embarrassing lapse

That no one forgot, and when he
died, almost everyone stayed away.

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

Love enters me, and there is no
escape, love convinces me of its

Presence, as I am of my own. Even
upside down, this life is my ground.

I look at the beauties of the world
and my eyes stay in my head.

I feel her compassion in the airy
net she casts. This compassion

Blooms in itself. I see her beauty
in my sight, and 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 played
in the market, the singer sang 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 thought I could
live the same here, but I watched

As my joy became a smile, then a
protected glance, then a reserve.

Gravity holds me to its bosom.
Icarus' flight lifted him above his

Place, but the story warns of his
fall. The singer ended his song with

The sop that the sight of his living
muse was but a passing fancy.

The Empty Hedonism of Distance

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

To accept, without any sign, beyond
the gentle slight of her appreciation

And admiration. She was laid up
with unexplained pain in her legs.

Her body glistened in the stifling
summer heat, as she became loud

With sounds of distance-making, the way
children know how to scream, to ward

Off attackers they can't protect
themselves from. She told me of a man

Who had once tried to entice her
to his life, how she held her ground and

Became part of a separate life,
I could no longer entice her.

I didn't care to continue
living in the intoxicating

Imbalance, I let go of water
falling through my open fingers.

The Indifference of Wonder

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

in a silver Mercedes, half a
dozen stars in a gray Chrysler,

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

Small galaxies glide by on the
arterial, shooting stars on the

Freeway. The expectation of
wonder has gone out of my love of

The other, but wonder is the black
night sky, behind the eyes, and not

The blur of lights. I bring myself
to wonder, I am the sun of my

Own expectation. The sun in the
parking lot's the same as the one

In the sky, the same as the one
in my eyes, its light never moves.

The center of my being is this
constant indifference of wonder.

The Dancing Girls of the Buddha

I never had as personal a god
as my love for a woman.

Warned of Buddha's dreams of dancing
girls, that came to him even after

Enlightenment, I continued to
seek a woman as if she were

My inspiration, but I'm no longer
willing to seek another.

Love of the other has been
the only devotion that fit my flesh,

The dancing of desire is gone,
but passion lives on in my heart.

The Peace That Has No Biography

A window, jutting out from the roof,
was the only access to the

Eaves I needed to paint. I stood on
a stool from the attic and stepped

Onto the sleek blue metal, with screw-
heads for a foothold. I needed

To find a way to paint the
inaccessible. I tied a rope to a

Tree on the far side of the house
and threw it over the peak, so it

Lay next to the eave. I tied a step-
ladder to the rope to stand on.

With one foot on top of the ladder,
I reached to paint, but when I moved

My foot, the ladder slipped. A sudden
jolt, and nothing happened. Fear might

Have taken me, but nothing of fear
came, in that moment of shock, with my

Face next to the roof, I glanced at my
footing and cleaned the spilled paint with

A rag. I was overcome by what
did not happen. When I got back

In the window, onto the floor,
in the upstairs bedroom, I felt the

Perfect nothing, of the nameless
peace, that has no biography.

Nearly Dumbfounded

In India, my visa needed renewal.
After a week of rain, I went to the

Magistrate's office, in a building
that had sat unfinished for years,

There was standing water in
the hallways, business-as-usual in

A surreal landscape, the building
was crowded, the lawyer's office

Piled high with papers, floor to ceiling,
the local lawyer was talking and laughing

With a man from Africa. He
took my visa and put it aside.

He may have wanted baksheesh,
I wasn't versed in the protocol of

Civil bribery. After more
conversation and laughter between

The two men, the lawyer held my
passport and laughed. He opened it 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.

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 school..

I read poems 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, if anything,
might happen.

I tell myself,
." The assistant

To the warden asked if I was going
to read anything that might be

Subversive, in the Folsom Prison
Writer's Workshop. "Only a few

Poems," I said, and thought to myself,
"There's nothing more subversive than

Poetry." The brilliant sun cuts
the air from its complacency.

I Wince at Invisible Injuries

I begin to feel the pinch of loneliness
when I'm not open to the aloneness that

Fills me. Identity suffuses fear, and
when I let go of my hold on the other,

What feels like loss begins to
reclaim this natural abundance.

