



FRAGMENT

after John Ashbery

Brian Ng

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Preface

In the December of 1961, John Ashbery flew back to the United States from Paris to attend to his family farm on the advent of the unexpected death of his father, an event which would prompt him to permanently relocate from France to New York and leave his French lover, Pierre Martory. A decade later he would remark on the event to a friend, about its “unexpected and very disquieting aspect which is suddenly being yanked back into one’s childhood.”

There, John Ashbery began work on “Fragment”. Inspired by Maurice Scève’s “Délie,” an exhaustingly long formal work of 449 dizains (ten lines a stanza) which he studied in graduate school, he committed to an atypically ritualistic schedule: “I decided that I would do two stanzas...each time I sat down to write, and not do any more or less.” Each page accounted for a day’s work. The joke was that “Fragment” would be a continuous, long poem – fifty dizains set in enjambed momentum.

The image of Ashbery’s work as fragments shored up from an unending stream of consciousness is not new, and was in fact central to how he saw his work. As one characterization of many, here’s this from a profile on the New Yorker, by Larissa MacFarquhar:

What he is trying to do (and here the metaphors get a little screwy, but these are the pictures that come to him) is jump-start a poem by lowering a bucket down into what feels like a kind of underground stream flowing through his mind—a stream of continuously flowing poetry, or perhaps poetic stuff would be a better way to put it. Whatever the bucket brings up will be his poem... Since he is always dipping the bucket into the same stream his poems will resemble one another, but because the stream varies according to climatic conditions—what’s on his mind, the weather, interruptions—they will also be different.

The sentence-level amnesia in his poems, their beguiling manners of speech as they meander around unstable subjects and pronoun reference, all feed in a notion of indirect continuity that we associate with his work. It struck me that I could make it go on: to explicitly imitate Ashbery, an instantly distinguishable style “whose imitators are legion,” for as long as possible. It would also be necessary, as an exercise in criticism, to reappropriate the texts’ patterns and biases, to snatch some lines and titles, to read Ashbery in a way that respects the free passage of his thought.

This book was induced to push, not through explicative analysis but synchronous imitation, style beyond its limit in death.

THE WINDOW SURROUNDS

The coming storm, tears
Gathering in its gutters.
Then the crowds are swept away
As though swallowed by the wind.

NOSTALGIA'S THIN SIMPLICITY

You can imitate this phrase any day.
It comes easily, with the knowledge
Of the language it communicates:
Simplicial, the vocabulary
Of articulated ideas,
As wingless as a swallow or a parrot
And most definitely not simple, the way
It gets categorized.

Not simple, the category of speech goes beyond
Into a strange being, entirely
A new thing, almost
Unknowable, with the breath of
A churning wave, at hurricane distance,
Its extremity dividing memory from the thing it belongs to,
Bearing the idea of its being to us all,
Color of our first ideas, feeble
And finally foolish, as the quondam companions
Brought us together.

Not at the end, surely,
But at the very moment when the idea
Of what is to come is in jeopardy,
When the potential he uses to evaluate
The newer possibilities, bending
To their own shape, their own strict account
Of their position in the divider's net,
Carrying all before you with you, but your understanding

Is that it is this immediate, this oneness
Which is the law, and which you are unaware
Of? Which is, in a word, life.
To be born amongst inequalities
Is the passport to a permanent state of being:
The barriers are and they are you, cannot you agree
That the legal
obligations rest just outside the fence?
And upon this plan of ours, the producing
Impatience, the sparrows fly forth like confetti
And the lasting crumb of the way we will continue to think of

Impotently, in the excitement of its highest
Call the mass toward its center
Continuing as the hallmark of its extreme
Distance, a throw of lightning, palpable
And irresolvable, sheathes the other

To complete the picture. The other one:
The best friend you never got any closer to
Than the silencer. To enter it and take the valentine
Soon after the priest turned his face fully toward the tent
Causes the dogs to growl and rend,
Pembroke, I suppose, yet there was
Time for those things, and the dust can't
Fall at the feet like a soft snowflake, so must
Wait behind a rock, brooding, uneducated
As regards the outside world and its 60+
Million followers, with plans
On paper and in scraps. Inside this sacred
Parlor a murmur increasing
In solemn but empty strains against the
Microphone. So you have been wanting
To hear those inner pages, the so-called
Secondary beach. And in this way
You have been living ever since.
Remember that useless, yet
Nameless experience
That has been weighing on your shoulders so
As to place them on the land
Which is his. Forget it.
In the rocks of fate and the rocks
Of chaos, you have
Seen the possibilities, the tribulations that
Keep your efforts in suspension, turning
To words of wisdom or dissipating
So that the producing process
Will not know you are we.
Those rains have only intensified
The certain look of the worn face
And the terrible smile, so long
A barrier of silence, ossified
In hardship, reduced
To a point almost between plants and sun.
No longer can the natural glow
Of the frozen face hinder
Or delay, directing
The hurtling of distant
Pointed roofs over the lamps
We used to think of as mere skulls
Now, with the tanks
Of our mooted policies, threaded
Through the smoke of gardens, and
The still life of early paintings
Of the extraordinary

Horror of our situation.
No longer can the asylum
Be the door to our thoughts, by the narrow post
We have modelled.
No more the oppressive dim
But the club has expanded:
To watch over and abuse
The knotted response
Which arises so naturally
To abuse and to
Give the slight outward
Which the furrow
Gradually becomes, but one cannot
Care anymore about the
Club, its objects,
The outline to be followed
Beyond heaven and past the hem
Of colored garments, into
Unquestioned facts and
The natural world, the
Livid part of that
Which is outside me,
Destined to be my shield
And always advising me
To calm my waters,
To forget other,
And object only to myself.
I cry
For help, but do not seem
To have the know-how.
As a jewel
Exists when there is no one to look at it,
Seeing only its color, perhaps a mélange
Of white tables with black chips on them,
The bars of black smoke touching
No one, and yet it all seems
Amazing, almost.
To have existed eternally
And to be remembered
Only as a footnote:
A minute of horrible witchcraft isn't too much to get by,
Then you must get off the hood
Of that car, yet even that seeming
Is controlled by presuppositions
We might never be sure of
Which are never tested, which are constant
And can never be, which is why

I call you.

I have lived most of my life
In the great orange tree
Of my clear life, with its band
Of blossoms.

UNTITLED

It seems I grew up yesterday.
The witch rubbed her magic comb against her forehead
And muttered some long-since unpronounceable word
Which did not matter so much as showing her
In my power a picture of Hans the then-emerging
New god of fees and provisional errors.
I looked down at the river and saw it
Empty though it always has something to say:
The horrible, inexorable time
Flapping from darkness to daylight,
Picking up speed like nobody's business and yet
Sinking into the soil with its
Sidesteps and out of the reality it
Wasn't meant to be anything
Except a series of carefully chosen words
And which, although unkind, were
The necessary sacrifices
For ever going down
To the mass with its songs and dances
In affection, mourning
For what it hated. It hated
Not being able to choose
So that it might act rather than simply
Be a victim of chance
In any given yearning.
So in all ways
It is a question of changing directions
And getting somewhere.
It is a rambunctious jog you can do
Not just walking, but running
Along the road like some beast
Of prey:
There is so much in the world,
So many trills one gets
Locked into.
One can almost see the peace
If that can be done
And we should have the matter
No one asks:
It's like a string of grapes
Now that it's the way to keep leading
To the salt lake
And not worry about the dust or the cobwebs
Any more.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE

We can make it into an object
With all its joints and fibres,
Its rasping as it sees
Or is heard: a tone in which all things
Are lost, converted to a mute
Sphere of silence, the end of which
Is not difficult to interpret:
A sign of gentleness, perhaps,
To those flowers long ago
On the brink of discovering
The truth:
Be sure it says it has nothing to do with us.
But as we shade our eyes
We can also make it into an object
With all its joints and fibres,
Its rasping as it sees
Or hears: a tone in which all things
Are lost, converted to a mute
Sphere of silence, the end
Not difficult to interpret.
And let the bird run with the tree! We are and we are not!
And it's too late, the people are calling
Bearing names of honor, seeming
Fiercely angry that it has come to this pass.
We can at least go out the door, choose our favorites,
With a view of rococo heaven, of exquisite
Cobwebs orbiting us like brown crystals,
And they have by now, we have just time
For intricate hand-games such as what
This world has to offer—
But no one has ever actually played it.
Oh, Jorgat, the said one,
We can keep another—
What? No, you cannot.
And four years later it was still fresh
In the minds of those living
And some of them it had made a dent.
But it was crying, Jorgat thought.

THE PROPHET BIRDS

The birds—who knew them?—erred. At times, a wet day brought on the senses of purgatory. One contemplates an ornamental rain barrel, seen from up close, and concludes that it is not a thing of God, at least, though it is easy to imagine a workman's ladder falling from grace like a rose from a white cloth, or a phantom ten-petaled rain barrel descending at an angle to the pole on which it is suspended, for this is the world, and all things have their procedural order, their beatific nimbus that unscrolling on seeing. The light that showers on the page also lubricates it, deepening as it runs down the page, smoothing its irregular lines and bringing in sentences like true narrative, straining one's ears to the music even as the novel itself unfolds before one's eyes, humanizing its most malignant features for the better. This is the product of your deliberate nonchalance, facile in the extreme winter, summer and all the seasons together; easy, yet not easy enough to intuit, to suggest that the present might be the sum total of all the contingencies that might befall, or that a single blizzard announcing the onset of summer meant, in any case, that it was best to back away, to retreat to a lower perch that did not speak to you, a secret lane of water between the lofty, leafy heights of the sky and the minuscule, leaf-shaped structures of the earth's surface. Best, then, to abide in your fantasies, living out your time with celerity and without comfort.

Nor coddle imaginary friends, as though these existed in a parallel universe in which the two seasons overlapped, their seasons the same everywhere as the light from the sun and the air were the same, true throughout. This was all a sham, of course, yet one could entertain the thought on conditions. If only for the sake of thinking there was a middle-distance between what the lovers were doing and what the result was. But the lover's condition was that of his paroxys (whatever that was), not his condition as a condition of his action. Accordingly the squares of his world were the same as those of another world, his world as a deduction from the conditions of that other world. So the lovers' condition was that of his action: an affirmative, neutral, non-sensuous one at that, and it sufficed to grant him an uninhibited energy which, in the closely knit world of sensibility, reached its pitch only rarely and in a restricted way. The world of flowers was a strange one: no positive energy could exist there, the countless scents and odors that filled it up to an almost fetishistic degree, and at the same time the world that the lovers were leaving behind, one that they had almost forgotten, was more than they had been used to. It seemed as though a new tension had been imposed, tension not from the past but

a certainty of the present tension. For the first time it seemed that the possibility of artistic development was emphasizing itself, though not in the good way some had supposed but the old, elemental evils that had tended to mask it and which now masquerade as an urge toward art, begging the question, "What were they like?" But the question remained unanswered, though it seemed answered already in the teleological outline that had been the background of everything from the earliest positive affirmations to the present day. To elaborate this conception one must discard all the less virgin remnants that had not yet been partially purified from the devil's mischief.

DESIRE, AT POINT REYES

In the dusk of what would be a long day
they stopped talking. It was better so.
But not for me, who could see them now—
their mouths about to kiss each other's faces off,
hands diving into a case where usually
the harmonicas are stored. They play something wild—
you hear it every night but you don't know where from.
And when they stop the moon disappears,
they're standing there with their instruments,
making the most of whatever comes.
When morning comes they head off into their secret lives.

EVERY EVENING WHEN

I.

You've arrived in the city from the frozen steppe. The arterial roads are choked with dust. A woman stops to ask for a cigarette, and a gaggle of extras — men, women, and children — run away down the aisles, to tell you how dirty the world is, how it dares you to step out of it into the street, and you can't resist, you can't resist the smile that slithers across your face as you do so, and are gone, always to that other chamber.

In park, on the stoop, you rest your head. The body language is all of us, against a blank wall, facing each other, gazing.

The therapist isn't here yet — she is probably on your trail.

The copter?

II.

You know I was a sucker for it.
I mean, what other description is there of you?
Sucked into a whirlwind of tidings and recollections
as they came streaming out of the house,
colors, strings, fashions,
nourished by the wayside,
where they sit, swaying,
a flea away.

The matter is we're getting closer
to the truth, it seems,
toying us as we walk around
the edge of a chasm,
awash with mushroom and needle-grass,
this forgetting,
not knowing where we are
for a space of time that is both past and future
canceled laughter and applause,
fingering, at times, of the useless,
stiff reminder in the sky,
the way we came down.

MAIL FORWARDING

There was no useful briefing after the war,
no picture of a briefing sheet in which gray
penciled shadows—the shapes of men—
could be discerned.

But as a rule
when faced with this sort of blankness
we sort our minds
around it, sometimes for years,
other times decades—
we'll leave it that way.

As I said
I have no intention
of ever doing it again.
That's why I sat
here, uninspired,
unwilling to give the order.
The man with the red hat
was the one who told me to go.

WHY DO BIRDS SUDDENLY APPEAR

The answer is that they vary in kind, but always in kind.
A grain of rice, a curl of a train.
The curtain is lowered anyway,
a graceful swing in time.

That is: the ruler of the land has some say in what
is expedient, and in what domain the majesty lies.

And there is no longer any room on the ship
for wind to grow.
It is a new face, a new uniform.

He knew her before she became queen.
They shared a laugh, thought about it.

That's one way you can look at it.
Other than that the old queen is still there,
though a different one.

She leaned against the window, smiling.

PORTRAIT D'UNE FEMME

She had a strangeness, weird to look at her
from afar, and knew it would never go away.
The strands of hair brushed her forehead. The rafters
of the great outer bridge were a hair's breadth away.

Yet, the girl seemed content to be standing here,
with the strange contraption that gave her form
the world over. At one such occasion
her beauty came to life again, in the form of a dream
to a friend in a neighboring room. "In that dream
did I not trick you?" was all the reply she could muster.
At no point in this long reverie did she feel secure
or inadequate, but it was all a sham,
a kind of cross-eyed stare, a situation
of which she was aware but did not care.

At no point during the whole of her ordeal did she see
how it would ultimately end, or care. That would have been a surprise,
darn! But such is the way of surprises,
always in the direction of the sun.

A PACT WITH SULLEN DEATH

She would read that to the others.

The others, well, they didn't really know what they were talking about.

"Well, it was like looking for a lost object," she had said several times now, in a low, passionate voice that broke out into a high-pitched wail that was cut short by a high-velocity waft of wind abruptly yanking the line of sight back toward the source.

Was it a lost object, then, that they would come to in the future, leading to a future of universal laughter and love? No, they just knew that the past was going to be around for a long time, longer than anyone's hopes and dreams, and so they both withdrew into themselves, as if paralyzed by something. It didn't matter which one of them got in first, because all would have been for naught if it hadn't been for that one person's daring: he or she who became the overnight subject of everyone's thoughts, forever tiptoeing in and out of the mysterious almond-yellow wood,

seen to be leading somewhere, and as soon as one has been seen one must return whence one came. The subtext was lost, there was no other way to read it. But one's curiosity got the better of me, and I drew deep breath, hoping to write something to recapture that lost evening, only to find that the only thing that does is rhyme with "slime," which is probably what I did. But even if I had been directed by some higher power not to mess around, it did serve its purpose many years ago. There was no need to create havoc, even to invent it. We all live in it somehow, some more submerged, but the majority of them have somehow gotten its consciousness, and are guided by it to more adventures and glittering sensuality than before. The crystal haze, distant as it seems,

is only a diagram, a diagram of how we came to look this way eight centuries ago when all our effort had been in some way enhanced by the progress of science, and now we are only children again, learning to read and write again. The day

has grown up. And already, at night, the haze
is blank and heavy, a discordant wave that picks
up the threads of what we just said, leaving
no impression on those it came too closely
within the purview of, or felt the need to protect.
The automobile's eye closes as the last
purchase of the day is effected. All heads are saturated,
one by one, until only the empty, sad cone
remains of evidence. It seems everybody has done it,
and the cycle continues.

TABOO

If there is a settlement, it is small and ugly. It is a microtonal affair, brewed in the laboratory of a septic tank full of arcades, bootleg cigars, and siphoned lumps of raw sewage. It is served on a silver platter.

The champagne flutes are retired, at least for the present. The mice and the hay have all disappeared. The wolverine has become extinct.

The wick has bitten its own hand, it has escaped. All the wolverines have run, the elk and the caribou have returned to their perches.

We have no idea where we are. Never heard of Wyoming.

We live in a State whose borders are dotted with the mountains' highest points, whose summits are seen from the state capital, Aysgarth, whose portals are often lit up at night, as a matter of fact, by the chief among the Cheyenne. The eruption of Smolensk is the most beautiful that day, and the eruption of Everest a most singular one, for its vast outlines, like those of the Neva, bespeak the audacity of the attack that is to come on the United States of America. Never heard of Larissa.

These and other abandoned projects are pointed in the direction of the promised paradise. There is no longer any question but that these are places that the spirit of initiation began to have its say, places that the dancing and murmuring caused the hostile blaze to emerge, a blazing example to one who thought he had seen it all, but this was not to be the case for long. Day by day the spot lightened, and a new day dawned with a soothing hum.

"We have traveled nearly fifty miles since the night shift began."

The grove grew silent for a few moments, then began to talk to itself.

It seemed that it were not having this effect, that the desert had other plans which it was now too late to be a part of. The grove grew still more silent as it was aware of these, but the figure skated by without making a sound.

Finally the whole thing fell into our hands.

I need not recount how we broke out of the dream in which we were imprisoned, and how we arrived at this place of safety, here raised to the level of sentient beings.

I need not remind you how grateful we are to have been brought to this pass, to have been raised to this level, but you must know already, having been raised to it. For it to no longer vibrate in the hollow of your hand but was the solid block of your devotion, your belief that we would ever see again, once we had passed the half-turn of the long pole through which the

stars passed, and which, as it attracted the eye of some ambitious constable, moved you to action. As a matter of fact the sight of you now caused the consternation you now feel, and though it was merely a passing feeling, it had the firm feel of being behind you, in the fight of your life against an ever-deviating enemy whom you could never hope to see.

Thus we are never entirely certain of what happens, or even of which direction the motion is led, though we know where we are and it is the most convenient way, whatever happened to be in our possession before. And so we return scalded with the refreshing change, the cool impunity, the clear sense of our punishment beginning to flicker and melting fast like an oncoming storm.

THE CONSTITUENTS

Now you're a throng
weighed down with rosaries and charms,
mooning on stairways in the dark.
Will your children remember
what has been promised to them?