There's no familiar language for
this contradiction. A man alone,

In his apparent contentment,
may seem self-satisfied, deluded,

Egotistical. As we are with
the drunkard's momentary bliss,

We don't trust every version
of serenity. We laud its virtue,

But discontent is the norm. The delight
of spirit is reserved for the insane and

The saintly. The shadow of separation
is still the master of imagination.

When missing is the attachment
of my thinking mind, I feel attached

To what feels torn away.
I wince at invisible injuries.

In the Quiet Windless Aftermath

After the hurricane between us
passed, I walked among the ruins,

Looking for reminders of the
possible. In the rubble, I find

Traces of the love that remains
in the quiet, windless aftermath,

A startled survivor, who's flown with
the cows and the roofs and the cars.

The airborne flotsam and jetsam
on the ground, I find myself, like

One who's been dropped from the sky, intact,
where walls, ceilings and floors had been,

Where the sky remains, and the earth,
the air, and the stillness, that did not

Go anywhere. Some part of
who I am still lives in the beginning,

To live at the end, but early on,
there's a drive to solidify,

And then the wind comes howling, nature's
cruel clearance, What remains has the

Character of what's within, closer
to nature than anything named.

Riding the Trees in Morgan Park

On the way to school, we walked through
woods, with a fast stream running its length,

In the middle of town. It was 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 climbed
the trees, and the weight of our bodies

Bent them, and we rode them to the
ground, on the far side of the stream.

Back and forth we rode, my friend
and I, or I did it alone. A tree

Might have flung me into space,
but only if I was strong enough to

Bend it far enough. The science
didn't matter. It was only boys

And trees, there was no attempt to
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 is it the silence of winter?

I'm nowhere in my story, like all readers,
I walk a wooded path, I climb a silent

Tree and ride. Once in a while, a tree
would crack under the weight. It

Was a thrill to risk it, to fall to the
bank or the stream, the perfect

Excuse to run home and change clothes,
and then to fly out of the house on

A dead run, with no explanation
but childhood. Unthought wisdom

Learned to pick the tree that matched
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

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 have come, I

Once barely stood by my side. I have
often stood apart from myself,

I think of the father I barely saw,
who is now here in the one I am.

We drove into Kansas when I was a boy,
He took me with him on a business

Trip, to a nearly deserted
prairie town, and he left me alone

To wander the streets, or I sat
in the car, or I rode beside him,

And I saw the lonely town, with
a few buildings, and a tree, standing,

As if on a hill, in a copse of elm.
I wanted to dive into his body, to be

Him, but I was his passenger, his boy,
his son, learning the brilliant isolation of

The heart. Now I long for the arms of
a man, long dead, a man who was

Never alive as I dreamed him,
except when we played on the living

Room floor, a beached whale, we three
boys crawled over him, and when he stood,

He let us climb his body like a tree.
We laughed until we cried, these

Tears are his, this heaving chest is
his, this love 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, I hoped to buy
the town. I dreamed it was for sale.

A Whisper in the Cacophony

Trees, barren of leaves, branches like
scratches on the gray plate of sky.

Looking out windows, the delicate
lines are soft, on this brittle day.

Painters paint spirit in art, poets speak
spirit in words, but language is cruel in its

stripping of the leaves, generous
when it reveals what remains,

Still, there's no resolution sharp
enough to make anything truly

Known, the skyward lines begin to sing,
the mesh of lines, the wafting lines.

I stand on the ground, I reach into the sky,
I draw myself from a tray of color in

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, on a windless day.
I see the lines breathe on barren trees.

In this world of abandonment and
abundance, a persistent joy

Leaps the glass. When I don't speak 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 love

I can't dismiss, I release the
hopeless love of my abandonment.

Handwriting the Mist

This foggy day, the calligraphy
of barren trees blurs, I accept

Its washed-out beauty. The only
lover left on this island is my

Own self, inside love itself. When
life itself is my ubiquity, I am beloved,

The silent fog fills the branches
with the beauty of its unheld gift.

The Evanescent Has No Chronicle

Shakespeare compared his love to a
summer's day and then erased the praise,

Knowing love's transience, his poem
became 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 unwritten nature of love
itself. This surest love has no

Biography, but the chronicles
of transient love are many

The poet says his love cannot be
kept or described, but it can be

Clothed in words. We love the weave of
words in love's place. A poem of praise

To any love with its substance
in time, like the beauty of a flower,

Becomes the fired 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. Love is not,

We are love's carrier, 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 complacency. One step leads to
a half step, then to a stasis, then to falling

Away from being alive. Let me
not slide to my demise in search

Of an ease. There's 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 there's no
good to be gained from this anxiety.

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

I Speak of an Inner Landscape

I speak of an inner landscape,
no less real for seeming less real.

I look at a thing, that's not a thing,
to describe it into gentle

Proximity, so its reality can
be seen. I see a doorknob,

Across the room, as big as a grape-
fruit, I see the head of a screw,

As large as a saucer. A face,
drawn larger than it is, becomes a

Face, not drawn, but drawn upon. These
portraits enlarge to an arrangement

Of pigment. The 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, mortal

Being, pulled from the muck, cleans its
face to a beauty, and the beast of

Its fears becomes a creature of
courage. We are mistaken to think

We sleep with demons and angels,
when we awaken among ourselves.

Between Small Dark Towns in Illinois

My uncle came back from the slaughter
of the war, a changed man, never

Fully present in his life again,
until he was dead in a crash.

He drove his car off a country 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 someone who loved him, but life

Had ended around him, so many times,
in such hurtful ways, he could

Never be free of it. It isn't hard
to believe his death was not

Accidental, that he drove
his car into an invisible room

Where he was finally happy
to be alive. I sit in a familiar

Room, tired of its familiarity, I think
to think away from it, instead, I

Think to that part of the room
more familiar than anything I know

That silent sense that fills the room
with its disappearance, that takes the

Place of everything that takes place
within it and makes it more itself..

The Old Dairy Building

My friend's art business burned to the ground. Life is what you expect of it.

Then, nothing is the same, and never will be again. My friend held pictures

Of the current war next to the loss of his love and work. Day to day

Life is war-time in slow-time. Firemen poured water in, from fire trucks,

From fat hoses, until the roof collapsed. Wooden beams burned for hours.

In war and everyday life, death and destruction, act, relentlessly

Ignorant of our worth. Another friend's only daughter died too soon.

It became an endless wave. She was taken, again and again, by

Cruel death, as her mother danced on the precipice of her sanity.

Death comes like bullets in the air. Those who survive, live by the gift of

Breath. We smell the air between the bullets and breathe, as deep as we can.

The Moment of Chancy Death

One man in the factory, after the war,
said he was taught to kill

But not how to stop. He said they
swept him up and threw him in the war

And then they threw him back
out again. He said he loved his family

But he couldn't feel that love, couldn't
stop fighting. He was still fighting.

Some never feel more alive than when
death is near, but it's not death teaches

The awareness of existence,
but the absence of illusion. The

Moment of chancy death is the
same as this moment of love in life.

The License of Life

When I say I am alone, to whom do I speak,
when by the nature of speaking, I am

Not alone? We are, at heart, an
exchange of listeners. These words are

The chronicles of stillness. The
quietest words are listening words,

I listen to what speaks within,
to hear what is difficult to say.

To speak from silence reveals
the effort of speaking, it betrays

A similarity to one who speaks
to meaning. We listen for

The voice of listening, we look to
see the eyes that witness. To look

In the world is to look to a purpose,
to witness is to receive

With one's eyes. Those who pose at peace,
wait for their time of self-assertion,

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

The Grace of Another's Need

Unwilling to reveal her need,
she turned away from attention

Was gone from the moment. I was
helpless to taste the grace of her need.

In our abundance, we make need
unnecessary and unwelcome,

I look for what might grant
a way to the interior, a reaching

Outside of care for its companion
in the kindness of allowing

Kindness. 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.