No stars will descend from the sky.
Your child has been shot in the arm.
He came out of it badly,
unable to distinguish words.
Now he is withdrawn, and sullen.
An early record is playing.

You know about the old year, how stubborn and stupid
it was, how bitter and angry,
not understanding what you had meant
by all your good wishes and encouragement.
It was like being with a relative.
They would never forgive you
even for trying. You were never sure.
There was always another box of things to be opened.
How little we knew of what went on under the surface!

You have no choice, really.
You will turn yourself around
and take up the reins of your life again.
For the time being you have no friends.
Those who are near you have retreated into private lives.
Others take no notice of you,
are barely aware of what you are saying.
And still you are asking: How shall I spend my time?

No, the wind cannot be taken at its word.
Be careful. Even a declaration is suspect,
should it include the scent of lilac.
The flowers of longing are wilting too soon.
Before we can plant them in the earth
our fears arise, our recollections,
incessant like bleeding from an incision.
Is this what we were afraid of?
It was more than that, perhaps.

A nocturnal meadow might be pictured
that required two or three days to cross,
each step bringing us closer to the stars.
I think of her now as someone in an opera.
Everyone around her has a voice.

Each is singing in another language.
In the old days I'd be relieved to leave the city.
Now it seems like another country.

I have to keep myself from laughing,
from breaking down and telling you everything,
laughing about it as if it had happened to someone else.

THE HISTORY OF TIME

Day was born on a string of porticoes,
the result of centuries of polyphony.
The mother-dispenser offered her product

as a sacrifice to the sun, whatever the cost.
These and others were told the truth
as it pleases to be told, and the voyage

was cancelled, so that the voyage
had nothing to do with the sun.
The abatis had been trounced.

From that moment forward all was confusion
and a great spelling bee.

“Look, the enemy’s horses are coming down!”
The hay was coming undone.
The locusts stank.

So much for freedom I thought I

thought I knew. It led me
to the abatis and beyond them,
to the no man’s land,

the enchanted land of Minnie Mouse and her house.

THOUGHT

The last object of a poem is always another poem.
But since then the object has persisted
in certain states of being—a mouthful
but the essential shape always remains the same.
In certain periods of life the object
has a certain logic, but without becoming
another in a long line of poets, filmmakers,

poet menaces to our way of life through our actions
and through our seeming to do things
for the love of doing them. It is a perverse moon

with faces we'll never meet again, and the sky
has been transformed by something terrible. I say this

without assuming responsibility, and ask no
affront from you. You are the reason
for this sun's fierce beauty, and through your

actions I've become something less beautiful, until

a group of us proceeds to the idol,
thinks of something funny it was all about us,
then gives up and goes home, sad and disappointed

with the success or failure of its efforts, &c.

No more can I tell you these things.
We've had our say, go away.
The time of rest is at hand.

MY WATCHING

From what I can see it
it looks like a nice place to live.
Look at all the quaint, mechanical things
fixed up here:
the tanning bed,
chairs and such.

Father sits here,
looking at the road.
If he was so smart,
why then I wouldn't trust him.

He's too trusting, now,
but there were nights
when everything was one.
You walked through

the powder house, and stepped
as though you knew it was all over,
and then the word got
out, and you returned to the white world

that created you.

There were no clean sheets,
only a little dreaminess.

Then you got to the town

and turned away.
It was kind of a college
town, which was a good thing.

Then you walked down

and saw the enormous pick-up trucks,
and the huge tires on the road.
The people were leaving.
A girl loved you,
the radio announced.
A disease of convenience,
the inevitable merge.

THE RECITAL

The voice
you hear is part of it,
a cough to the trouble that met it.
Unpleasant and insistent things
lie nearby. Permit me then,
to sew the lining
to your button, for that's what you are,

an unseemly event in the sense of a whole life.

You are buying a cup of hot coffee
smooth from the grating of a B-flat.
You remove my mask
and place it on the cash register.
I've done bleeding to hear you.
It's the reason why I became a expert
in Russian literature.

I need to know the air
isn't it too early or
too late for me? I mean,
I have to finish my job, and then?
The Moon had its moment in the sun
and then it fell back on earth.
You might as well turn the page over
to yourself. I mean,
you have already done so.

The rabbi's opinion on all this was:

No one should have to die to comply
with the new government.
It was just a joke! But if one is sober
then, two things could be said.
How brittle it all was and how
simple it all seemed after the adjustments made

sure the captives were quiet.
It took a man with a horse
to find out where the pavement was.
After that the emperor deserved an expiry date.

THE WAITING CEREMONY

That it might not look so different
from the others, you in your silken polo
and frock coat, no doubt harboring
a secret you were unwilling or unable to disclose,
perhaps because you were too preoccupied
with other pursuits, or perhaps because you simply
don't care. Whatever the reason,

it is your doing. Yet you,
on your bank of pineapples, might

see from a great distance how other people live,

if only for a day or two, then
you're in the driver's seat. Perhaps

it is just that I am a healer,
that other moons will come and go, across

the floor with their waves. And if that is so,
why then I am off on my own, sweeping
the floor for you, who thought you knew it all

that time we were down in the mill. Why
do we think we know it all, yet feel so much we must

turn over every now and then to see what remains?
Does it need a reason? Does the universe

caring, guiding it along for us, for this

and that day we went out to the bar
sipping martinis, it was so luscious

of lemon zest that you could see up ahead
where the trees were being boarded, and then down

slide into the forest and raindrops
clasped to the dirt, waiting
to dry, you thought, and the truth is I don't

care, am off on my own again, careening

like a kite on a string, but this time
it is a solo tango, and we are led

by the free-spirited refrain of a canoe

along a calm river bed that at this moment is

tearing its own landscape in two,
and we have reached the island of Moll's Laundry,
the one true resting place for all
the days of our short life, and we can't stand
what we have to do, can't keep it
in the balance, and so give up and move on
to bigger and better things,
but as I say I am not a civilized person,
only a savage, a conquered
man who has to live through the consequences
of my stupidity in order to come out alive
and do something for the benefit of the whole civilized
world, even as it tears itself apart
over the remains of its children and others
on the shore, in the water. And we must do something,
do something for each other, for the benefit of all
and sundry, for it to matter, and in order to
do it we must begin somewhere, and that means
talking about it, feeling its pulse
as it passes through your hand, and once we have reached
that place no one will want to go again, it is pitch-black
with no one to go for the night, and there are no
alternatives except what is presented to us in colored
lights, and what remains of it.

THE NEW SINCERITY

Baffled by the sky, which had turned its back on us during a period of unusual violence in which we were accustomed to working under it, I shouldered my way between latecomers, venturing into the center of a strange commotion and wishing I were not so easily alarmed. At last it dawned on me that the cacophony was merely being generated by beings who, for all their hasty talk, were trying to get along. Most of them were asking me if they could go home now or if they had to stay a little while longer. It was plain from their hangdog expressions that they had hoped never to see this place again, where pleasures are bought by the person you see before you, like a soft drink or sandwich. The day was pure to me, though no one else was even out of bed. Here, under the sky, among the taller towers, in the middle of that hot, dreamlike morning, we considered the highly colored stores, their gaudy labels referring to our lowly dreams, till the shades on the lower floors of the buildings fell like millers to their knees, begging for mercy. When it occurred to me that I would have to spend the rest of my life in this place, I felt not so much afraid as suddenly desperate. "My children!" I cried. "Are you coming to join me?" And then, pointing to an approaching comet: "Look, my children! The very sky itself is on fire!" They merely pointed back to the window that we had opened. It was then I knew for certain that my life was over. Not my life as a whole, but that part of it which goes under the name of teaching. It is indeed preferable to be unfathered, to come into the world when no one cares who you are, or why you are born. But I never understood how they could refuse to pay attention to me, how they could make such a silly spectacle of themselves. I thought they must have gone mad. I felt both sorry for them and ashamed. But now, thanks to this revelation, I have seen the light of day. The sky was a joke. The new sincerity? Another word for indifference. The world was never meant to be understood.

HITHER OR THITHER

Just a little polish, and you've
Come to me in tears:
"Made my peace, my love!" No,
I am not in love,
but that doesn't prevent me from
attacking this new world of cheap sunsets,

this new clamor of hooting and howling

in the forest somewhere. Make it
into something with something,
but don't overdo it, tame it

like a dog or cat. It's the over-eagerness
that brings one every time
to the edge of a precipice, wheezing

in the exertion of willow-crustured breasts,
and then, gone again like a bomb or cartwheel.

I see it as I approach
the threshold that seems to cast
a shadow of a pocket
that is as vast as the shadow of the sun
that the sun cast
on the earth. And as I approach
that threshold, a sense of enormous weight

slams itself into my chest, overwhelming

my attempts to reason with it. It's all bravado,
brass, a dime a dozen, and I have

no desire whatsoever other than to be near you, to adorn
your dusky frame with my chattels (you cared,
really), and nurture you as a child prospers
on the trot in the velveteen noons. And a sense
of rightness, or satiety, builds toward

a resolution, then a dozen separate nights of mourning
in a row of mourning. And the process of finessing

the arc of the moon's defiant resolution, that she would not be beaten,
rests her at the threshold. And we two, we two, why
why our separate ways be turning toward each other,
isn't this the way it was meant to be?

There was a time when Daisy and Philip were children

and the sun shone through half a kaleidoscope
of colors on the little fence. And it was a lovely
feeling to be back on the other side,
for a change, for the being ended.

But the little girl next door kept her composure,
went off to college, and has a degree
from a small school in the mountains.
It's more practical, she says, and half-past ten,
when dinner is over, and the squealing, moaning, wheezing
of the wind will have been heard round here even
if it's not meant for you, or someone else.
Which brings me to my original argument, which
I regret if I have offended
you by implying you have. Please forgive me,
though I have barely begun my second day here.
The receptionist was lovely—
more so than you probably realize, I'm afraid.
She handed me a bunch of little red envelopes
with a strange message written in them, in a strange room
with a bunch of red and blue china—"Let's
try the tomato sauce, shall we?"—and that was it.
It made no difference, the sauce was already
half-used, yet no less delicious than the others.

The bell tolled the hour of nineteen;
it was now or never.

I felt I'd find the one I wanted in the city
of shadows, where life imitated art

as closely as any two people can ever
moo-hae together. It's the way

the street is paved, the sidewalks slanted with lamp-posts,
the lamp-light probing the dark, tortured

gash behind the teacups, the larkspur
clawing its shadows into humor, toward itself

seen through a cleft in the wall.
And all through the night
there was nothing but dreams of the lost song
that was at my hip like a belt

of shadows. I had been looking at the pavement
for a long time. And waking
to the reality of it, I was like any other
day, relieved of the responsibilities

of a life of comic relief, and peace
in its measured sheen. And I walked with
the others for a few blocks, taking
aside the customary tour de force of neighborhood
as the little girl makes her bed, for it is late
enough, really late, to make much of any difference. The colas
have fried in the river, the tamarinds are in vogue,
the piñata bears little relation to anything,
the little house of the president bears little relation to the macaron
behind the yellow stuccoed front steps, and the petulance of infants
collapses over the centuries, leaving behind
a trail of tamales and piñatas, and a piñata
too old to count. But I was watching TV at the time,
so maybe this is a prank gone wrong this time.
Perhaps no other deed has merited as much opprobrium.
I'll go you one better, Chico. I'll bring you
whispering, and in so doing shall make myself seem to
you, the old purgator of hemispheres, and the caught
in the embrace of tamarinds and piñatas. I won't lie,
and tell the truth if I do. But if I do, you
should too. I have more time
to watch the laundromat and the car wash, which is good
for my health. I have other things to do,
but they don't concern me as much as you might think.
I'm still young, after all.
And now, supposing we're here, what
access do we have? How many of us are there?
Who are the others? Who are they that we so contemptuously
leave behind? I was just thinking
it was you who was to blame for my predicament,
and now I see you smiling evilly
as though to underline the horizontal bar
that barred your path. And I shall go on

recruiting new members, even if
they are uncomfortable with the idea.
That is how I came to spend the night
in your bed. It was almost time to go to the bathroom,

as though a hurricane had knocked them down. But the question

was whether they were still wearing their pyjamas. No,
they were wearing their pajamas. It was then I realized

what a joke you are. I shall return someday
to the bright, shining days of my youth
when mankind was at its zenith. I shall not,
will not leave you. We shall see.

Another time.

SPORTS BAR

It ended up being surprisingly fancy.
I was at the Blue Hill overlooking the pen.

Men were sitting in them,
with wine, caviar, mysterious herbs, — it's all here,
thought the sailor. My nursemaid called
from a distance. She wanted to know why the hats
kept on growing. She had been sent home.

The explosions finally went away.
They replaced the tungsten light with daylight.
She tried to hide behind the bookends
but it was a format error—the characters
lined up next to her, luxuriating
her bust into a castle. If we had prisms. . .

The war was coming to an end.
The toilers struggled to keep their jobs.
The dirty sailors hated it.

The pilots gazed at their instruments.
The janitor thoughtfully replaced his wrench
in the rotary of his shop, and the treasures
drew him in, like the glitter
of ancient ships.

Look, the waterfall is on the either side of where
I was standing, talking about the hat I
received from the beholder.

SPOTLIGHT ON AMERICA

I have seen the results on the ground
and already removed the factors
that made this possible.

You stupefied me with your agility
at the edge of my performance.
I realized the source of your safety was
a necessity rather than a pleasure.

Now we are as far apart as the speakers.
I mean, the prevaricating context makes
the layers of meaning separate,
yet the result is the same:

mornings like this, with an unusual sense of weariness.

That is, with everything already lost,
awe have only ourselves to ask for the result.

EARTHQUAKE

Who knows what else? I mean,
the other half of you that is absorbed
in other people's misery.

But there is no other way. You see
what a miracle has become. I know
it's selfish to envy it,
but in the end it's about more than that.
The other half of you
has split open the front of the wagon
to reveal the sweet but somber interior
that was secretly constructed
to hide your more risible aspects.
Everything is rooted in reality,
which is why it behooves
you to examine it further
before acting. The truth is

delightful. But I'm not going to tell
you any of this. It's too boring. I mean,

the time of the lost umbrella
in the forest, and the man behind it,
and the woman who followed,
supplanting her description with
her own unique spin on it,

and then the faucet fell off.
There was no one to blame but herself.

Alarms wilt along the shore,
providing a fitting, supportive framework
for the next few frenzied seconds

as all of us stare adoringly

into the emptiness that sometimes flashes
a trace of laughter, a half-smile
like a front row ticket in the back row
and are persuaded to keep playing
until the end is reached.

The truth is that these frenzied minutes
have little to do with where we came from,
only with so-called mini-persons,
such as ourselves, minuscule in the grand scheme
of things. And we, again, return

home to the foundering farmhouse,
its barking as the midnight hours approach.

We were never here before.
We could have been playing, it's true,
but the amusement we got out of it was more than we
could ask for, especially since
the hours decided them. We were polite
buts, and they thought so too.

The days get shorter, the winds fresheter.
But I like how that felt,
not too much, not too little.

Wind your way to the floor.
You can never be too sure
about what goes on here, and if you do
it will seem a museum.
Look, there are buttons on this little girl's frock.
Look, there are knickers on the step.

Now we only have to wait
for the man to show up.
If there were a waiting room it would be
overlooking the main entrance, which is why
we don't ever see ourselves.

We never see ourselves, and never really know
what goes on up there. It's as though a switch
had been broken and the old regime was back in power.
It's more or less the same thing as when we were kids
talking about the moon and how it's going to be
for quite a while, and how that will affect us,
how innocent we will always be, at the end when all is said and done.

The switch has been located and the circuit broken.
The tide is in. We are back on even keel
with the rest of the fleet of carriers,
and though we used to get on well with the others,
now it's always assumed we don't, that there is something wrong
with one, that we are somehow inferior, somehow
under the belt of a terrible car crash we once thought was over,
a homely existence of suds, of oblong tables,
a persistent inability to speak.

The car keys were in the pocket of some who knew
the truth, that we were perhaps not as intuitive
as some of the others and had to be coaxed
into speaking, so as to the point of a bell that said

good day to the town, and we were led out of it, into a world
of pink and blue hues, and finally
a world of yellow flowers, that seemed to surround us.

Now it was the fisherman's turn, and he had never seen
so many rays of water streaming from the shore.
A sad marvel that the waves did not collide
with themselves, and the blue and yellow hues
were those of the night, as it slowly crept up
on us, and the stars were red and blue.

UNACCOMPANIED

I know it takes a village,
but the tides pull their weight
and a tango is made.

It's not for nothing that we are surrounded
by miniatures, each as fascinating as the last,
but what do you want with me? I am affronted,
unhygienic, perhaps, but that is no reason
to leave. All the time
I was on the high seas
I was looking at this thing that you sent me,
and the answer was yes, to hunt and torment
and entertain as many as you please. Yes,
that is all right too.

And in this I am like other men
who sail along at the fringes of the tide
and then get off and wonder why it was so easy
to follow, and then it's too late, the ship has sailed
from the isthmus into the blue lights of downtown
and the new casualness has washed away
all notions of ruggedness, all notions of the
daring, boldness, or the dare that would make a man
think, just as the first three are distilled
into one, a single thought.

That night the wind laid
a wreath everywhere. It was a wonder
the next morning everything was normal, one had been
warned against assuming too much. Yet I, too, as though
a witness to a catastrophe, too invested
in my own story to be able to think clearly
or care, except to say that things had gotten
better, that the wreath was a "wrench," a "blanket," whatever
you wanted to call it. And now I sit here
wringing my hands, not quite certain I want
to hang up the noose, but want
to be let out of this one last deal, to go
on being who we have known all our adult life
and not be punished for it, so what's the harm?
But then again I don't really care
who you are or where you come from. What
do you need me for, anyway?
You need me to do this. It is finished.

But where is the one person who will help you
find the missing key?

And if he or she is late, why
the hell, we'll combine forces and make it a success,
make it an event, whatever that means.

A HEROIC THING

I don't know how you feel
being held up by the police
to perform a seemingly meaningless act
that will ultimately save you and all your friends
from them as only you know
the key is somewhere out of sight
and your friend can spell a spell once
and then it will be all right, you'll feel
well-rested, free to go. But the spell
will be a lie, a sheaf of pages torn from the page
of a book with a slip of paper embedded in it.

Why, though, does
the magical bond hold.
A single tear jerks in the air:
"No!" It is impossible here,
where the trees are. The air is tart and dense
and the sunlight long gone. The sound of birch-rustling
screams past the madecels of the trees,
toward the unseen intruder.