In the prosperity of life, nature drops us
into degrees of ourselves we're willing

To pass by, in our rise. I see what
seems of little use, the practice

Of a quiet kindness, not rushing
to the aid of infirmity

And weakness, but being together
with each other in calm regard.

The Calendar of Creation

The sun's glare has character, it glints
reflects, highlights, washes away.

The hillside loses depth of color,
burnt away in brightest light.

Points of fire mark the corners
of metal roofs, as people lower

Their brims and consider their misplaced
faith in destiny. The young may

Enjoy time in the sun of destiny,
but dwelling on destiny

Washes away the passage of life,
draining color from the moment.

Where nothing of the real
is named by the calendar of creation.

The destiny of having no destined
day floods the day with the heart.

The Praise of Present Joy

Displaced by change, we walk out of
ourselves. Unfamiliar with what we

May become, we walk in the ruins
of who we have been. Kick us out,

Burn us down, destroy the present
as past, the future is closer to

The bone than what we've been
or done. Change hones us to

Our essential selves. Nothing of
the certain is gone in the change of

Destruction, but some wander, lost
in themselves, even unto death. The

Kindness of our greatness lives on,
we bear our losses to a painful

Advantage, Masterpieces burn, and
we invent the charred art of what's

Burned in memory, nothing we
cherish is any more present than

It is in our presence. When we celebrate
what's to come, or what came

Before, even in our distraction,
we free the praise of present joy.

My Brother Runs Near a Sunny Beach

The ground is frozen solid, as if it
were ancient sheathes of opaque

Facade. Walking is an adventure,
getting to the car, an event,

Going in a store becomes
calculated, arriving, a success.

This frigidity affects who we
are, in how we are, my brother

Runs near a sunny beach. Here, my
hands tighten in a grip perhaps not

My own, as if I am being frozen
from within. My lyrical

Ears want its cause to be the
absence of romantic, physical love.

It's been cold, for long enough, for
the cold to become what operates

In everything else. My brother runs
near a sunny beach, I lately

Lived in a torment of desire.
It was a fire that I danced

Around and through. It may have been
summer sun that heated my passion,

We are simple creatures, living in
the temperature of our lives.

Nostrils Flare in the Vigorous Air

A strong wind blows in the bright sun that
leaves the clean edge of seeing with

Nothing to cloud the senses.
A friend drove us to

A ridge above the city,
where pollution created textures

Of a different beauty, A vast
panorama spread below in a

Valley thick with the exhalation
of millions. "Beautiful" he said,

Indicating the stagnant sky with
a sweep of his arm. The setting

Sun lit the crowded canvas of
purple, red, and yellow, a raging

Conflagration of riches for
the eye's willing imagination.

How beautiful is our private sky,
when no crisp wind blows away its

Entangled thoughts. We thicken
ourselves to a kind of beauty, until

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

For the home of natural beauty,
unclouded by our residue.

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,
caverns of delicate intricacy.

A breeze must have 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, cheeks powdered,
charm restored. The gravity of existence

Has greater endurance than
our epiphanies, I fall in and out

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

I retire to the familiar. To live in
love's long epiphany, is to accept

The spontaneity of the unknown,
a perilous perfection.

At night, the fog dulls the newly
wonderful catastrophe, but its

Beauty remains, until dawn brings
another morning of miracles.

In Simple Grace

A barefoot worker came to our rooms
to clean, He swept the apartment

With a short, natural broom. Silent,
light, and swift, in no hurry, with

The movement of a dancer's grace,
he finished the job, without excess,

Picking up the wispy debris with
his fingers. Collecting the scraps

Of refuse, he elevated a
mundane task to its beauty. It

Was not watching him work or
witnessing a performance for reward,

It didn't demean him or define
his station. It delivered him

From caste and caricature. Lifting
the detritus of our rooms with

Long, narrow fingers was not an
act of simple grace, it was simple

Grace performing an act. It could
have been any other act in its

Place. He was one in whom grace
occurred, lifting me to wonder itself,

One cannot claim the moment by
describing it, it's good to forget

Everything but simple grace, without
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,

Shoulders shake like oxen shed their sweat,
their yoke, I wipe my eyes with words.

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

What I never learned. I walk into
the faith of not knowing, intent

In arriving where I've always been.
I learned what my my father taught me,

What he never knew he taught.
I became, his unseen self. I became

His emptiness, I became his perfection,
I wipe my eyes with words.

The Eyes of Its Own Arrival

The hills are the bare backs of beasts,
bears, whales, encrusted and frosted.

The fruition of life is its own
fulfillment, but if one dwells on

That work being done, the
difficulties outweigh the reality.

If one takes a path few others
take, one sees others less welcoming

Of the choice. We live in a world
that defines any such choice as

An act of separation. One may
seek, by stepping aside, to bridge

The unsought separation, but
the organic doesn't reject the

Organ. Despite seeking recognition
in the eyes of others, the

Genuine is seen most clearly
in the eyes of its own arrival.

Pollock Was a Painter

Pollock was a painter, wanting
to be a painter, drinking, fucking,

Fighting, painting, talking, he
tried to act like a regular guy with

His family. He began to act
like an artist and dress the part,

He bought an artist's brush at the
artist's market, and then, one day, he

Became a painter. He couldn't go
back to playing one, everything

That came before was erased in
the first stroke of his transformation,

Some might say it killed him, to become
what he played in his behavior.

We play roles akin to the
reality we scarcely recognize,

Until we begin to play who
we truly are, unseen by others.

My desire to be inside love
is a role I have played, until it

Became who I was, in the center
of what had seemed periphery.

Nothing Happens in Love

Nothing happens in love. A room is
lifted from its contraries, then

Back in the same place, transcendent,
every stick of furniture the same.

I see you without seeing you the
way I saw you, the way the light

Sees what it falls upon. The trance
of love plays a surrogate for love.

It becomes a way of being, but
being needs no new way to be.

Someone says we are love itself,
and it becomes a paradigm of

The love we define away from
itself. The pursuit of love is a

Fraud for love itself. Once, I loved,
and I was loved. and nothing occurred.,

Except there was something of
nothing to call itself the name of love.

No Lover No God

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

Heaven, but I don't surrender
who I am for the absence of one

To love. All day long, all night, every
day and night, I don't surrender

Who I am for the sense of 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 am left
with everything I might imagine

from them, to discover its
presence, here, in this simplicity. No

Lover, no god, I won't give up what I have
for what I don't, there is nothing missing

In what only seems missing.
What is between my reality and

The reality of everything real, is nowhere
to be seen, undreamt of, as present

As the air I breathe, all day long,
every night, no lover, no god.

The Ascent of the Descent

Grace and gravity belong to
everyone in the practice of our

Being with words. The first great leap
in learning is to speak from silence.

And yet poetic language stirs
skepticism. It's said that poets

Make obscure what should be clear, that
truth and beauty should be made more clear

Not more difficult to know.
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's

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 truth of it,

In words that match the ascent of
the descent, in words that mold the ore

To its metal, that call the miner
to the core of his own being.

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, never not his

Friend, they were neither and both.
A woman, loving by her nature, put

Her hand on my back, without intent,
I felt the bloom of a certain

Heaven. Not a bonding with what's missing,
but with what takes the missing

Away. The taste of a delicacy
erases thoughts of hunger.

What touches me, that makes my body
less a body, makes me more than

This body. A wise old man put his
hands on my face, and my losses

Were concluded across the decades.
I put my hands on my own face,

Like the hands of the old man and
my flesh tells me to give and receive.

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. There is
no greater spiritual dance than

Poetry. 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." In poetry, I dance

Free of the clutching of my ideas
and the nonsense of my ways.

Jesus Laughed

My dancing heart won't take direction,
it will not stop dancing. I plunge

Deep into 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. There's no room
for play in a tragic world with

Comedians for relief. Struck in the
side with a sword, Jesus laughed,

There was no body to be wounded,
to seem to be killed, but he needed

To appear to be reborn. so he
cried out and died. No one needs to

Do the impossible a second time.
Being born is the sleight of

Hand of existence, and an open
heart is its passionate player.