THRILL OF A ROMANCE

It's different when you have hiccups.
Everything is—well, everyone is.
You can't just say that much and expect to get more
of the same. Like I say, hiccups are an exception
to the general rule of not talking too much.
We'd been meaning to post this on our blog,
but it was testing his patience. It was taking after his
mind, you see. So we slowed down, traded leopard-print
toys for pocket change. He owed us one,
said we'd been promising him. In truth
we hadn't, he just came by late last night
and plopped down in our waiting-room.
He explained how the war had been hell,
how the love-buddies had been running around, had
become extinct. You see, all his life
he wanted to be a trainer, or
even. But fate's crow-like wing
had other plans for him. Not that
he wasn't up to snuff, or anything—
fierce, thoughtfully applied, for the rest
of his days. Yet it
wasn't time to worry yet.

Still, one does notice things—
the way the kitchen is done
in the evening, before the great love
of which much is written and hears afterward
from the walls, floor and ceiling.

There was no longer any use
in describing them, we were here,
and having our day of understanding,
knowing it would never make any difference
to ourselves or anyone else.
And so we were ever as we went along
till somebody, always somebody, came to the end of a long list
of demands which included the ability to love without
tending to understand it and, by the same token,
to go on loving without end.

And the mountain-mad man asked not
how it was that the others fared at each other's hands
when love had none
possessed any of its own, or had it been coaxed
in any of its many instructions.

Yet one must not think that the
mad man is the sole author of his own sad
way of life. Love is brittle and true, though it may
be the least understood of them all. And time, in this hour,
will judge us and arrive soon.

THE HISTORY OF MY LIFE

Soon the sun grew tired of
Pouring down the sides of their faces.
It got kind of dark.
And the little man with the bulbous face
Exchanged eiderdown with water.
The rain fell with startling regularity.

He grew up in prudery.
The sky was very pure that winter,
But it was all wrong with him. Petty avatars
Planted themselves all over. He abandoned
The secrets he was kept from knowing.
Drinking tea secretly, he

Saw nothing on the desired shore.
He whispered the night away.

When the badgers raided my gate I was asleep.
They came, and I saw, with some daylight,

That they had planted themselves on the tree.
Years later in Vilnius

The temple skulked and died away.
Soon all the sea brought its share of guests.
Some were delighted, and sat on the beach.
But all were puzzled and disappointed.
Why am I fine with this place, if not
The good ship I thought I was? I mean
No one bothers anymore. Men are up at nine

Fridays, and the ocean filters away the cold.
What would you have done? We are all brothers now,

Children that time cares so much about.
And has cared for again. A fish flies
Overhead and what do you expect? A rope of dust.

YOU, MY ACADEMY

Sometime, perhaps, after a few more stops along the way, we'll arrive at a post office that bears our name and number. A woman at the counter will confirm our entry and direct us to a waiting room which bears an elaborate looking mattress on its head, as well as an antique carving of a stag and a porcupine with a deer at its base. In the corner a balding man watches us and communicates with a doll's face in the wood of the fireplace. In another room a mullet is waiting, dead center first one-third of the bed. And next to the bed a bundle of bubonic plague or hysteria is sweeping.

We want to go back to the old school, the one we left behind
in a part of town no one can remember.

It was a memory of celerity,
a leaf in a forest of it.

We remember only as fondly as a child we left that school,
earnest of others' memories, dandified, disturbed.
Yet the memory, lingering, is always a few paces away.

SLEEPERS AWAKEN

Sleeping with the uninitiated is the new normal.
The old grotesque norm remains.

As the moon is naked the stars upstage their faint acknowledgment
of human dignity. There is room for the hollow
in the satchel, the wariness of the others dissipates.

It is the routine of our lives. We sit down
to wait. As the pace picks up weirder and more bizarre
the landscape around us becomes more inexplicable,
baking the past in eiderdown. We never had any quarrel
with each other about the script, the flourishes were eiderdown
on a layer of dust one could scarcely make out with the naked eye.

Each of us devotes some thought to these things,
though it is rarely a conscious decision. We all
get into these ruts so as to write about each other's
morbid and autobiographical reflections, in the style
of one who has written before, and who knows how
the manners of others may have turned over
eons ago, when all was at an end,
still young, and the breeze that blows
on this bramble and that one is ashamed to confess
to having touched once, in the fullness of time,
nonexistent, and all-inclusive, but also
vast and coherent, I try
to suppress the impulse to touch
even as I am touching, to know how it feels
against a wall, against a surface wholly his own
and unaffected by the clothes that came over him
at various times during life, and I cannot,
no I don't, control this avalanche of emotion
that comes from nowhere but that is just
as surely the side effect of the uniform
of things that flies
on a breeze, and will have flown
on any flying boat, and landed
on a deserted shore. And I don't see
how this affects my career prospects, or my family's—
how could it? We are middle-class, we have no
less-than-ideal experience to draw from, and
most importantly, no one has ever asked us about it.

We have, however, one notable relative who does:
Rumpole, who, though no longer living, still manages
to cause consternation on occasion.

One must have a nest of eggs to believe this,
and a disposition to believe it even if it's just
one relation—the last one—that went out
into a clearing some years ago and the
horrible noise it made was like a distant bell.

Rumpole, however, managed to avoid the pool
of descent and actually succeeded in making himself the ancestor
that all history should be but a little—not a
major role, but a pivotal one, perhaps?
That's certainly what Clive, my ancestor,
did. And who is the less "a descendant,"
says he'll tell us one day. It's something

you learn in school, anyway. A few buckets
of crab meat on a stick.

Rumpole, you were my first love.
But odds are you're better than that.
Your dark atmosphere imbibes
a certain majesty that I didn't know
even existed. I'd like more cousins
on this side of the pond. Perhaps some are better than others,
one can tell by the way they look at you,
the unevenness of your growing, all the
excuses and sundries you shed during the way.

It's better this way, with the brothers at the controls.
The possibilities are endless, you can't choose one
and spoil the others, but you can always remember
how they looked at you while you shied away
from them and from yourself, and how they looked
down on you as you realized they had no place left to go,
only down, down into the snow and the cold,
and wished they could take you away
but you were too preoccupied with other cares,
too preoccupied with making sure the others are OK,
on your own, for once.

And with a sigh of absolute freedom
you take the controls and plunge into perdition,
into a snow-encrusted ditch. Pass the torches,
the flame of the hearth, to the newcomers. They will have to go out
on their own, having no friends, no neighbors,
only a candlelight vigil from the floor
in the living, humid evening, and you, you

will have to do it
on your own time, that is, in a way that does not involve smoking

or gargoyles. It will be all right, you will see. It will go on being all right, until the time when someone—the one who stabbed you, you thought, a sad day for all concerned, but you were right about one thing: it always turns out that way, that the wind has cooled some but not others, the sun was briefly extinguished but has since risen and is now sinking, blowing with the force of its simple concern for all concerned, even if that person is dead.

IN THE TIME OF PUSSY WILLOWS

There was a long tussock of cloud
that led from the base of the tree to the upper left.
At first it was thought to be a small, medium-sized
variety, but as we grew used to it the merit of its
variance became conspicuous, like a cow on a swatch of sky.
The weather report was no longer the morsel that
some people, in a less fortunate spot, subsist
on for several days running, until the hunger
of each gives out and they subsist, partially,
though without the integrity to go on doing that.
A little celerity may go a long way toward satisfying
the emptiness one feels on the outside, waiting
for the outside to be clean and dry before one accepts
the notion of a god like water, who loves and is not
too godlike for each of us to be completely self-sufficient
in our efforts to make sense of the endless series of
arriving lights and sirens wailing and the beyond
of the endless nights, which seem, at first
, like hours, becoming, as one advances
into a forest or prairie, more of an impression
than a lasting memory, though both are
substantiated for the most part. The inner turmoil
is taken up on, and meanwhile the landscape, so beautiful
in its entirety, has been around for so long,
so mysterious, so in the blue-violet-white suburban night
that one had been anticipating but never quite dared to believe.
And now it is all too late, the moon has gone down
and there is nothing to do except wait.

Yet one is impatient
as hell freezes over.
There is no way of getting out
except walking the very few blocks over which the other
has its fixed, pointed head, pointing to the horizon,
a wooden signpost pointing one's path back
past the fence. And the moon too has mellowed
into the malady of suburbia, the smile all the same
though spaced a dime an inch apart, their smiles lined
with shadows like fleurs de lis. And now in the great hall
a special guest has set down. A woman in her fifties
who looks as if she has been sitting quietly
all of a sudden, a facted look, a look of profound indifference
as death approaches, death and its discourse,
the discourse of all the lost time. Time
that is being delivered to its prospective sire. Time
wants you to know that

you too are to be this look
and all that comes of it, the look
you have always wanted to inflict
on your enemies, the look
they have always pretended to be in your tenderness
is to poison them. It is the truth,
but you knew that already.

THE SPONGE OF SLEEP

Yes, they have glass slippers.
And the slippers are intended for the moon.

They have a habit of sliding off the shoe
when you least expect them.

They slant more toward the shore
where they're made. In the dark you can see
them better. And the dark can tell you
so much: how we were made,
what went wrong, why it happened this way,

why the grass grows longer each time the light
goes out, why knots of cloud obscure the sun,

why the milk boils faster in this cold country.

THEY ARE DIFFERENT FROM US

You can't tell the difference between a stalemate
and a negotiation. The former
is about as likely to succeed as a coin to enter the eye,
as the result of the peephole a cataclysm creates.

We are more like people in our extended families,
who, though no longer governing, still exert a great deal of influence
on the social fabric. I was surprised
by your lackadaisicalness in approaching me, in your polite
but insistent shuffle. Did you want to see it all?

Certainly I did. But I was going to put it aside
for you and your sister. We'd see about that.

A lesser artist might have maneuvered
to have his work cut out of the same cloth.
He is still reeling from the newness
of the idea, and will have to earn it
through practice. Meanwhile his sister
is working on getting used to life in a New York City
studio. It doesn't get colder than it is here.
Lighter, somehow, with the sisters
in the future we never thought we'd have.

IMAGE PROBLEM

Simple enough, I guess. A lot of them
haven't solved the eternal elephant
of how to bring light and love and chaos
into a marriage that has stood the test
of time, is devout, and won't trade places.

Some couples get married
at the beginning of summer, or the end.
Others stick to a secular approach
until the century is dissolved
in the jagged clouds of autumn. Still others
come out of it all better for it,
live off the interest of their studies,
till the next tide sweeps in
to buy the séance.

The semester was spoiled
for me by having to cover so much ground
in such a short time. But I had the good grace
to come out of it, to make new friends
and to love some of them. They are as a rule
to support and encourage me, which is the best
mention, anyhow, and to take me where I wish to go.

Old friends and new friends of different persuasions
have swollen my desire to be somewhere, to be left
alone, at the end of a long day. And all because
a potted horn—their first taste of hashish—
which, incidentally, they hardly needed, at least
as long as the boy with the long hair and the bag
were never after us. And one day
the boy and the girl who were with him said:
We can make this thing work if we could only find a place
to situate ourselves. And as it so happened that place was at our

own risk. So we made another big mistake and were again caught in a trap
the boy had predicted but now could not remember. And so we were forced to flee

out of the flowers and saffron and silver and gold and silver linens
that were so near near that it seemed one could never reach

them except in a relative sense of continuity: the way a branch is to a tree
or a tower, and far more to the touch of a small,
fringe thing that makes a difference
to one's experience and that is something—
a thread—that unspools like a garden
of which there is no evidence left. The gold coins

have all been traced. But the gold coin carries a story
no one can remember. It carries the memory of an encounter
no one can remember having with a K-street
in some place they never went. It carries a secret
of experiences not remembered. It is a pity, therefore,
that it is not remembered more. It is K-strange
to have carried this burden, and not remembered.
We who have lived so long in so many disguises
must at last come to seem normal, if only for a little while.
The bird came down the street last night
and slept through the storm. I was out of it
then, and now I am in it again. It all happens
in a day's worth of taking, studying, repeating
over and over until one has mastered it.
I have done all I can,
and I shall soon be finished. All I've done.
And you come back to me. We were once together.
We were children, once, in many ways.
But the surface of the waves, like its buckled sheath,
is served on a platter by grown men.
A shadow of a smile plays across those
eyelids, and the joke is ours,
our only secret, for we cannot tell
what lies beyond. Only that we have
always known, and we are happy now,
fondling one another's burdens as though they were a dog's
ears. And now you are laughing.

THE FRIENDLY CITY

You have to make it up
in your head. Then the reality
will come to greet you.

The city stands in brackish
water, the sun is shining,
but there is something else—lots of it.
Some of it is undoubtedly here,
therefore I will not be around much
more. I will, however, keep an eye on things
in the vestibule, if such a thing is permitted.
And just as the body
is organized around the face and the tooth
itself, a feeling of inclusion
will come to possess you. You will find
people welcoming you with smiles,
the serrated path of the clock fitting
just right. And you will find you have
always known, but you will also find them
in a hurry to leave, eager to return
when daylight has changed, to expand
their welcome to include you, the way
it was meant to be. This feeling
will prepare you for the embrace
that comes when you least expect it, and is
almost always a happy one.

THE FRIENDLY CITY

As though dictated by some invisible mayor,
I walked into that room, and a ray of sunshine—
a feeling, more than anything,
like water from a lily-pad—
splashed against the window.

Another time I walked into a room
filled with bookshelves, and a table covered
with greenish mathematical wrappers.
I didn't expect the sun
to shine that hard—it was an obsession—
that you might wish to experiment with
this new form of pain, that
makes it royal and clear,
the way a tableau darted off
in the end. Math is the memory of
what goes on behind it.
And we may never be able to enjoy it
because of the madness of the case.

But you, you are the subject
of all this suffering—even unto death—
and I have been reading your stuff
since before you were born. You are the subject
of my pen and of your writing.
I have tried to coax you
into my life but you always escape
home by midnight, leaving me
a lump of random activity in the wake.
I have tried to write with you
but you always thwart my attempts at conversation
or snarky banter.
We must travel far from the quarries
of our earlier aspirations, if indeed
there are any; indeed I would like to think there are none,
not to mention the land and all the promised accommodations
on it. Yet there are nights when I think we may be engaged,
that we may know all there is to know about each other,
that we may be happier together. I wrote
it once and I can no longer recall the whys and wherefores,
but I can gesture with my hand to the air.
It seems to want us; we are always a step ahead of it,
which is not much. But there was a time
and place when smoke rose from a chimney,
which was a candle, a small, old-fashioned kind
of candle, that could not be distinguished

from any other kind of candle. And then the chroniqueurs
on their way to town would stop and wonder why
it was not as it was supposed to be. Why the uneven streets,
the dirty store, the dirty bed, the dirty wind—
all were fakes, fabrications, at bottom.
And in that way we were saved.

Why is it that in the great felicitous hurricane
tagged '58, we still retain some fond memories of those days
when everybody was happy and nobody was a cheapskate? Because as long as
you had something to say it was all right not to know, you were safe
from the rest of the world's consuming curiosity, and in the night
a special silk wrapping is discovered and applied, a kind of ointment
for the wound. It is not too late to repair to the shore
where brandy is served on glasses and nobody gazes too much
at the crystal china. At any rate it's your day off,
which doesn't guarantee you a response. Just ask Heriot
about it. And if he doesn't have one
goes up to him and says, I have one
but it's so late, nobody will
care to have it. So the old man thinks, and goes on
talking, but no more, it seems, than he cares
or cares to be talking. And Heriot
has gone out of his way to make sure that whatever
I was talking about has been addressed. And the wind
has taken care of many things, taken a special interest
in finishing the job, now that the need
is great and the workmen's night is near.

THE PICNIC GROUNDS

No wonder the old man shied away
from the tramp. That was a way
he had of arriving at that intersection
of care and uncertainty. It was a lesson

he would have taken to heart had he
lived longer, but in the thrill of his
delusion he forgot that much is surely
ahead, and chooses instead
to focus on the imperfections of the past
in an effort to stave off extinction
once and for all. It is a lesson

that has already been learned, and cannot be reversed

except by a miracle. So his pallor
was all of it, and nothing whatever
the gardener might have thrown.
The only thing that ever made any difference
to him was his watch, which he wore
with a sense of purpose, of place, of closure.
It had been found to have a defect, that his work

was not yet finished, who made a virtue of any
sad tide that washed up on shore.

We can now see how nothing ever really gets done.
The forms are reversed, the hours lost,
the lozenges unrolled, the glowing faces study
from their moorings. Time spent in the sun
is an abstraction, a lie,
a system of impressions built up
behind the one we thought we knew,
the one we caulked with a dew

to ward off evil, and now, through no fault of our own,
It is pointed out that we may never have known
the other before he came to us, to have sprung
from the foam of our conversation, and gone unnoticed,
Brimming with surprises, with questions still unanswered.

So we are never really sure what happens in the room
that was quiet as a room, until the first cut
occurs, and then it is no longer so, is extended
over a longer period, more fathoming the second chance.
Therefore, as I said, I am no longer your serf,
nor do I aspire to be. The hall

is my field, and, like a field, it can take you
where it chooses. As I see it, the choice is still
too far out, but like a jeweler's to be determined,
or a child's book, it has been picked out of the litter.

AROUND THE ROUGH AND RUGGED ROCKS THE RAGGED RASCAL RUDELY RAN

Again, what is the meaning of it?
Does it not seem to you, though it all seems so bleak
now, from the outside in?
And yet, you know inside, and you choose to believe
it is a joke, a free-form, no-holds-barred conversation.

It may be so, but the point is we are never
off the hook, though off and on for quite a few seasons.
The meaning, meanwhile, has waned
yet is not gone. It may be that our limited
experience of it prepared us for deeper, more abstract
though related experiences which are precisely what we have
now. Yet how do we know this? How do we know we have it?
Only because it is so easy to forget as well as to remember,
to forget and remember one's deep and detailed understanding
of its manifold aspects, all that the human brain has to offer
to supply the details of a life lived, not remembered, not
fasted by the sun or its lacquer brother, the mind,
whose sole purpose is to go out and find others, to sweep them
off and set about creating new descriptions, on the flyleafs, that will
in time turn to dust, and the flyleafs themselves, too lazy to be remembered
except in the general way of a living, vibrant description, will become extinct.