Along the River and Over the Hills

I drove south on Canyon Road,
along the river, a two-lane black-top

With no traffic, back over the ridge,
through stunning vistas, between two

Small cities in the west. In moments of
anonymity, nature rises to its grandeur,

The works of man reduce to a stretch
of highway, with roadside turn-outs

For the fishermen, boats, trailers and rigs.
Separate from the society of others,

The earth's indifference is a blessing. I am
not made small by size made large, I am made

Without boundaries, on the open road. To
learn myself, the work is never done. It is

To chase a chimera, from the abyss
of unknowable reality to mountains

Of definition. On the road, rolling toward
Yakima, a few miles south of Ellensburg.

I become as I am, I turn to the
world and see who I'm being,

Pictures of Home

Away from home, we hang pictures
of home, Leaving home gets one absent

From oneself. Masks of peace
are hung in empty halls of separation.

I cry in simple joy when anything human
calls itself home, in grief, in pain, in love,

In recognition. The farthest
distance home is no distance at all.

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

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

Another Man Taught by Another Man

I watched a wise man to see if
he'd betray himself as another

Man taught by another man, to believe
something from what other men

Had said to each other, or if he was
identical to the original moment.

An old, sad story, that what we
teach each other could be held suspect,

That what men tell other men as the truth,
straight from the godhead, could be

Held to question. "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
reunion, when we are already

The same as our original reality?"
The one I wondered about pointed past

All teaching to my unteachable
origin. I let go of doubt,

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

When the Greatest Actor Died

When the greatest actor died, many
cried, they said he was a being

Greater than himself. When something
greater than a man. lives in a man,

We want that greatness to live on,
in the flesh. We are not small beings,

Inhabited rarely by something
greater, we are beings of great

Being, in the constraints of our
limitations. We elevate a

Rare being to honor its rarity,
to keep that rarity from

Becoming the common state of our
commerce. No man is greater than

Any other, except he opens
the gates of his being. He puts

Himself inside a self larger than
himself, and 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
greatest actor was no god, he

Played those conceived by others. His
life, among those he loved, among those

Who loved him, was a turmoil of 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 glance of eternity, the look
of a moment, for all to see.

The Old Sailor Baby

His hands were small animals he
couldn't contain, he kept pulling them

Under his care, to keep them back
from being seen in their bestial

Vitality. They tried to live independent
lives, children crawling

Away from their mother, only to
be pulled back again. He was an

Old sailor, alone in a bar, with gnarled
knuckles, canvas skin, eyes

Averted from the crowd. His was
a quiet curse that revealed a

Gentle confusion, a child
in a giant body, I thought of

My father, myself. He sat by
himself at a round table, nursing

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

As I waited behind a woman at the
store, I held her baby's bottle, the baby

Was full of milk, on the edge
of sleep, heavy-lidded, like a sliding

Wall of earth. The baby's feet were
bare in the carrier, two big toes

And eight tiny niblets of pink skin.
The child suckled with less and less

Enthusiasm, until her tiny
hands let go of the bottle

And fell into the air. "Beautiful
baby," I said to the mother,

Stepping into the warm sun of
the street. Later, watching a movie,

I cried. It helps my heart to cry,
To be a baby, to be a man.

The Music of the Blooded Air

On the first hot day of the year, bugs
jump out of their cocoons and flood

The air. One could plant the air and
reap a harvest. Everything competes

For space in what gives it life, the air
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 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. 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 that's
soon to be a rapidly receding

Memory. I tell myself to write
this moment's unwritable poem,

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

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, until I asked a

Passing stranger and learned the awful news. A nation wept. That night was

My first date with my future wife, and despite an inauspicious start,

We both needed a companion for adulthood,

We held hands and jumped. Four state cops sit together on a break, one of

Them roars with laughter. It's rare to hear anyone laugh with abandon,

Let alone a man in uniform, he gurgles, coughs, cackles, giggles,

Hacks, and bursts with shouts. In Shakespeare class, I failed to read Hamlet before

A quiz, I made a joke that no one enjoyed, and later, discovered,

in my reading, the prince of my own Denmark, I won't live past my life,

No matter my words. The laughing policeman fills his ears with his own

Laughter, as if the circle of men is laughing with him, the other

Cops, in softer tones, know how to
handle the scene, With grim faces, they

Finish their lattes and leave. When the
president was killed, the great, wide

Country was filled with the deafening
silence of his death, it wafted

Across Iowa, it coated the Rockies, it
quieted the waves on the coast. I thought

We married because we danced well
together, as if our marriage would

Be as harmonious. When Ophelia died,
Gertrude cried, certain her

Son would marry the girl, if only
the King hadn't been killed. "What are

You reading?" Polonius asked Hamlet, "Words...
words... words..." the Prince replied.

Chased from Fear to Fire

We 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. Stillness reverberates

With peace. We disturb our peace to make
ourselves known. Dogs bark to announce

Their presence, endlessly barking
their being, we bark all day and night,

Our presence never assured, those
at peace need no such reassurance.

We teach ourselves to be insecure,
we learn to communicate our

Insecurities so we may live
in fear with each other, the mind

Chases itself from fear to fire and
back to fear. A mind may make things

Of beauty and truth from its seeded
self, but the ground is complete before

The bloom. One thought lifts a word,
the word wants to play. This habit disturbs

My peace, Once disturbed, it's as if
peace can be ignored, and ought to be.

My hands drop their words, I drop my
hands, and my fisted fear falls away.

Down by the Banks of the River

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

When I drank gin, that summer
in Illinois. The sun was hot, in the

Late hours of the afternoon, after
work, in my room, in the old house,

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, in my third floor room

In the quaint, dilapidated house in
the town next to the town where

I was born. The sun is blocked and then
comes back, and the feeling comes back

With it, it bakes me, like a warm liquid,
until my body feels more liquid

Than vessel. The warmth of the sun
stirs the feeling I'm happy to feel,

Another living, breathing presence of heat itself.
I write these stories backwards, from the

Image to the source, and then sit
in stillness, wrapped in the heat of life.

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

Son has gone and pulls him away,
with no sign of alarm or regret.

The monks laugh, their art is temporal,
the boy is another agent

Of the temporal, as is the
attention of the mother for her

Child, neither is concerned for
The consequence of their agency.

Sitting Bull complained to the government
agent, that they were taking

The sacred lands of the Sioux for
their own. The agent laughed, citing the

Ojibwe, running the Sioux out of
Minnesota, the Sioux, running

The Pawnee out of the Dakotas.
"You may call it spiritual,"

He told the old chief, "but it's not
new, and it's certainly not sacred."

The slaughter of native peoples will
continue apace, 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 name it our own.

So Often Away in Paradise

A poet reads her tale of Blake's wife, saying she missed her husband,

"He was so often away in paradise." This is propaganda

Of escape that denies the real.
Blake and his wife welcomed spirits

At their dinner table. They sat
naked in the backyard tree, This is

The propaganda of spiritual
romance. We so habitually

Clothe reality, our tales of love
have become costume dramas.

Rumi wrote love poems to the Beloved,
when his honest asides were

Of bare existence. A trained speaker
for religious others, it was

Customary for Rumi to dress
his grace in garments of glory.

The emperor of existence has
no wardrobe. How do I admire

My existence or ours, if it's
naked of any form. Instead, I

Praise its reality, in all its vast
and empty wonder. This praise

I encourage and allow in myself
is my human urge to clothe

What I am, when its naked beauty seems
too much for these words in rags.

How Beautiful it is to be Alone

After the aloneness of the body,
nothing so surprises me as the aloneness

Of the soul. Anything that forms
a soul is alone. The form of the

Soul needs another soul, like a god,
to protect it from aloneness.

Oneness is a truth and a deception,
it careens in the mind like

Good drugs, as true as last night's
drunkenness. True sobriety destroys

The illusion of separated
souls. Sobriety's a toxin,

As sinful and as adjudicated,
as the church runs the hiding

From the real. There is nothing
more terrible than being alone,

It is the truth. How beautiful
it is to be alone. Alone in love

Is the opening to no thought
of self, or the self of the soul.

The aloneness of the soul is
the last gasp of the illusion of

Union and separation. How
beautiful to be beyond alone,

Beyond soul, I am love itself
in the shape of a human being.