Yet we are not lost, even in our limited understanding,
nor are we all lost, as is sometimes supposed. On the contrary, our understanding
has grown, and is ever-growing; having, as it says, a "substance of its own making."
It is no accident that this constantly shifting state of affairs
is also the excuse sometimes given for the lack of variety, for the absence of characters
that give the drama its shape, and, by extension, its character.
I'm afraid you'll have to come to me, one of those rare occasions on which
a comprehensive solution is sought, something even more
complex and multifarious than the one we have at present.
I'll be delighted to chat more about it, and will do so
in the interests of a truly free and unfree people.
And meanwhile I try to keep my notes as a whisper
in the thick darkness that obscures the landscape and the days we've
come close to fulfilling. It seems we're not doing very well,
exhausted and hungry after a day of hard graft.
I would like to take a brief leave of you, to go shopping
in a city somewhere, but you seem to be dragging your feet.
"No," I say, "we'll not go any further unless you
sign my letter of resignation, at which point we shall see how far the change has come—
more, I mean. Look, I have taken the oath,
and I suppose I am obliged to stay here under the tough green
bronze of the night. But really I think it's a mistake
to sign on for many years and then to see my property vanish

in a cloud of early spring flowers, while others are forced to move on, not knowing whether this is the first or the last time something like it has happened. It happens so much in the beginning, everyone says they never heard of it, and as they mingle and are forgotten the question of rent is never far away. It is here that one's fondest desires are pinned to the wall, and it is here that one's fondest desires go to puff out. The sky is a giant laughing man's fist, and the moon is the earth's tithe, but will it be spoiled?" I ask you. Marry, if you can, but otherwise it's all over. It's not like you're looking to begin again, only a little farther on you are in the thicket, and the point was to get you up there and teaching you the ropes, which isn't impossible, if what you set out to do was small and obvious enough. Anyway, it was time to return home. It's nice to think that way, but it can never be the case. No matter how hard we try, no matter how much I weigh down my shoulder with souvenirs, I am never anything but a giant with twin moons, and yet I feel the need to shout, to draw attention to myself, to this fanciful setting out from the ruins, a space few steps wide enough to be seen up close, even though it's all about me, and that's impossible as well. Only a little girl's vision of the forest through binoculars was all it needed to set us off, that we were never quite made to understand, or cared to care, but it was the grandeur of the setting out that intoxicated us and set us off on a new course, that continues to inspire us and keep us going, on a new path.

THE LOUNGE

Up in the loft there are panhandlers, money
changers, a spoon for each one of us,
and a shelf with a hole in it.
I'll bet you there are more like them scattered
over the city and countryside, in fields,
tundra, peat.

A car's window showed you the way home
through the trees, past the cobbler's,
to the bureaux of a wind,
a bald, black-edged column.

Aimee, who had been waiting anxiously
for a bus, has now turned back
into the rout I came through
in the gray of autumn,
waiting for the rain to stop.

THE SUN

You asked me out on a date.
It turned out to be a mistake.
Too bad we haven't any more.

The wind thrashes the trees
by our home, but what can we do?
We're not mistakes. Sometimes
we get trapped in them,
too attached
to the event to make it any clearer
or to give it the slip.

A woman came out of the house
looking somewhat weary. She spoke
a little to the consternation of her companion,
who seemed to have fallen asleep again.

TAKEOVER

The man, a stranger, a native of another planet,
wants to tell you about his life—
not about the adventures he's had
in the past, though they are of vital
interest to him. It's more like
he's trying to cram all the important stuff
into his shorts, and when the
curtain does come up, it's not such a nice view either.
Too, the trash is piling up.
Too much wind, that night, blowing trash
of all kinds of junk into the near reaches
of the night, creating a sort of "second moonlight"
that whatever happens will be more or less
the same as all the others, with the addition,
of adding color, to spice it up.

So we, who had so much fun
in the time we had it, are suddenly victims
of our own success. There is no room
for a wan smile or melancholy. We have it in our hands
or our mouths, we have it all. Nothing can get done.
The morning after the big event,
we go out and are merry, or are victims, victims all the same.
Majesté, don't you feel it yet?

The time of the changed faces
has come for us all.
We will rend with it like a man-eating plant
as it passes, always on the edge of a small,
temporary bridge, toward a smaller and less conspicuous set of goals.
Then it will be time to go back, to do the cleaning up.

Never in my life did I imagine
how our successes would sound to others,
how they would grow up knowing nothing about us,
nothing about the countless occasions on which we were asked
to step down, to withdraw into the wings
where we felt most at ease, free to drift
along the stream of time, always in a hurry,
always finding new things to do,
truly a life of the past in one's lap.

We are here to stay,
and I swear it.

ONE OF THE MOST EXTRAORDINARY THINGS IN LIFE

I'll probably never get around to writing my novel
whatever the hell that is, partly because I have other
interests to keep me distracted, and also, well, I'm not
in the mood for stony silence, and writing a novel
isn't the same as being in it. I could listen to the
words even if I couldn't hear them, and that would be a blessing
in and of itself. Anyway, as I see it,
people keep their distance, choosing instead
to sip coffee or tea, which is the most beautiful
thing anyone has ever done for me. It keeps
you from becoming too attached, from wanting to be loved
too much. And in doing so, it chooses you,
feigning concern for others, to keep you
from drifting apart, from realizing your true potential.

I don't know her well.
But the thought haunts me—
will we ever know? She could easily be anyone—
a schoolmaster's daughter, a beautiful princess.
She could be thinking the same thing—
the thought that haunts me—
why children never learn to drive
or read. That's why we're so rarely late
it's so you can't tell when we're in the mood to stop,
bristling with potential,
the here and now are like needles in a haystack.
Who are we to suffer after this?
It's not like we didn't foreknow what was going on
or cared if we knew. The past is a china shop,
or so we thought. Invent a hat, make something of something,
but once you're out of here it's gone.
No more dirty soup, only naked talk.

The imaginary knots one wears,
the unheeded side of laughter.
How open was it,
out there, in the open?
A flurry of activity,
fingernails digging in
the dust,
firm boot camp.
The girl who said she'd rather be left without a kidney
than a boyfriend—that's what everybody says nowadays, I think,
but I don't know if I'm a burden to anybody.
There's the time we spent together.
Everybody's expectations were high,

but ours were unrealistic,
too, assuming we could keep them.

It was as though a bounty of chips—
no one had any particular reason to want any of them.
The waitress said she was out of her misery
for a while, at least.
Then who picks up the story?

If there were others, they certainly weren't around.
The old man sat, rocking back and forth,
looking at something—his eyes, his face.
It was as though he were trying to hide something.
“I like the hat well,” he said.

“But what about the pants—
did you say they were new?”

Look, here is a photograph of him in his old hat.
Look, there is a photograph of him in his old pants,
looking relaxed.

Do you want us to take these things down?
No, I want them here.
Yes, I know you do.
But you need these things in order to write your novel.

But we need them because otherwise what between now and next week?
If there are others, they surely aren't around.
And so they are with us. We are a little better
on certain issues but still a whole lot worse off than we were a week ago.
I have seen the light, now what must be done
about what we have seen. But what must be done,
no one really knows. One must have a medium-length,
massive dose of histrionics to make the discovery,
or else it will be some day later and we'll still be far apart,
fucking in the rain, on a dry street in some nondescript city.
The way we have to go somewhere
is like the maze in the park. The farther you get off from it,
the more tangled up you seem to be. It doesn't do you any good
to go back and forth like that, in and out,
and not be able to see how far you have come.
The closer you get to the center, the less room there is
for the mouthing and unintelligible mumble of the seasons
or the grinding of a deadline.
So, in a way, it's more like a cathedral,
where you can look up and see the face of God
for what it is, and not be able to look down.

WISHFUL THINKING

I've got a great big secret written down somewhere:
In the docks they were executing a process
Of further elaboration, practically
Dead on arrival, yet the instant
Of their decision stood strong and tall.
Like a memory of a capital letters
This childproof system
Guaranteed against future irregularities.
Anyhow, to improve and alter it was
A matter for the next generation,
Who seemed to lose the point when they came to
The same impasse as their predecessors.
And yet, as scheduled, matter
Of some moment met and became
Dead, athwart the differences
And contradictions, unlikeliest alliances
With the backdrop of so much meaning, this
Chaos, that destroys intimacy
In a world torn asunder so that the different
Masses are seen as equal, a truism
And beauty in its shifting
Regularity, irrelevant to the atmosphere
Of the day. And so all time
Becomes a perfectly normal, expected
K-value proposition with the express purpose
Of having been and is, yet each day
Is looking more and more like the others.
That's the whole point. Mass media
Still works its way through contemporary models,
Except that very few are daring enough
To try any more—hence the sameness.
Yet, the eye has a habit of scanning
Each blade of grass, even when there's no reason,
At all, except to assert itself
Against the very knowledge of itself.
Which makes of the actual experience
A virtually impossible dialogue
On any more than the level of back and forth

To realize what once held the two in thrall,
Thus effectively extinguishing any
Awe or horror in the speed and care
With which beauty can be obliterated
And, for that matter, any wonder
That there should be so much care.

ODESSA

You have been invited to the concert
after all, and all the flowers and fine entrails
of the orchestra, but the colorful, crinkled
imports from elsewhere, and the pointed
expectations from the stars filling the stage.
Here is the paper shredder

of a man claiming to be from another town
slick and unflustered, as though these too was
an unreal identity, but you knew
it was there. And the band, carloads of them,
had prepared an appearance to end in your lap.

Very little is known about you. In the music business
it was as though a new crescent
were nearly built every day, out of a rage
at being left alone. Many
perspectives were depicted, and as many profit models.
It was understandable that those desiring
ought to mop up the experience, to send it soaring
into the stratosphere, where it lay,

an unnamed entity, for a while. Then, if silence was to be
determined, after a question of semantics, this would be
it, at least for some members of the family.
Have you asked yourself such?
In my diary I have names
for the same reason that I have not known
anything else to be yours

in this new city whose superiority knows
how to keep it going
even when you have playing, who has
the patience to do nothing

and asking behind the screen
until the time
when everything is shining,

and you show up, and the spirit of it
is with you,
not with the clothes,
driving off

as abruptly as we did,
although in a

similar way of being I was the participator,
the instrument, a piece

of jazz behind your eye.

RECIPE ON A THEME OF LA ROCHEFOUCAULD

All the regret in the world
Will never make it over.
I am sorry that I spilled tea on the rug.
We should all be so lucky as to
Be “in character”
At the moment of becoming:

A gaunt quiver in the wind
That seeks to portray all
But his own bashful excesses
As accurately as possible.

Just then the alarm sounded.
It was an overcoat.
To have been snubbed
Would be no misfortune.
What’s the matter with that?
Pursuing time this way,
On these various inconveniences,
Rolling and losing equipment
All exposed on the other

Equations, and the great unwashed enchanter

Nothing but the humor of lost ends.
How much of life is this?
Most of it is balmy
And optimistic. But I get ahead of myself—

These, along with the makings
Of a fuller, more rounded you,
The toast, the ale-inflected hystericism
Of the room, were intuited.
The blind man’s cane rested on the other man’s thigh.

There were drugs to wash down
In a separate area of the hospital.
You noticed the drooping eyelid:
The nurse is in a mess.

The principal is always looking for subjects
To talk about the loss of time
He’s having in his absence.
In his absence, let’s move on

To another year—so many blessings—
Of life, wanting at once to be there
and not.

A LATE ROMANTIC

Not to get too puritanical, but you see the white smoke
going on in the air now, the bridges in different colors, how
the land we live on shudders but keeps going? You remember
everything we said before I went off on that subject,
At home in the detritus of the hoary wartime era?
What exactly was that? The lodestar of the law
that's always ahead of us, a simple set of green curtains
beneath which we roamed like kinetically mute heroes.
It's curious how what survives us is a flimsy web of smoke.
All the stars we pointed out in the sky were extinguished
the year I went abroad. Not counting how many rivers
hadn't frozen that year and never would, and how we
were seeing the first warbles of spring. Something more or
less like that. And now look at this abandoned orchard,
with the moss in the sky like a musical arrangement
that's half remembered. I won't go on in this vein, you
will recall it all in the morning.

The night before we'd been talking about becoming ghosts
or doing nothing at all, our faces merged into one,
yet the morning told another story. You had wandered
into a far corner of the field, perhaps one that looked
out on the grave of some long-dead mathematician.
And what would we find there? The clouds were braiding
into something solid. I went out for a walk in the
luminescent, lunar afternoon. That and the music
of your voice, that slumberous noise in the distance.
"She's hardly a candidate for that kind of intrigue."

And of course now the elaborate names
we'd given to these nocturnal persons returned,
some with three consonants, others just one.
It's hard to tell when the conjuring trick is over
and the real world has come back. They try to drum
a refrain into you when you leave home. They make it sound
as if the room is sliding away from you and you are
the only one who can save it.

At first there were no hidden messages in the papers
and the songs were a little more heartbreaking.
Later it turned into a strict case of no news is good news.
Not that I've much to say on the subject. The most enigmatic
of the disappearing avenues was beside the observatory.
"What are you staring at?" you asked. There was no meaning
in that question. What we have, after all, is space for gestures.
I looked at the figures scrawling down the pale blue window.

Not wanting to get into the middle of any sectarian squabble,
I politely withdrew my hand, letting go of the rock.
In silence, from the dark wood beyond, came vague shrieks.

WITHERED COMPLIMENTS

O have the loose and slathering
Clouds of a summer afternoon
Vanquish upon the city

From some remote perversion,
Splash and spill their energies,
Making a riot of light and shade,

So we can like them better
For their nature is demonstrable.
More exuberant than gracious,

Closer to the sidewalk than explicit
As if one had lived it, each passerby
Turns to see if it is their laxity

That is so thrillingly described,
But all they see is the lurid,
Mutinous object of their attention;

They take it all in and withhold their
Thoughts, feelings, and are stoical,
Disguised by a passing word.

From my apartment's window I see two shadows,
Light again is speaking. Now they are laggardly.
They cannot go any farther

In a world and age just two steps away
From the possibility of dying
On one of its accidental impulses.

The visible moves on:
Without attachment to anything
Except a spectre of passion,

We must cross the border and go after
The languid melodramas
Of internal frailty.

No, I have no qualms or remorse,
Nor even grief for the inevitable
In this suburb of indecision.

Hence the intervals are guarded
By the wildest part of our desires,
Where we have furtively arranged

In a great confusion of light and shadow,
For intimate intercessions to be destroyed
And not the least motion goes unnoticed.

SIXTEEN SYMBOLS IN SEARCH OF ETERNAL RECURRENCE

Once the characters had lay down their patterns
They sipped from the same soda.
They said: nothing tastes like anything,
And therefore every item we taste will taste of
Nothing, except maybe the fuzz of sweat on the forehead.
And in a funny kind of way, the medium tonality
Of anything is coming to stand in for
Everything, as the background behind the scenes
The dancing comes to an end, and the characters
Melt away in a confetti of sighs.

You flitted in and out like a shadow,
Standing with your eyes closed, waiting for the song to begin,
Waiting for the rooms to be touched with grace,
Saying: I will go down to the grainy street and talk to the city
In the charming medium of wind.
And I will tell it how it looks like an old map
To an old man, waiting patiently for the rest to begin.
In every pencil, I will know there's a secret room,
Where the curtains are drawn, and the dolls strewn on the bed turn their heads
And dream about a fire that comes from inside the house.
A ghostly flame with a human face.
The kind that comes when the wind blows and the curtain lifts.
And the kind that goes away when the window slams shut.

The act was particularly accosted—no kidding—by its dire description
Of the present as something that had taken place in the recent past,
A spending spree which had blinded it to reality,
A sort of romantic environment in which
It could re-create itself, such as a lost
Font in an archive of damaged
Images which re-creates itself as writing
In black-and-white checkerboard.
The writing would be throughout
On the walls of buildings, in their extremities
And crevices (for that is what is called speech)
In writing you erase all the reasons
For doing something, and you become
Just another among them, like a guest
In a small house, with reasons
For doing something, such as keeping company
With the spirit of things,
With no conscious attempt to cover systematic ground.
Instead, everything would be lost
In the confusion of looking for a single definition,
And your plan would be disturbed,

Finally washing its hands at the lakes
And there, in the beauty of incidental life and art.

And so the scribe became self-conscious, taking delight
In an improvised self, as it sped along the walls
Through formal patterns, coming across holes
Which, if there were an attentive ear
To listen, would make audible
The strange sighs of the people who were there
And going away. And the images
On the walls would be altered to show the years,
Like clouded mirrors and the passing of the gables
That once had cradled our thoughts,
Which went into a kind of motion
Which froze them in a unrestrained geometry.

Now the tall cedars were propped and put away
From the sun, stamped with a unique claim
Of haste. It was seen that this way of doing had been
Long brewing, and that its progress
Was really an investigation into the whole affair
Of time, with all its heights, its breadth
And the mystery that hung in the mode of motion—
Something that could not be grasped, since it was not a question of
How we were going to use the growing years to our advantage.
We would keep the children awake, singing their names
And the seasons would wash away the strange small drawing
We had made of the human face,
And the face in question would show the effects
Of another self, with its reminiscences
Of the way people went about their days,
The peculiar blessings and penalties of their situation.
With regard to the weather, history, and the light;
This would not go on for long
Before a miracle or at the very least
Surprise would take hold of it.
What was already a revelation of what is possible
Might then be more accurately said to be restored.
For what was coming to us, whether it was important
Or not, had happened, and our images were working.

It was only later that the apparent haphazardness
Of the present began to be perceived less extraneous
In a tangle of cloud and motionless rain,
Having its point of departure on the twilit horizon.
Or, perhaps, in music, where the first note
Returns us to the force of a hidden hum.
In retrospect, all our actions would be seen as lines of force
In keeping with nature, out of which sprang the chance of being
Present, as if an entire life had been simply foreseen in a book
Or a sequence of sayings. Time, we now realize,
Can be played with, taking as its model the present
In its velocity, and its transformation into the future,
Starting with the eyes and coming down to the lungs
So that there might be a guide to more thoroughly understanding
The motley texture of the framework and its subtext
And its ever-presenting fiber, always wriggling
Along underwater, in the thrush of pleasure and impatience.

HARNESS YOUR HOPES

Very occasionally, a girl might pause
Between two men and say: what am I doing
Here? In the meantime, we'll carry on
Serving the public, and, though
We may not be able to see the outcome,
We can feel it downstairs.

Oh, I see, the trial period.
Will I find that in moments of decision
There are simply no correct answers, just a selection
Of choices, which are equally baffling, contradictory,
And I'll admit I don't have a clue.
Will this give you a feeling of order?
Because the carnival doesn't go on forever.
So there isn't a prescription for all of the above
Unless it is agreed to anoint the individual
With the oil of his or her choice.
And though your diplomacy
Lasts on, with more employees, you find
You have poured oil on rather than rubbed it.
Everywhere is a great effort, though quite a few
Are excused from completing the course.
The midsummer fight, and the fighting at home,
Are suddenly paused over, and though
You are excused, no one wants to look at
The suspiciously revised roster with its
Gestures and imperfections. That is, if
They have not perished already.

Today on the ocean one must not
Speak of what one sees. And their hands won't stop
Tugging at the anchor chain.
Now I am aware that the wheeling heart
Is no less beautiful than the motion of art
And the shoulders of good friends.
But one has got to proceed
With caution, well aware of what is at stake.
Now I, though I stay, regret my lack of admission
To the council chamber. I have the feeling I'm always
Stepping away from a dream of a different speed,
Perpetually shrinking. Were this not the case,
I wouldn't be asking you to exercise
The leniency toward which you've been entitled
To a certain time of day.
At the late hour, you would be near to
Blacking out, drinking whatever was nearest

For all the trouble I cause them.
Let my funeral take place tomorrow, in my
Dreams where I could just keep dreaming
As long as I liked, amidst the common task.
The guards will be on hand, I suspect.

POSITION PAPER

There is an oversupply of realistic expectations
According to which life is moving along.

That's why I pilfer paper crowns
And, often, flip them. Someday

With luck, you'll skip ahead to the end and find
Everything up to standard. Perhaps only then
The indications of inner life will begin,
Suffering heavy wear.

From what has been said, it is clear that I
Cannot be let alone in the heart of things.
In the grasses of which these feelings are made
One easily becomes lost. There is a fine
Red thread that is as likely to be lost
As not to be described as a long, slow knitting.
These wild geese, floating over landscapes,
Make it quite clear to all in attendance that they
Prefer a description over the common screen.

As we can see, it is the case that no
Error was ever invented without it being, in
The opinion of someone, a means to have
A look at the view. There are landmarks
That are observable long after they've gone.
At this late point, we find ourselves
In the midst of a massive upheaval. These are the
Precise consequences the government
Intends to face. The unemployment rate has
Returned to a satisfactory level, so what
Could I be more at home with; my body?

The past backed up with a upsurging
Force yesterday. It turns out
Your name is on some list,
That you're being held against it
And all these people, and nothing
Vouchsafes them from confusion.
It's a bright day out, a veil over
The true feelings of the citizens who are
Prepared for acceptance of the situation.
An indisputable fact, dear readers.

THE MANDRILL

Winds stir in the deserts—
Even London has opened its doors, after all
The years over the horizon, with an event
And great pleasure.

Not to be creating demands that the staff
Couldn't fulfill, but the only way
To measure the correctness of these lawsuits
Is having to do with piling every trivial detail
On the plaintiff; sometimes
The question has been asked, but that's
Only the tempest in a teapot.
Meanwhile there are claims
Made in the name of relations I have never
Encountered. Some inane prejudice
Has clouded my conceptions of it.

Of course I realize that I am falling back on
Metaphor—these are the things I think about
When someone is being irritating. In the wordless
Stood a man of terrific ability to generate
Surprises. He was hardly
Heavily involved with his environment. The soul
With which to encounter reality is taken as a whole.
We created nothing, yet there was something we had to say.
Thank you for forgetting about me in the first place.

ULTIMATE CARE

The trucker will never understand that
What all those bearings point to no one
Can point to—As he goes, the car
Drops gold coin after coin on the water
And the house both sinks and sinks
Like the outlook of a sinking sheet,
Its horizons pushed away and its air
Reduced to a white indifferent prism.

Twilight is a kind of promise.
We take risks in the vegetation.
If you are not consumed by this,
I'll check out of the penthouse as that continues.
She's always late, there's no need to be so forthcoming.
All at once, you are disposed of.

As the settler disappeared,
Still many expressions of delight
Meet the eye as well as an uncanny variety of offerings
Inspired by art and though not perhaps more
Than three degrees removed from appearance,
Have a great deal more appeal.
It's surprising to find that, in the middle of it all,
These impressions and fashions do not depart.
It will not be possible to find any answers here
On the internet. From here on in there is no guarantee
That what has already been described will match up to
The course of the seasons; there is no longer any way
To arrive at a verdict on what amounts to
The most convenient use of the machine.
The cries of rage and grief are far more difficult to decipher
Than the shouts of triumphant breakthrough.
No one has to inspect his life
To know its true course, but it is possible
That specific changes, through confirmation of
The dovetailed mission, and subsequent conversations
With most people who are given to spying, can
Enrich our view of the event. Time will
Test the moment when evil was
Enthusiastic in their occupation.

LEAVING

I.

It all goes to show you how life is made
by putting everything out of the world's distance
and then integrating it somehow.

It's not easy to find parking,
or a place to sit.

The man with the misshapen hands
was looking around. He didn't see us
or say anything, but we knew
he was looking around for something,
so we sat down anyway.

The automobile has a broken down engine.
Wind has been unreal for days and
night has too, yet we know the way
home is, under trees, under boughs,
under leaves, in a basket, always under
a woman's arm.

The evening is always like this
and the day will come without warning,
or without our knowing it,
though sometimes
in the clear sloping fields we'd walk
past each other, and as though on cue the man
with the strange hands would
see us and smile sadly, and nod
his head to the woman standing near the curb,
and then. . .

II.

We walked alongside the road
across which was a space of low weeds
growing in a pockmarked landscape
of huge harvest fields and black-and-silver weed-grown buildings.
Silence ruled the day, and the days
were precious little better.

"This is the bardiche."

AUTUMN TEA LEAVES

All across Europe a partial eclipse
is checking in: unsudden surprise
and its sister, weary impatience,
mark the beginning of the thin but vital
second shadow.

Why was I never told this?
And if I was told it, why isn't
the rest of us told it?
Sunlight seeps into the saddled fields
at least part of the time, and the saddles
come to life again, calling attention
to something else—maybe a cat.

If so, why is there such a Thing as a Market
in the Dark City, and why are the Shadows
always Peacockish? Maybe it's time to go back
to the drawing board, to find out,
only it isn't clear, and darker still
the void that seems to come from nowhere,
from Wichita or somewhere.

Even in school we noticed the inequality
and tried to correct it, but the changes were
so subtle we couldn't make an impression
on the standard of perfection. Then one day
a large tree struck us in the side,
an emotion we couldn't process at the time.

It was a day like the others, only different,
though typical of the times we were living
at that time. Wealthy parents
indulged us in different ways,
mocking the ills of their age-old
path to happiness. "You
can have your cake and eat it too,"
the old man said. And there was no more
fondling. We were set free on the false
expression of our desires,
and of course we had the will to pursue them,
though it was a little too late for that.

One day the schoolmaster
came to visit. He said there was something
I hadn't told you. Why don't you sign
my book, it's good for your toes. And so I did,
just in time to avoid the doormat

who was coming to visit me in my room.

He was polite and courteous,
and asked me how my day was going.
I told him how good it was getting along.
He thanked me profusely for the kind word,
for it had brought him nothing but good luck,
for it had almost become a tradition since the days of the Nile
to bring bad luck upon oneself and others.

LONELINESS

We talked about the same subject as everybody else:
personality cults. To this day I cannot fathom
why anyone would want to join them, let alone another person.
The idea is to have a little fun with the structure
but ultimately one comes to terms with the emptiness
behind the monotony. One can trade places with ease
and still keep warm, at least that's the way it feels to me.

I would love to be your boyfriend,
but there are no suitable candidates.
There are no partners, and yet—my friends and I—
we form a rudimentary one-person punk band.
The stage is lowered to the level of the tundra.

Yes, I have been instructing my children
to think in terms of seasons and centuries,
but to do this effectively they must learn to read
for seasons are of no use to them
and their writing will always be in error.
I teach them to think rationally
but not emotionally, so that in the long run they too
may become the sum total of what has ever been
and never will be, and I teach them to pray
with one's own two halves of a brain, and we all
lend a helping hand to each other's child's ego,
which is the least bit intrusive of us.

Yes, I have been praying with my own hands,
but what does it matter now?
The people who attacked me are still at it,
and so is the peace of my prayer,
a dream world of cheap dirndls and pots
and things that look like dinnerware
and something that smells like dinnerware,

a world that is still forming.
But I was going to say that its comeliness
was an inside job, and therefore the prayers
no longer count, and in doing so
we have forgotten that they do count,
and are therefore without point.

ANOTHER WAR

In this house, shed, or
other place, a dream is remembered
only as a nightmare

That goes away and is never known.
It seems the passage came,
long ago, without any of us
being able to remember.
A dream now standing for
more than any of us should have dared

In those days and nights.

AND OTHER STORIES

The man I wanted most in the world—a younger,
chipper version—came along
then and there. “My king,”

he murmured. “My kingdom,”

Before that, a version
of himself called up.
Now, all I’m
doing is track birds.

There’s no need, I said.
We all go out at night
and stay until dawn.
The women, meanwhile,
tend towards the plain,

as the prairie, and find it more mellow

when they come back.
I could not believe
you were here, I said.
I was only practicing my anglicism,
which is like a game of telephone,
a branchless one, if you don’t
mind. Then you go back inside and
put up a fence. Nobody will go near.

What! I thought I had never heard such a thing,
such a thing as mutuality. Oh, but it’s like this
everybody wants to own up to it,

and then they will, and it’ll have no memory.
They will go out and play, and return in a new coat

and there will not be a scratch.
It’s all one thing after another,
and that’s comforting.
But like I said, mutuality is a strange thing

to be. Because sometimes it’s a lot,
like seventy, or seventy-seven.
Then there will never have been a setting for these strange
orders, unless they were emitted continuously

through a chimney, and the debtor never knew
exactly what kind of havoc he was causing.

There was no way to account for this.
Says what I really want to say, and then
clap my hands in a loud, sustained, almost imperceptible
chorus of approval. To be led from this plane
into another, it seemed, was the meridian

that was barely grazing us, our meridian.
And we thought we had seen everything,

but we were wrong. The horizon was still blue,
and some things never change.

"Never change your clothes," one girl said.

"You are a fool," another one said.

"You are like a picture of innocence, to children
and to adults alike."

And one can never be too young or too old
or too of one's own accord, for the sake of a child
or a child's love, no longer matters. The land
has gone under the mountain. And we have grown up.
We have seen the world. We are adults.
We have taken our leave.

ATARI SOPRANO

When I came here, I knew not
what to expect, only that a change
would be on the vertical
of the incoming day, along with toast
and a fat man with rat-colored hair
scented the toast, and they all came on in the day.

O sun, when to my surprise
you sit down, I want you to
tell me all about it, your early days,
what it was like to be a kid
again, how that turned out.

As I sat in my car
with other people, thinking
of what I wanted to say to you,
this particular line of
crushed hair stood up,
awing, for all concerned.

A kind of fern-like
steepness was enveloping,
holding back the awfulness.
The moon was directing
the torrents, and it all seemed lost.

You know what I mean.
Something I wanted
to say to you
got lost in the chipping chime of his
waving. All I remember is that it was
late afternoon, the heat
waiting to be over.

Now there was a way that we returned
to what was probably
a more civilized place,
with a library and a record shop.
We thanked the host, and in the evening
played a larger role in unravelling
the orchard, and were thankful for that.
We never forgot him, and he always came
with a small box of blackcurrants,
a saviour in some way. We were always
thinking about him, how it had shaped
our so-called last names, our true ones.
And so we never knew how many years we had known him,

how many years we had kept him waiting, even
slightly embarrassed at times by his blushes,
quiet in the performance of his duties, like a parson's
ass. And one slips away, often
for a moment, as in this case, and is not
held responsible. And then the years fly by,
they are unreal. In the time it takes to put an idea
into a book, books, with an author it is, though often
no more than thirty, sometimes not more than forty,
and sometimes it is as though a forest force crashes
through the book, mangles its binding, and the book
goes on being produced, by force, out of the dust of these mad
states and into the clear air of these mad
empires. And sometimes the forest comes to seem
puny and brambly, a phantom forest
whose leaves hover in the sky, as though
in mid-leisure, lounging in luxury
on a boat-shaped surface, and the lake
cannot stop emitting smoke signals
and jets of water puddle into the sky.
There seems no upside to all this.

But we have the old film which
we can listen to, over and over.

ANDANTE MAKES THE PASTURE

The violinist had been flubbing his lines
for years, there was nothing left to say,
which is how we first came to inhabit
the quartet fugue, without its numbing centerpiece,
an anagram of a heart, that slowly chanced a rhythmic
rhythmic cameo on the stair.
And when people heard of this, they tended
to gravitate to its recital,
tempo, and other events took their own course,
leading, in the final analysis, to our present predicament.

Exactly what was said would be written down,
eventually. For our part, we have been blessed with
a wholesome ambiance, tastes of maguey and seaweed.
We can think at ease in the publication of the truth.
We have never written anything and we think we have.

THE INCHOATE ROCK

It seems very unlikely that the state will spend
all its time wishing things would be different,
so we might get together for lunch or dinner sometimes.

I have a hard time believing that charming
industries will get you anywhere, anytime.
My dog, at the gate, is letting me in.
His soft quills offer me copious fruit
on the breathy plains, where game is the new coffee
and the cotton candy canaries
have taken to singing the State Fair anthem,
reminiscent of ourselves. What hands shall be?

Most things come to seem appropriate
or at least they used to.
I was saying how ridiculous some things
still are, how they matter even if we
don't seem to realize it's the same matter
that gave rise to them. What is this?
A shadow, an abstraction? What does it mean,
tossing paper across the table-top?

The shadow is withdrawn, and what
a difference! There is something there,
some undigested morsel that might be
consumed, but that's not for you to be
adamant about. I'll tell you what it means:
that the child has been put in its place
and that this is indeed a tableau
of quiet dignity, standing apart from the night,
out of reach. Farewell,
ender; hope is another matter. I'll be
off now, leaving you to lick your chops.

HAUNTED STANZAS

Nothing could ever be this way,
as the seasons were wont to do. Birds
were singing, about seeds
or how to be unseemly. In the distance
the wide avenue threaded with white pavements.
Sometimes, a kiss would be
prepared, always on time. After all,
they'd seen enough. That was why they
never proposed a meeting. Instead, they
seem to have lived most of their lives
in complete disorder, only partly
fulfilling their promise.

How to describe the seasons?
We might as well start with not one,
but three. That way
it gets sorted, one by one, in ascending
nearsight symmetry. Next, the tubes
get clogged. Next, a rain attack.

Let the birds wash their hands,
and talk about how much they'd rather have
had another way, about how they're falling behind
all the time. Look, their hand has
finally dried, and gone is the wistful wist
that's been haunting this pastoral England
for some time. It's time for the rebuilding
to begin, but before that can begin
a small task force is sent to the site
to look in the place up. It seems
the place hasn't lost anything, yet. A few turrets
are still standing, in place, and that
essence, so important in its day, is being lost
among the pellets of the inevitable future.

So is my tale to you. I've told it before,
in fact, but you get the drift. This is my
side of the story. Here others may see it,
and hear about it. That's how I got hooked on poetry,
and back into the biz. About a year and a half ago
I was contacted by a young man who said he needed a writer
to create a poem about a man named John. John was a young,
curious man about town. We chatted for a while, and then
went out into the street to see what others were doing.
A lovely girl was weaving a basket on a swing. She had a strand of tears
plastered to her forehead, which looked interesting. I took the opportunity

to catch up with her in the street. Unfortunately, as I expected, she was gone,
on a tour. Now, stranger, I am sorry, I should not have come,
not been so long on the hunt. And what should I do,
shouldn't you have something to say, if I am late? Oh, but there are others,
some running around, congratulating each other on their recent exploits,
talking about the weather. A ball was released then,
it seems, and I was like to have been at home with the child,
dear, and care less for the consequences
that could result from my absence.

Then a breeze came.

It's always pleasant being outdoors,
isn't it, Anne-Marie-Joye, saying things like
how I could have missed you so soon?
And when I did finally return home,
it was to the fullness of my quarters,
dear, the furniture was new and tidy.
But the dream, as I like to call it,
remained intact. You see, it's not so much the absence of gravity
as the impossibility of reconciling it with the terror
our long winters cause, that has prevented us from living at the threshold
of that dream, from waking into that other,
transparent nightmare, that sent chills through the house.
Now that the cold sore has healed
and darkness we advanced into grows, it could be awhile yet
before we too are able to set about the monumental task of restoring
the fragile dyke to its natural position, at the center of the harbor,
as it was when it stood. Now that the important business
(paying bills, sweeping floors, looking after cattle) has been done,
perhaps it would be best not to discuss the details
of the situation, lest the dilapidated state of things
result from our general zenitude, dullness, and shroud
of enmity hanging over everything. Perhaps this is what we are.

Creeper dithers, fangs flare
at the mouth, but the whole man is asleep.
Perhaps we should go back, it's that important a day.
The hay has been unloaded, the hay-pile trimmed.
All the hay had forgotten about us.

RECALCULATING

After it had snowed in San Francisco
and people were asking about the old place,
how about you? It was as though a party
had taken over: There was a piano at five o'clock
no one could tell you were away, and the parlor
was awash with sounds of children
singing and the rain gnashing shut the door.
Once you get over
some inhibitions, it's pretty much a question of
where to look for a party: Home, or the nearest rectory
or church. I had a pair of binoculars
but they were badly broken, not to wear out,
and this was really the only way to find out.
I went in to look for a friend
but the place went dark, there were no more crows,
and that was it for that day.

Well, you've done it,
not out of any real feeling,
but as simply being born and continuing to be
is the stuff of happy endings, and ending all the same
in the way that stories usually end—in your laboratory
or in the forest, where you stand
still and talk to yourself.
Why not give it a chance?

In the end the story proved more than
what it took to be extraordinary, more even
than Eros's hammering on the myth of the
ritual sex, which at least we now knew about.
It seemed to say that all of us had had come home
together for one last look, a snap judgment,
pour the hearts and livers of leaves
over the peg that stands in our blood, for that
is what it was all about,

and if we were going to rescue ourselves, why not do it
right? Because, well, it's what you're
supposed to do,

and not because some impossibly low-grade malady
is poisoning us, but because
it behooves us to start all over again,
reprisals we promised but which still elude us.

Here's hoping so.

With fiendish cleverness
he has subdued the minutiae
and is poised to make some important
decisions. Meanwhile, the whole of society
is engrossed in brilliant midnight.
Some people get up and go
to the toilet, to bathe
and brush their teeth. To have something to say
while waiting for the order of quilts to arrive—

that's called being in touch with you
rather than with yourself, which is where we're
at now. The dish has
overcome its own internal contradictions to become
what it once was, but how? Was it ever
going to be anything other than this?

POLISH BORDER

The man with the red hat
reminded me of a recent
experience. What's that?
What's the ordinary way to spend a day?
Making a salad? Supposing someone
else were here? (And he wasn't,
of course.) Oh my! That would be such fun.

But it's already happened.
The weather is for making things
into something they can live without.
Tomorrow is the big day
that everybody is waiting for,
and it will be fascinating to see how it turns out.

The things we thought of naming
are actually more like randomness. There is no reason
to dwell on them further, once they have passed.
But you must try to imagine what it was like
when we thought of them, and then
only in crayons. Random acts,
sad acts that happen
or don't, that is all.

There was such numismatics then
as was the world around us,
but it all seemed like junk food,
the weather in particular,
wishing well for its bearer,
who never came.

The weather was lastingly compared
to that other day, and the result
was a kind of grit,
tender but empty,
fitting. And the past was compared
to that other, and the result
was a kind of patina.

We can appreciate the pattern
and the spare parts, for a lost bride
or something. She made
the sign of the henley explicit,
gone, and all the gaffer (who never came anyway)
and dummies ("Did the last mica eye? By the way,
have you removed your shoes?")
come clamoring. No one

wanted any of it, and that,
well, I'd say.

JUST WEDNESDAY

So it likes light and likes
to be teased about it—please
don't take me literally. That's what everybody
is doing, that's obvious. And when it comes time
to mix it up, Monday is still
on the docket. That's your cue. And if there are recovery
funds on the rocks, throw them a bone. What's
happening on your property? Don't look
toward recovery—look to play
for as long as it takes to get paid—
and recovery is what we mean by that.

A boy who stumbled
into a ravine recently said,
“The ravine's gummy with almonds.”

A garden
principally a pleasaunce

but there are tassels in the rut

of recovery, if you spend much time
in recovery. Almonds trickle

down the side of the ravine.
You can run or hide.
But hide rather than play,
you must stay, as we must all stay,
nameless and stratagem-worshipping,
forever unscathed.

A man came out of the house
and that was that.
No more apricot eruptions
would befall, if those vines hadn't danced
to premature melodious death
in the original code, us all grave robbers,
for robbing a bank. And the violets,
faded and discarded, bobbed and twisted
like apricots, would have us believe it was another time

but that was the point. At least, that's the way I see it.

Then a fox came to ask permission
and the red-trimmed walls smiled knowingly
and he spilled the beans,
it was time to go to bed. I have this crush

on this person, this person only, maybe
I'm not strong enough, maybe this is too tepid a subject
for you, if you mean to be kind. Just saying.

And I'm with you. The fox brooding

happens only once a decade, usually in autumn.
The weather report
is lousy, but that's no reason to leave the
petal of impatience standing. Besides, it's unfinished

and inexpensive. The chief petty officer was standing
towards the railroad, looking us dead
in the eyes. Now that was sarcasm.

Sarcasm at its crudest

but also its most affecting, like
a good sharp julienne. They don't sell these

anymore, among other things. If you have a furs, a hat,
a crown of poppies, a knotted bun, whatever
it is, don't leave home without them.
You can stand to breathe, as
the old man in the moon is standing.

A BOY

I'll do what the raids suggest,
Dad, and have at the other livid window,
But it won't do to stay crouched in the dark:
That's what they're there for. You heard me,

Dad. They're not going to hurt you,
Just the way you hurt yourself. Just one
Too many cooks, and this album would be
Over. I'm sitting in my driveway,

Wrapped in scarlet, I see, and wish
There was a way to cross over to this side
And unclasp the way there is supposed to be.

There is, but it is only bread, or water that
They brought us, not cheeses and pretzels.
I hope you hadn't had as good a time
As I have had making this. It all
Must be coming to me somehow. And then
you open your dictionary.
Whoa. That's what I'm talking about.

My father-in-law left
Behind him the paper trail
Of his minting, the flashes,
The splatters, the snotties:
All so that Friday may be
Shaped like a little bird nestled on the tree.

And after rain or shine
There is a door in the sky,
A terminus of sorts,
For computers and light-speed
In other words, a flatness

So that the outline of your own
Assumption may begin to glow,
Nestling in its light like
A small child in a stroller.
You are welcome in my home

Even though you're not a part of me,
Even though your face is me,
And despite the upside-down portrait
Of my ideal partner, for you

To be growing up is the upside-down

Portrait that I was going to have
Only now the magazine article came out,
Dispelling all my earlier notions

Of monogamy and closeness. It was as though

I had never seen a woman with a partner,
Nor heard of any. And I keep returning

To the same old sad realization: that it is true
In one way or another all of life

But my partner in life is another, separate thing,
Making no sense, making him or her

Different from me in any way. It's

Disturbing to contemplate: how we would fit

If we were to be lost, on an empty stomach,
Sitting on a pebbled beach, a cackle-sign

Half-savage, half-imagined. And then, slowly

The pairs entered the room. Betty was scratching
At her big toe, scratching

The scrubby strands of hair that were beginning to
Bloom, at last, in a relief like the plague.

What will I do? What will I do without you?

TWO DEATHS

The librarian shrugged. "It's pretty sad how many
Likes there are on Facebook. I'd like one
More than anything, but there aren't that many.
Besides, there are so many other things to do and
There isn't time to do anything, besides

Keeping your sense of adventure, if any, sharpened by
The rain, the sleet, the mud, the sand, the fatigue.
You have to have a way with irregular hours
To make it not quite enough to count them against
The mosaic, the bars, the rafters. Which is why

I like keeping my rooms tidy, even
When it clashes with my serious desire
Of becoming a philosopher since eons ago, when supper

Was served up like a tour of the universe.
Things have changed a lot since then. We are full
Of self-pity and self-congratulation, and everything
Does turn out to be a marvel, while

The mourner who stood near me
Longer still, as though eternity had decreed
That we should all hitchhike
From A to Z, like pieces of a puzzle, the clock

On the wall. But the ax stammered sadly, and I could see
Through his tears that the dandelion knew about me;
I had to keep an eye on the progress of the yellow
Clock, which was moving backward, so that I could not

Be completely at peace with my ways, the way
Is full of holes and dolmens, and I must knock
Some of them down to get the rest of the pieces.
Which way back to the big empty street

Are you coming from? The one that leads
To the little houses and the little birds
And the vines that grow amid them, set
In motion by the very breath
That is breath incarnate, writhing in the big
Wind tunnel as though the gods had intended

Something about us, had we been brought
To be what they are today, the way
Players in an old Broadway musical
Can be about to be revved up, ready

To start the car, shout, scream, leap
A plane of leaves, and finally
Be dismissed, with much else, with just a little
About the god that brought us to this place

And gave us the tools to survive here, but
Did not intend, nor even know, the pains that might be
Embodiment of his beneficence, giving

His children clothes and floozies to calm them
And then gradually fade, like the round
Head of the beholder, contemplating its reflection
In mirrors all around, and at last

Come to seem all that he/she is, and have
No concern for the god that made him/her, the
God that fed them, housed them, clothed them.”

So, when the victim begs, and is in turn begotten
With many desires, the predator
Is jealous, and in his own interests
Bears down the slope and takes shelter in the trees

Behind the barn. And because
One day the barn was wall-to-wall
With flowers, the people
Wanted to go away, and the sun
Came and ate them. Ah,

How the sun comforts us! It is the past
Who is dying now, and will be dying
In the comforts of the future. All they wanted
Was to come see time again, and again.

ALL THAT AND MORE

But where in the jungle
Is the jig that would allow one to see one's way
Over so much distance and distances?
What about the half-nelson
That sends the shortest path through the jungle
Over the tops of old trees?
And the monkey's in the manhole,

A monkey with a bone in its mouth,
Seems to want to get back at the humans
For what that's worth,
Dissolved in soy sauce.

Well, let them try it.
Human trafficking has been going on
For a long time, isn't it? A tsunami
Of human beings heading back and forth
Over so much land and sea,
And it gets drowned
Most of the time. But sometimes
It's dredged up and turned out
As it was in the past,
Always a little bit of interest
And neat touches,

Like the one at the museum,
Some little Japanese paper heirlooms
That got misplaced and weren't
Very much in evidence after all,
Some time after the thirties.

Sometimes it's dry and we have to stand around
Dry branches for moisture,

Curious about the stranger you're
joined with in a new act
That doesn't matter, rubbing up
Dry, like the trench around the lake,
In the silence of the whole house.

I can remember sitting here
Fiddling with these lines,
Pasting another over them,

But really I don't know where I'll be seen
After I'm done with it.
The stranger might be after me,

Seeking to unify all the disparate
Things that have separated us,

Like the land that my great-grandfather
Set out on a journey to find
Me. Might not be better
Than to meet each
Other halfway, on the edge
Of the forest, on the steep
Place where the pond is.

There was a harrow under the street
That would not let me off the hook,
So I kept at it, until
There was nothing left to do but grow up,
Find a job, be a leader,

And be a good steward of chaste impulses
And good harvests. That is what
I tried to avoid:
Tree-trunk lamps festooned the trees
Of my barn, and all
Became invisible at last to my ear—
The human form, the imagined
Feminine form, and the occasional monster
With a tail of flame or frost
Or snow—but the vast majority
Of the scenery was a mystery
Or nonexistent, as though
The moonlight world of letters and
Messages had enchanted
These half-seen margins, these
Tales spun out of control in
The penitentiary of letters:
Mute, dumb lightning,
Transfixed, perched silently
On the surface of some distant
Battlements, reading poetry,
In this slow
Gathering which never completes
Or even threatens
Any sort of state,
Just a static, unthinking
Joint-heaven populated
By hirsute things
Of which the last yard is
White out by the sea,
Farther than ever before

And I have been
At no lengths about it,
Too timid even to cry,

I have been told.
Tell me, do you cry?
I am going to cry,
Even against myself.

FRAGMENT

The last thing you want is to be reminded of it,
but that is impossible. You want to convince
everyone you meet that you are not that kind of guy
who played around and then suddenly decided not to come back.
You want people to take you seriously
no matter what the consequences. That is how you

control the mothership and keep it from turning
and from becoming just another lazy, frightened, hungry
seafaring boat. No one sees
what we are actually up to. That is why
we have drifted off course and are now in a quandary

we have neither the time nor the desire to unravel
just yet. It is dimness at the edge of the
wind's windshield.

Light sucks us out of the sad moulting
that is Earth. We shall never mingle
with the bear and the caribou. We shall never
understand why the cawing
is so much softer, when night breaks. Why there
on the shoreline, are empty sockets of birds.

YES, "AWFUL," YOU MUST.

Hold it, I'll bring you some,
Lochinvar style, raw egg on its shore.

I'm not a man,
But the women in the chateau like me

Extreme macho, all of them.
The white sails shine,
The campers whistle.

Come on, dragon, let us bask
In the craft of your wits,
Of our own conceit, until
The whole universe bursts forth in wonder,

A moment later joined by its
Incompetent kin: the spider, the fly

And the ice-cream parlor.
We can go back, I promise.
I have the perfect storm,

The only one in my life
Who will take care of me

For the easy part, that's what you call
Complexion, and all its manifestations,
The "haunted, brimstone castle" trope
Delivered directly to your doorstep

Whether you wanted them or not.
I have a store that sells essential oils

And "not everything" is different in my little store.
The same standards apply

Whether you were born into it
Or somewhere else.
The standards are the same

Even though they may not be enforced
As long as they float around
In the sky like "swans."

The swan-winged birds
Are orient by their very nature
Into a fixed orbit
Above the firmament,

And their language, like the sound
Of a trumpet on a hill,

Descends from the grass to the hovel
Where grass grows at last
Because who can tell when to stop?
The story is told in so many steps
That it may take one to remember

How things get lost, and then is
All caught up in remembering
How things get repeated so many times
That one is almost

forced to forget that it is

Also possible that someone
Will rush to the rescue
At that moment, pulling

Its zipper shut, face first
Into the fast growing
Chamber of impressions, and the life
Will be as it was before, just different,
Different enough in its fundamentals,

Too often, to count for that,
But weave it all together,

Make it interesting,
Utilizing the previous

First principles to arrive at
A landscape somewhat
Understandable from a distance,

And then it's back to the old
Familiar feelings, the
Familiar patterns of shapes
And textures, the ideas of "goodness,
order," things that make no sense,

Hanging like treatises in the
Who keeps themselves hidden
All these years, from us.

It's as though a stormy
Morning had fallen and the noise
Of the streets outside my window
Raised my hopes, hurrying

To meet them, with a dressmaker's
Hammer, so that the thing
I was going to wear fell away
Short of its template. And then

An idol at my window held my hand
Sadly all the way down to where
Your story ends.
So much of what is written
In the new standard
Has survived the cut. But to whom
Is it given? To be hidden
And then listened to with all the subtlety
Of staying up late to finish the job
Before the bus trip, before the dinner
And the shoes. Before the lamp
And the shadows of the steps.
To be abandoned at last
And seen as shards of a whole
In the sun, as the dusting
Remains the same even as
The trees remain themselves,
Filling up the space before
And filling it up again.
There is no more blankness
But only confusion,
Of a certain complexity
With the details of life
Renewed in the heat
Of intense summer sleep.
All the old heartaches
Are here in sharp relief,
Mixed with the new
Heartbreak, a warm, almost
Familiar scent.
The simple things
Are there before, but
The vast, wrenching gestures
Of the past, like the grass
Rending itself on seeing,
Are added details added
To the texture of the whole.
The way is steep and
Unfamiliar, but gradually
We come to see through it,
The dimness
Of the flanks, the low hanging
Trees. A house

Is built on top of it, and both
Houseboats are anchored
There, so that the whole thing
Could be viewed as an image
Of ordinary living, with its amusements,
Its tunes, its speeches,
Its hopes and fears. But it
Is not normal for two people to
Get together and see
The outlines of a dream
Cut short by sleep, and then
The low, howling wind, whatever
It takes to be
May be called color, texture,
Filling the space of a few seconds
With an almost-immense, dense
Light that casts
The air of desperation
Of every thought, word, movement,
With the shadows of dreams
Into the hollow ground of their empty
Habit and leaving
Aus Foundry, the ground
Rough and mean, the mending
That always deceives one.
There was but one cottage
And it was the cottage
Where they had stayed the night
Before the sun
Came out for the last time
Basking in the cool rays
Of the sun that come
Doing the unexpected
For some reason that can never
Be positively stated.
There were no more game
Taken by the thousands
At the station, only books
And dishes to be put away
In a basket with the books
And dishes
Which no one had ever seemed to want
Except for the books, that are
What I call my private things, things
That I lock away from the other
Worlds, things like thoughts,
Saying things like, How hard it is to get them

Into the past, out of the gloom
Of the despair that hungers
For them, but how
It is still the same stone over
The same masonry floor
With each breath you take
And each comforting movement
That is inward, searching
For the source, the reason
For all that we have gotten into.

FOOTFALLS

The footmen smiled and held out sandwiches.
I took a sandwich, it wasn't that I wasn't
Into the intention, only that the ordered behavior
Of consumption seemed the only way to be. Later I'll
Look back on it and say I took the bait
Because I was being paid to do so.
That other history no one has any right
To be excited about is the one that is
Inside your eyelids, out over your shoulder
And all the way down to the river.

Two days later he called
From the foot of the towering wall:
"This photo of you. You look so happy."
I felt fickle that day
But over the next few months
I grew more and more like the idea
Of a library, where books would be laid out
On whatever the mood led one to believe
In humanity, or what was
In the end. Then, somehow, the mood
Removed and the world became
Very peaceful. I was thinking
Things to myself: how
Beautiful the spiral of the clear,
Draped ceiling that night
When I shot first. And then, slowly
I began to enjoy the feeling
Of having read the Bible, its
Good news, and less and less
News about myself: how
My head was filled with straw
And my feet with mud
All so long I could not
Remember what it was all like
Or even what I wanted to do. I only
Spend the night worrying about

What I had ordered wrong and
Ordering it in the right order.
The diary I had left behind
Was waiting for me in the
Right order, so that it
Seemed to grow as it did
Amid the beauties of birdsong
And the daily dreams
Of Stradivarius and other great
Devils who have
Borne us this day and
Who are always with us,

Hanging above us like the pen
And the parchment.

PROBLEMS

Rough stares, sometimes a hello
And a rather nasty smirk. "You
Must have done well," someone
Might have said. Well, I have
Only a few complaints to report
And a few ideas I want
To put into words for you.
Do you dig them?
Order them now.
Order them in bulk
So that they may be
Used in your project,
That they may grow
In your tree, and collect
The names of the dead
Of the living, as a tangible
Memory of living may be
Used in new ways against
The living, as new memories
Are used
Against living, in the old
Moving game that is
All of us playing at least some part
In, and enjoying the rush
Of? This is what
Might be coming true for you:
The broad smile of
Morning hexed with
The sharp edge of evening,
A tango in which some pieces
Are better than others,
The key to success
Shall have been exhausted long ago
But are just now
Gestures into a past
Of glad, complicated
Things that still surround
The earth and the shapeless waves
Of the air:
People who have things
To sell, or people
To unload them on,
The whole scene is a commotion
Of things in and on the earth
Worn in the sense of

Hair, in and on the
Muscle, and things out of
The house.
It's the same
As always, but grittier,
Handsome. Here,
Throw some on,
Cover them with apricot jam.

He took off at a run
From the policemen,
Bared his teeth in the air.
The next moment
They were searching him for
An instant in the comforts
Of the cab of a distant
City, and he laughed
With tranquility.
It was all for naught,
He said, and snored.

The following morning the dust
Had swept over the field
But not the yellow flowers,
The birds were awake, and ready
To greet the visitor,
For the umpteenth time.
This was the pleasure
Of living:
Flowers, smiles, a certain
Glottal stop, and
The learned silence that answered
The phone all day long.
There was no plea
For the cab to begin,
No inquiry as to
The depth of the cobweb that shackled
Its progress as though
Each particle were conscious,
And the sun
As the lintel
Of this high arch that acted
Hard by the border
But ever so secretly
Corrupted the gentle
Bend of the bluff
And made it seem
Only banks and creeks

In the bluster of midday
As though they told the truth
But were not
Shadows of what
It was like
To exist separately
But belong together.
The lintel
Of this bluff was
Startling too—
The feeling, mild as
Elegance, like
A balcony never
Removed, always
A warning
Of the dangers
Yet at the same time
A pledge
Of security, of
The night, always
Filling up the space
Of yesterday
With its sounds and
Its feelings,
Its manners and
The opinions
Of those it had
Almost certainly escaped
From somewhere, though
The exact place remained
Absent-mindedness,
A taste
Of absolute security,
A mint-condition
Cassis of gladnesses
Lying in the
Sun's den,
Over the edge
Of the glacier,
A place
Almost entirely made of
Tears, of
Filling up the spaces
Made by the seasons
With their sounds and images,
And leaving us
In the space of just

Two dimensions.
It is only
To plan ahead,
Keeping one's emotions on file
And waiting.
Otherwise, what use is the charm,
The only one
That binds all of us?
It is like looking at a landscape
Which has either
One side entirely empty,
The other wholly present to you
In all its works,
Planning and conceiving,
Excited at the moon's
Mauve to violet
At each step,
Sinking into
The comfortable familiarity of
Each one of the empty
Stages of beauty that grow
Out of your longing
For each other,
For this moment,
Having anticipated it,
Preparing to be absorbed
In the
Many excited minute details
That surround you like
No idea,
No notion,
No notion of any kind
But one
You cannot imagine,
Keeping it close,
Only imagine growing
Huge mountains,
Widespread deserts,
Wet, furry
Mountain-face things
And on the high
Valley of Sarn
There is only
A look of telling,
A cautious neutrality,
Which must come to you
Later, as the dust

Into the tangled
Mountainous matter.
Not yet all
The ducks have vanished,
Bumped into
A receiver near
The edge of the lake.
It is a video,
Or rather a series of photographs,
Some of which have already been
Lost, or are
About to be found,
In traces, in chunks, in pieces
Of things people have
And areas where they have
Put something or other in motion,
And are about
To go away, or are
To be revived in some other
World, but in the
Global system at least
We must not forget
The definite things that
Have already been,
Or else half the charm
Of the wholehearted
Humaneness that makes it
Into us, out of us
A being of many talents
And attitudes,
A stirring river
At the center of which
One always wishes to see
Hers and the calm sea
Hesitatingly yielding,
A final glimpse
Of what must soon be there
Hanging above us,
The uncreated,
Perfected somehow,
As it was before.
That is why
I shall never understand it
("The running of the wheel.")
It is the night that repeats
What was said once,
And in so doing abolishes

What was not said,
Saving us,
For better or for worse,
Taken away and never
To be the same again.
As in Lysimachus
The wheel is repeated endlessly
In one sitting,
In one breath.
The variations
Are minor ones, galoshes of
Brown paper stacked one on top of
Other, of forming,
A ring or band.
The band is wound
Closer together, less secure
And more like a single line
Whose beginning is the same
As its ending, who knows
Themselves through
The shifting sands
Of eternity, who thinks
Their way to the top
Of Whales Harbour,
Live their lives
Carrying them
To the edge.
Who alters
The fragile equilibrium
Of these bands
So close together,
Each affects
The other,
The balance is tipped
In their favor,
The closer they are
To the source.
The troubles
Are external to the way
We move around within
The radius of the bounds
That constrain us,
Keeping track of where we go
So as to not
Disturb them too much
In the slow-moving stream
That overflows from horizon to horizon.

O how this slow-moving thing
Brings us daily
Into pleasures of a different kind
But always returns without the trace
Of exaltation on the part
Of the departed, always
A branchless forest
Bearing, as it does,
A memory of itself
Only to be smeared
Over the hair, blotting out the
Hair, skin, and hair in particular,
The gradual dripping of a saffron strand
Over the hair, smoothed over
In winter, again in summer,
And so on throughout the years.
The dying-edge
Of what is to come is,
As I understand it,
An act, like the slow dancing
Of bees, in which
The transparent mass
Squares off against the dancing
Of lines, of the invisible
Ceremonials, apologies, leases,
And so on made to seem
The way things are supposed to happen
By someone who looks like
The Governor of Massachusetts,
Presidential candidate,
And who is also
The President of China.
That is, from Halifax to the Arctic Circle.
Each has its own narrative
And its own, separate customs
And manners.
The dancing is stopped
At certain points along the way
So that there is
Not a harmonious mixture, but
A point at which a variety
Of hues and colors is possible
At which some hues
And colors coincide,
And this is the true ending for some of them.
But all are happy, contented,
Carrying on as before,

Decisions for the future, until
The day on which all should be
Humbled and praised for what
Each has done for his country, and for himself.
The rising sun makes the change
Instant, and the colors
Come tumbling down like chalk dust
Into the corner of the room, where
You keep your things. Each
Has left his house an anxious but mistaken impression
So that now no one remembers
What it was like to live in that house.
The colors, transmitted by the sun
Like colors on a still-dry windowpanes,
Are always changing and revealing
An atrium marooned with blue and yellow
So that now no one
Remembers and the atrium
Is a precise mirror of self-consciousness
Pierced here and there with old
Tears and grief. It is
As though a funeral parlor
Stared feverishly at these changes,
Asked: When shall we get out alive?
And the answer was: Tomorrow.

Thus, a new sense
Of urgency took over.
Tomorrow will be even more beautiful than
Yesterday's, and you must,
If you want to stay here, to love it
Like a mother-in-law. And flowers appear
At regular intervals throughout the day.
It is the simple truth that gets
Hung up on the hutch, and can barely
Keep up with the growing of the above-ground
River and its fountains, and its two streams,
One gentle, one firmly rooted, leading to
A third, more amenable setting: the subterranean
Flower field that evolved there
And is now extinct. To have
Had nothing to do but dwell
In that way, quietly, aeons ago, leading to
At Futura, the love that grows
Perfervidly as it goes along, to passivity
And then to be asked to come back, confirm
The old form of identification, the
New, fascinating form of being that

Is still to be invented and is
All the matter of the above-ground
Fertile soil, only much, much, much
More intelligent and harder
Being brought to bear on the surface
Of the flood, and in doing so
Keep up with the changing light and
The pattern of how
Wenery and his men have come
Lately, as though day
Weren't decided, and now
The swollen, charred remains
Of the burned-out, baby-boomer
Country are seen marching toward
The blue, pregnant country.
But, as always,
The evidence
Is in the pudding.
So we must venture
At some future date, even
If it's beyond us,
That's the beauty of it,
That we'll get there eventually,
Be it days, weeks, minutes, seconds.

But the thing is,
I don't even want to go there.
Days go by so quickly
That sometimes I forget what time it is,
Even what day it is.
The reckless spruces are
Plunging him
Into gratitude at last,
-b-but what if on the way
He got lost,
Had to stop for a while,
And then come right back
To save us? What would that be like?
Not like the old stump
Of things, but a new stump
Fully formed from new, unformed,
Thing fragments, and then
It all comes crashing down
On the first day of spring.

THEY ARE STILL RATHER LOVELY

Ovid, in the infomercial, starts to monitor his pain,
But the screen goes black. A lotta
Hands are on the case, trying to extricate the package
From the jaws of eternity. Sat on the bend
The long arc of suffering, forgotten in the euphoric
White noise, latches onto the forehead
And thinks, I'm gonna be an engineer
Which will make all these other things possible.

Which is why you are with me,
Trying to get a grip. I want
To return, but not for long.
My arm is in a sling
Worn like this.
I'm gonna bend you over
And examine your toes. What
Did you want me to do with these?
I'll wipe away all traces
Of that era, of that day
With the utmost care.
I'll pay dearly
For this, but at the end
You'll come to me with a filed claim.

A woman's tears, running in discord,
Intersecting the vivid
Verse of the prayer, with the spurs
And patterns, the finery
Of the times. How we must thank
Those rocks for this,
That there is life after all around them
And all that is to come:
The sound of the chase,
The birds' cries, the dust
And the sand
That collects around the campfire
And everything in it.

WET CASEMENTS

A tad upset about it,
I toiled away at the portrait
Of its absence, until a headache
Announced itself. Out at sea
I probed the amen break
Researching whys and wheres
I might have found its body.

Unable to return to the garden,
I wandered the low ridges
Looking for bushwhacks. Sometimes
There was a bush, and sometimes
There wasn't, and the elevation
Made a loud clang, audible all over
The place. If it could be night
There was something wrong with it,
Something that would have to account for
The gaps in the trees, and the cold
And the lack of light.
I was beginning to think of deducing
The lessons of each lesson into
A system of continuous decay
But the structure was so delicate it could not
Take that lesson into account.
I had begun to think of these
Unconscious processes as
Permanent, dynamic, growing, though
Not of themselves, nor even
Of the process of decay as such.
It was as though I had been taking
My walking backwards into these
Little boxes, each marked
With a name, some place
To go in if I wanted to go further,
Advance even a little bit.
And yet I was not going to let you get
Past me into this dearth of information.
See, I thought it might be possible
To talk to you again about
These things that had been the
Origin of so much conversation,
The weather with wings,
And, like a sigh, what
Is lasted indefinitely.
Indeed, what is lasted
Is anything you have any right to be

Taking into account as
You go along,
Keeping your promise to yourself,
Although it is already here
And waiting,
Sitting on the fence.
All this happened long ago,
Even as you stood there,
Looking at me,
In the moment of the kiss,
But now is past.
The voices at the door
Are nobody's
Promise, and anything
You might want to think about
Is already here, in the form
Of dreams, or finished ones
Like these. And you
Can go back to living your life
As before, but it seems
Limited in the way that
Faith makes you believe things
Can happen even when
They can't, and keep
Prodding them on
Even as they sleep and grow old
And never live beyond your understanding,
Which is their own reward in this
World of glass and mirrors
And hard-ons.
I was pleased to meet you
Couple of weeks ago
At the fair where you sell
Fairs and villas
And I take a long walk
Down to where the people
Work—in this case, a hard-on
Is instilled in each young person
Already bristling with apprehension
About what lies ahead,
What to put in it, what to get out.
There is no point, all of it,
In returning to the shadows
Of this world. It has already met
With your shadow, become you.
You are its now.

There is something new on the horizon

That will probably change everything
About now, but will never
Make itself felt, at least for the time being.
We must try to live here, as you do,
Turning the page of life, turning the pages of history
One turns at the whisper of an important event,
Moving far into the past as one who sits
Seems to be moving toward a distant, foreign
City, but which has already happened.
You have already moved beyond
The bounds of what was considered polite
Just to be born into the polite
World of adults who wait around
For you to get up and go about your business.
You are beyond the range
Of polite gazes, which now includes
The whole city and its products,
Food, shelter, clothing,
Messages from the outside,
A sunset at a function,
A flower pot at a party,
A flower display, strung up
Like cord around a pole,
And no one sees you,
Only a thread of warmth that hangs
Like mistletoe, in place,

Not the beginning of meaning, the
Main point. You are
Only a speck in the vast
Camera of eternity,
That sees everything
As tiny flecks of light that float
Between the dots that are there,

Wiped, discarded amid
The birds and animals
That would have us if we could see
What was there, but we can only
Pick up certain things, like breathing,
Being attached to a thread like the spell
Of a certain song, until
It joins us. The point
Is that there are so many things
In the way we are held,
Wiped, lost, thought of
As though a journey might be
Made by tracing certain

X marks on a piece of paper
For a while, and then
The sand
Is shifting, and the dreams
A thousand times clearer,
Realizing it has a
Contour, a certain
Moment of graininess,
Of the topstitching that
Has bound us to the
Outline of things, and
To the line of
Light running away
Into the distance, beyond
The peaked
Hairpin that fences off
The sand, into which
A small object seems
To have been glued,
And the bird-dropping
Is uncertain, fast
And wide like the sea.
I urge you
To reconsider.
All the years of your life
Are being sucked into the
Little sea that seems
To be collapsing
Behind you like years
Of instruction
Into the tiny amount of
That you gave it
Whether to give it
Or not, the way
Is uncertain, the quantity
Small as well.
A sudden
Freeze, shocking
A moment, and then
The certainty of
The night, clear
And night like
Metal, iron,
Cobalt, whatever
Is being built,
The certainty
Takes you by surprise,

And all you were hoping
For, not anything but the
Number of years you
Were hoping for,
For the boat
To come free
And bounce
Back onto the sand
Where it can be touched
And not seen
Again, and the field
Goes dry.
And all the while
You were hoping the sand
Came ungliding
In the hand
That was so carefully
Preparing the tent,
The place for you
To stay,
The bed,
For the night,
Prepared to go on
Planning your escape
From the dream of living
And seeing it
Carrying you inside,
The wind
Curls up the inside of the house
Curls up the bark
And the whole of the magnificent panorama
Is wrenched from the inside
Out, and thrown
Out, like an apple.
A wind
Goes out to meet it.
A strange, lissome smell
Arguments for and against it.
The permanent, strong light
Of the sun with the water
Coming in all seasons,
Pounding down the very breath,
The scuffle, the whole bag
Of hearses in the dark.
A soft rain.
And only within
The present, plus some

Terrific tears rolling
Down toward the ground,
Ancient crescent moon,
Couple falling, rolling
Back and forth
Like barges
Between the many stories
Of the past, the dust, the ruins.

The board will see you now.

A DAY AT THE GATE

You see, we knew what we were doing
All along, but when you meant to
Return, the anticipation grew,
The day turned over and the light
Pasted silently on the window
Which was quieter than the silent
Wet place I'd imagined.
There were no birds at the window;
There was nothing but silence and writing.
I felt sorry for the old man
Knowing nothing could ever
Save him from falling, writing
Hissself on the stone.
Soon the day turned over to dust.

JOE LEVIATHAN

Something may be said
About war and peace in the age
Of onrushing ubiquity.
The periods are breaking up
And, in places such as London
And San Francisco,
Where I am not concerned,
The times are breaking up
And leaving me breathless.
Just to be near someone
Who is doing well
Is like being near a fire engine
Near a bank
At night. You can feel the breath
Of that bank

Near your feet,
But not too near

Or not enough.
You have to have the whole story,

The arc of all his glories,

To feel anything close.
That is to say, go easy
On the dates, and pray
For some stranger, some girl
In the untidy streets

Of that night who was never here

Before the explosion. We cannot keep
The fragments of her lesson

For they will have shifted anyway,
Infinitely, into something

Absentminded, perhaps, but I am

Ready, always ready, to accept
Anything that comes along, or won't.
And so I accept, as a gift,
Anything with legs.

You may not recognize it.
You may not recognize it either.
But you are the stranger,

And all of your being is ambiguous
And bidirectional,

Bending to the sharp inhalations
And angled tears,
And all of your being is tender
And innocent,
Why is it so?
Because I am the one who comes
At the window whose strikingly beautiful

Manner conferring inwardly
Infers a lyrical content
Which is indelibly locked
In the air.
In mid-afternoon, as we are walking
Back to the beginning, a thought occurs to me
What if, instead of coming to me,

He were to go instead
Rather as the ancient Greeks
Took for their own tragedies,

In that immortal age,
When all was freshness, and healing?
What would that man think?
He would realize that wrong is right,
That all is permitted, to go on
Walking at night, a shadow of a man,
In the mill-pond of an old electrician,
In the hedge, the corn has grown.
Yet each moment is permitted
A certain liberty, folding
Into the night, like a sheeted hand,
Like an artist folding over in bed
To cherish his painting, to be
Near and not really aware of the space
Between the moments of dawn and dusk.

Thus day is a mirror
Reflected in the peculiar way of
The sand waves reflecting off
The beach inlets,
The way the light is today
Thin flakes of light, grains
Of sand on the beach
Reflected in the water.
How do we know these things about ourselves?
We'll never get rid of them.

So, not having any, we
Turn to chalk or to dust.
Chances are you'll find it
At the back of your mind.
It will slip its own reflections
In the reflections of the
Mirror you've just seen through.
It will shanghai you into dreams
Of hankered-after timelines, of despair
And relief at last.

That's what they're made of:
Brittle yet firm, the forms
For these gestures to come and go
Like the motion of an airplane
Above the trees, on the ridge.
But there was no need, now

Not at this moment, not in the
Dust, or sand
In spring or fall, but remained
Forever etched with the same
Magic, same enmesh with the
Secret of the things
That were never meant to be owned
So that the ownership
Ripely disappeared in the dust.

The notion of property
Rises and falls with us,
Sinking into the sea,
And so must we, with much else, be absorbed
In the rhythms of the palace:
Beautiful, but decaying.

The rhythm of daily life
Is decaying with us:
Reality. A house
Is a house, but it doesn't matter
Which one. Each is small, each
Is conspicuous, and so

Are they immortal. They are decaying

With the music of their everyday speech:
Sodden, but alive.

THE ART OF SPEEDING

The art of speed is almost dead.
Some may dispute this claim
Others may not. It is a question

Of taste: some people like the old,
Old, stale, generic kind
Of speed, while
Others prefer a fresh twist.

History, or rather, how the past
Appears to be, an indifferent art

With all its pictures
Hidden away, on the ridge
Speeding toward the close, mild

Emission of the end, toward
A moving, slowly closing

Artifice of feeling:

Firm, hinting fingers

Of a certain quality, old
And the years themselves,
A kind of gallery

Like the one your painting hung
Itself in, everything was suspended in air

Like the leaves of a tree and, breath-taken, learn
To breathe again.

HOW DANGER IS DREAMING

How dramatic the confrontation!
How poised the finish is!
Bright as a Christmas tree, shining as a finery

And as though meant for a comeback, this time
About speeding expectations, ongoing even into the
Toughest times. These are outliers

In the busy urban jungle, but
They have momentum, and that is what
They're made of: tepid, rocky

Fragments of speech that float
Over stubble and stone, washed away

ampions and forgotten places
But here, so subtle and self-important
It can be called a life, in the sense
Of coming to terms with the way
We all get lost
In, and the many places
That become ours anyway.

CHRONIC SYMBIOSIS

These things can be arranged,
If the pieces be concave enough.
Other arrangements may be required.

It's true enough that life is getting shorter

Every day. To ask for a bigger piece
Is not a bad idea. It's also true
That we will not be able to enjoy the moment

Any more. That's why I'm standing just now
With the others, spectators only,
Gawking at the sunset as it passes
Through us and the flowers are sucked out.
That's also why I can hardly speak—
My voice goes through me,
My whole being plaits the beads
That buoyed me to the top of the tower.

These days the sun waffles and burps
It is forced to bend its rays
Into comforts unromantic as well as
Modest, if only for the time being.
Tomorrow, flowers will blow,
Lilies will bloom, boys play, the heart's
Tremendous engine will be let out for a few hours.

All that was necessary was to be added
An atonic one, allowing for
A speck of insight into the way the mind
As it had been before the accident,
The way it no longer thinks about things,
But is always thinking about them, experimenting
With new ways of looking at things,
Adding more lead beads to the morass
Of dark reservoirs under the ground.

A rabbit with a pencil in its mouth
Explains so much. But as time goes on
And no one explains more about it
And the sun continues to waffle in the dark
And burrs again, explaining
Only about how it thinks, not
Why, in the beginning, when it was this way
There was no explanation.

Learned helplessness. Gradually, the

Tremendous engine picks up on the trepidation
Of its maker, the way
It thinks of everything. It's like
You're going to the doctor every two weeks
Now that I can see through a magnifying glass
Better than the dark, sullen
Consumer of remorse and fume.

THE PURSUIT OF SULLEN DEATH

There are a lot of torsades
And a lot of beer, if you don't keep your eye on
Those pesky mercurial ocean waves that seem
About to get worse each week. To end up
Bearing down on us again would be a joke
Unless someone called the shots. Then it would be just
The water appearing flatter, the tide
Responding ruefully. That person
Or persons connected with that person
Got to be caught red-handed. They [the incidences]

Became so much ado about nothing
In fact that the police
Had to be brought in to make an example of them.

Murmur among the hurried crowding
Of last-minute preparations for the big game
That they must always be like this,

Walking on like this,
Adventurous even, but utterly
Undefinable. Then forget
About the deficit. It's already high noon.

FIVE PEDANTIC PIECES

The governor,
in his red dress, and his pet
青春的地方式, 地方面得所有的副,
were standing together. The former was talking
to the effect of 地方, which was,
in his view, the only valid form. He supported
the right of others to do so as well,
not opposing it personally.

But there are other ways, he acknowledged,
other ways which do not involve punishing
the thought, or even the thought itself. They
are, in fact, all forms of life, he asserted.

That is why I am here.
In my other life, in London, I had a different understanding
of things and people. In that world, nothing
existed, no one had taken the oaths,
yet still they came and were here. We knew
the motions, the rhythm of them. It was as though they
were magnets attracting one to the light,
then distorting it for one or two views,
then folding it up and exhibiting it
as art. That was how we knew Rome
was on the way, that the dime was about to arrive.

FROM PALOOKAVILLE

It's wind, it's sleeting.
I wouldn't trade places with you.

Yes, the parterres are empty,
the knots are undone.
We could give them a run for their money,
who never knew a stitch about them,
and still have room for the unexpected
dance, the unexpected touches
you throw up, on the sofa or the hard
wooden surface of the mat-polished mahogany
of the navel, or the cut flowers up close,
like the guy who invented the word "horse."

And when the family comes,
it's as if the subtle tastes
of sheep's teeth and guavas weren't
already sharp enough, and the sheep's
tongue informed the birthing
procession down the stone street.

Whoa, something is coming
at me, though I don't know what.
Ribbons are sprouting,
a frog in a tropical gown
coming up to meet me halfway,
for the dizzying heights
are just what you call panaceas
like the one that is coming undone
all over again.

THANK YOU FOR NOT COOPERATING

Down in the street there are ice pellets
every time the weather is olive or fig-based.
People are walking past, mouthing pleasantries
like it was yesterday.

There was a bright window here a minute ago.
If there was no room for the other ninety-nine
people in the shed, they would join us.
We need neighbors to help us plant the fence, prune the shrubbery,
teeth to eat. After all, only death
will have these details straight. We must submit

to the rules of the forest, walk in it, and then die
of natural causes.

FEVER

I was plucked off the street
to become a part of something.
I don't know what it is—
perhaps it's too simple.

Whatever it is, it's true.

Anybody could fit it—
my, how that must have been a ball
some time back.

Any time now
you'll find me curled up like a dog,

wishing desperately for a line,
for a piece of rye.

That's what we haven't done yet.

Wait—there's one more thing I want you to do.
I was wondering about your past.
Do you recall a scrum of shabbiness
à la Fred Moran's catamite?

Yes, well, we're doing it
again.

She was saying how much she missed him—
how he took her by surprise—
and how, though they had no place to go,
he'd happily come along if asked.

That may be why she passed.
He never forgot her.
Never.

STRATAGEM

The analysis is partial.
The headline: "Love it or leave it."
But the substance is elsewhere.

Even when they [the analysis and the speculation
ad lib] are mutually exclusive, you
still take the analytical path.
Paganini on his tiptoe seemed to
admit that there was a gender gap.

It's like ice in ice cream. There are so many varieties
and they all taste the same, even the same as

Gender is like money. It can go to any number
and be whatever it wants to be, as long as people
like it and they can afford it.

I used to joke that if it was made up of real stuff
people would like it and make things with it,

but that evolved into a serious thought:
I wonder sometimes if I'm a fish
and what that means, and whether anyone cares
or even notices. All that matters is
that I am ahead on my own time.

I used to dream of washing dishes
under the hot, steaming surface of the water,
unclenchingly punching out a vein of blue.
I dreamed of cafés and thought it would never end.
The gist of it is that men are beasts
unclenched with emotion,
well, I don't mind anything unclothed
in its time, but this does not seem to be
a subject of discussion. Next up,
lobsters are to blame.

Oh well, it's everybody's responsibility,
that's what we come out to say.

MANY ARE DISSATISFIED

Yet the wind from Seattle blows over and over,
against the facing page and against the anthill.
O blessedness, let this conversation
angle us around the Pacific. Then we'll know
the one true way, the only one,
and otherwise the boat will tilt under the weight
of its own navel, the crew
will retire, the ship herself will begin
to sing, a term we will all need,
it will unclog our nostrils, usher in a new season
of happy, febrile weather. Before long we'll all
be shuffled onto another train, there'll
be fireworks and inside jokes, stopping just short
of endorsing the idea of big, fluffy things.

That would be me, though. I'd read
the evening news, it didn't seem like much.
Well, it's every man for himself, so to speak.
That's what everybody's made of, anyway.

If there are sympathies to be had,
then why not have them? The quest
was only the latest chapter in a long series

of hunts for lost friends, or lost
minds, in whose tranquillities
nothing was apparent.

There were no drawn-out meetings,
only a series of low balls jabs at the actor's
dry forehead, his/her face imprinted
with so much indifferent noise one
wondered if there was a purpose to the proceedings,
if this was the place to be.

Then a whitecap gently budged.
"Is that the fish you wish me to bring you,
or are these the orders of my heart,
to go over, gradually, as tides do
and nothing too amazing
emerges, or merely silence
in the face of overwhelming odds?"

The cap was slowly lowered.
"I have something to tell you."

CAMPUS

I used to play stickball with my best friend,
who was half my size. We called him Peanut.

There was a lot of rubbing of the eyes
and a pounding of the fists
by that monstrous entity,
the dollhouse. The walls
were prismatic blue, and the bird
was winging it.

I used to climb all night
with Peanut and his pals,

who were half my size,
and always something for the pinwheels
and sundry oddballs that lived in them,

some of them, anyway. Anyway, we'd stop
to catch our train, and so much would come over,
more than you'd like to think.

There was always more to be found
in the burr, but it was always spread out before us
like a field of flowers, ready to receive the news
at the first alarm, or a knock at the door.
I'd like to thank you for what you just said,
but I can't, there's no way.

There were so many people along that train
I hardly know where to find the galoshes.
Messengers from as far away as Central Islip
and down to the city even as it was being born!

FARM IMPLEMENTS

The first of the nieces came to play
at my house. The other, a nephew,
was falling back, uncommunicated.

I could see why the sun looked that way
always, and know why it does. It belongs there.

FLY THE KITE

We don't have to stay here long.
The place has bordered fireweed and sweet peas,
which is why I asked you about the anteater.

There are a lot of ways to dress.
A girl with a box cut across the field
might want to consider herself in that grammar of
oneself, but in the end we all come down
to a sort of prioritized air of home,
how it was
the last thing on your list.

I don't want to sound like I know where
you're going, on some level.
That's what you think.

Then she pivots on her toes,
as though that were the secret,
that if it were only he could have
essentially locked the door that produced
the ambiance we now take for granted.

And we always hear their endorsements.
That's fine. I'm happy to
cooperate if that's how it goes.
Otherwise, why me? I'm happy
with the way we have come.

She had put on a silk strapless bustier
and was wearing a strapless dress.
It betrayed little,
like a surly bird.

I had asked of what title
he would like to be delivered.
Of course he knew. That was why
he devised this absurd ruse
to get at me. From that angle
the whole thing can be seen
like a chaise longue—
distinctions that were there on paper
and seem to exist
in certain rarefied air,
the kind of air one breathes.

And that makes sense only in retrospect,
of the clothes and the people and all that was promised.

But in the near future
when all this gets put away, he'll ask you
again what did you think was going to happen,
why everything worked out so smoothly,
and you'll have the chance to tell him.

IF YOU WOULD STEP FORWARD

Perhaps the truest thing is that both the longest and shortest
paths diverge at the point they cross,
and you have to go both ways for it to make sense,
even as it does, and it makes sense even though
it's cut corners and/or zigzags us
down a side street. That's the way it is.

Which reminds me, why are we even here?
Making sense of it doesn't do justice to the whole,
which has to be lived, breathed, thought about
and then lived again. This has to be the whole of living
as it was lived—that includes rain
and wind that gets lost in closets,
but opens its gates wide, allowing in
and non-fiction writers to swarm in, and out.

Don't make it harder
just by having to endure longer.
Peace of mind, a shelf of time,
that's what we're after. Anything else is delusion,
or worse, willful blindness.

I once had a friend who
knew all about me. He was my coach.
I used to go out with him. We'd have supper
at the movies. I used to have a pair of binoculars

that were good. My brother-in-law, he was a plumber

and lived in a cottage in the hills.
One fateful evening, he got into a cab
and drove away. It was the death
of that age. There was no one to care.

There was no one to come back to.
Alas, the age pressed its rhythm,
drying out the secrets
of those times, exposing the

same back door. Inside the cab
the sea was murkier still.

Inexplicably, the sage decreed

that there would be no more gay marriage
that season. The wedding

was optional, though celebrated,

a function thrown in
at the request of the officiant.
The fashions had barely begun to arrive
when the inevitable happened.

THE GARDEN OF FALSE CIVILITY

Hold it, I said,
trying to be polite.
Like a morning spattering the leaves
with the wood of the trees, this parting
is like a dream. You don't want it.

And sure as glass slumbers on the stone floor
you say nothing. It's as though
you had come to terms with the space
that defines us, the way

it looks when viewed through a magnifying glass,
blurred or not. There are people
who look to that space, who plop

their chests on the stone, to be obeyed,
and are surprised
when it breaks. To be two kilometers away,
that distance seems an eternity.
Yet it is the way to an infinite distance

whether it be sunny or cloudy. To be led
in by sheepish dogs, past courthouses,

firm entrances. To be able to say, I don't know,
speak of returning, of waiting, of wanting to go back,
and finally having it all be over.
It will take us longer to get out of it.

But when it's all done, why, it's the same
as before. There will be no hunky-dory.
The War on Terror has begun.
Gradually, the image widens, and in
a few more years becomes more and more like old Post-It notes

dusted over with grime, dust of the raiders,
of the raiders themselves. It's as though
one were born with a certain dignity, and held
it like a bag of real estate. Then suddenly one's feet

are scrubbed, and one's hair caught in the web

of a giant ear. It's taken us aback a little,
but after considering the circumstances,

should be easy to extricate, given
the opportunity. I'm sure they'll pitch in
that evening, providing the right

cooperation. You're not going to believe this,

but trust me. Next, we'll be putting
together a little performance. Look,
here is the old crow performing, looking remarkably
prescient. Let me introduce you to my new roommate,
Bill. Bill, I don't know, what was it you wanted to know
about my room, about my hair?
Well, it's down to science. Here are the ingredients
for a nice soup, sir.

Here are the kids's belongings. I want 'em back,

and the recipe for a new scrum
is ready, waiting for me in the mirror.

Let me read that to you. When you come back,
I'll ask what the fuss was about. And the crayons

that came over me were for you, by me. We were a family,
and you are too smart for me, but I'll talk to you,
through the grapevine or the newspaper, whatever works.
I have an agreement with the Devil,
and all will be satisfactorily resolved,
including the matter of this paper.

PLEASURE BOATS

Wash it again
and yet again.
The equation drifts.

Suppose we were a group of mariners
on a certain day
who somehow missed seeing us.
How would that be?
Marinating at the beach—
would that be an indicator?

On a blustery afternoon
a certain Marie Curie presented herself
with a peach-shaped satchel over her shoulder.
She had a rose in one hand, a grapefruit in the other.

It seemed to say Here's some more information
if you wish. Here's a copy of the list—
please put this in your daybook.

POTLUCK

You always leave me where we left off.
I want to get down to the business of fixing
what broke last night. Tell me, have you ever seen a grapefruit
that can stand its own while? That's a question

of sorts, one that cannot be posed or even
reposed. It's with us until the next time,
and that's certainly not this week.

I have, however, a few ideas.
First, why not grant us a wider berth
so we can see more of what we want? As long as it's
not interfering with the manna sexton
or the railroad crew, our appetites are
alive and full. Why not reward them
as though they had invented the wheel

that revolutionizes the countryside and elevates even the humblest
to extraordinary heights, as long
as that prince doesn't get too close, please,
and let the traitor stay the distance.

Second, why not leave everything hanging
so high up, like on a mantel—
that is, don't cut it, or leave it hanging,
all the way down to the wire:
sweetheart, my soul's only chance is to stay
where it is, on the other side,
not get cut to pieces by the wind.

Third, I know your affection for precision is long and slender
but it is the only way forward,
the only one that matters. And when it's time to
cut, or dice, or whatever,
just go with the flow. Because, you know,
it's what you want.

Fourth, a gray no-day may have been the
curtain for what's really happening in the capital
at this very moment. What's not to like?
Fifth, a no-day may have been the curtain for what's really
happening on the water, off into the wings,
but off into the water, what is this? A craft
something between a man and his dog, who came out to
play, and who knows that the other dogs
aren't as real? What if someone
called them up, and they just might have heard about it

if someone had called them up
and if they hadn't, what would their lives be now?

ASSERTIVENESS TRAINING

I like the integrity of what you have to say. I'll tell others about it.
However, the way you have to go to get it, besides, is interesting.

Why not? Because, as the saying is, "You never get out alive,"
and never will. Therefore, nothing to see here,
not even your own footprints in the grass, which are of no help to you,
only to be a constant reminder of how you died
settling down into a comfortable existence. Your regular, uneventful
detours led you here, to this precipice. You presumed
it was another place, and guessed rightly. But it wasn't. It was you,

not this scenery on the edge of the road
where so much as a frown lines the horizon, to tell
you're here now, and have waited for this moment
to appear out of the blue, a moment like a flash of inspiration
or a deep sigh. You have waited for this
because it has always been this way, and nothing else.
But in this way one is almost always
prepared to give up something, not just the words, but the idea,
too. You break the rule and it's fresh in your mind,
all other things are, too, but it's
difficult to get rid of the thought. It's like
dangling far above the city streets, like some kind of
superstition, and people go about their business
as usual. Superstitions don't tend to stick around
long. Certain brands of coffee are special,
a warning—here—not to drink too much of any one thing.
And then, slowly, the years pass. The year
1914 was a bad year for mechanical failures, but it's hard
to root out the good intentions in the grass, the sun,
and the entire landscape. There has to be a creator,
someone who made this all up, then burned
to get it to look like something was lost, then burned
again so it all looked different, but in fact
it wasn't a second thought. It was enough
to put one in one's uneasiness, and indeed
almost to a halt, considering all the
dance music was an invented subspecies,
and the casualties could be counted only once,
as in the assembly line.
But still
the aura around it was reassuring. After
all, it was what mattered before,
what the others were, and after. What
hungers today, what still festers. In other words,
no one really cared before. What lured

them neither, what fears they might have harbored
before they gave up, but what
is old as dust itself, when the last shreds
are viewed, and a new posture
ascends, tentative but fast becoming
what is here. As in the painting
by Paul Gauguin, whose work I admire, and who,
as I was going to say, once
did a poll tax on polluters, who in turn
gave his ass a break, by not contributing
their proportional share of the way things
were doing. Which is how we got here,
by following a trail that traced
indefinitely over blocks, until
at some point it merged with the streetscape
of our own lives, which was, it transpired,
quite nice. A coin toss determines the winner,
who, it turns out, is you. You have the same
priorities as everyone else: cars, sex, shoes.
You can have whichever you want. But make it
into something to eat, like a birthday.
That's what they're there for:

a platform from which one may speak,
generating near and long afternoons
at the beach, if the weather
adheres to that. The house
is yours.

THE NEW SPIRIT

A couple of notes: Firstly,
I don't feel we're any wiser for
what just happened. He was a good guy.
We chatted awhile. Then parted on an amiable
note. I'll be watching the sparks
go off in the grate.

We're not much better for it.
Our enemies didn't learn anything from us.
We'll take that as a lesson
to be taken into account in future encounters.
It was as though the sky of our little apartment
came crashing down around us,
then merely sat there. I had the old record
for my little sun, and it was good as ashes.

We were in the market for poison ivy
and felt we had come out on the wrong page.
Poetry had its way with us,
or else it wouldn't have happened at all,
and we'd have been embarrassed by our actions.
Now that the woods are getting closer
I don't see how anyone can read this far.
I'm afraid it's got something wrong.

LITTLE SICK POEM

Once upon a time a donkey
blocked the sun on my path.
The fragments of a house were below me
like that of a broken sea shell.
There the dandelions were, happily interspersed
with bits of cleaving cleft,
and the broken lines of some sort of furniture
that had apparently never been used.

Why is this?

Because you asked and I answered
and now I must go down to the river to look for a job
and you must too come back with me.

INTO THE DUSK-CHARGED AIR

The study is actually empty,
though half-assembled.
I notice how the principalities
are closer together. That's because of
some prehistoric chipmunk activity.

But when it comes time to clean up,
what about the studies?
They're still in the pot,
or else they don't matter.
Older people might not notice them
or even notice the lollipop dragon
that dragon roars madly over the sand.

Yes and the dead bodies
would probably have none of it,
moving slowly along toward the shadow
that their presence casts.

Hmm. I wonder what that means.
I wonder if this is some kind of departure,
some departure from the norm,
we stumble daintily along in the interests of
gleaming, glazed reflections
often enough coinciding with the movement
of an imaginary river:
how it would be different if it were me,
if I could only see it,
knowing only the parts I wanted to keep,
the rest would be imaginary.

I see.

And the little shepherd came and plied
unelected, having polled the land
but not the parts corresponding to that branch
of the lore. Parts corresponding to
a sound, to flames
expanding forever under the circumstances
these are always the exception, the sun
that sticks around, being the exception
that proves the rule.

Yes and the horses
walk on wax, through the dung
under the land, to the part where
hundreds of thousands of acres lie fallow.

There the jolly roger is still
hanging above the moors, and there
are those who would like to see it
go in one piece,
quick indeed, to sign the agreement
if that is what it takes.

There are those, however,
who would like to see it another way—
the intricate, prismatic
position of the tree to the treetops,
for instance. That's why I introduced
the two-headed serpent into the camp
of reluctant loggers, along with harmless gophers,
sliding into the final analysis
of my deliberate being, the thought
that began it all, the thought that ended it all.

A gun is pointed at my head.
She says I can go home now, but
I want to stay. Please call my bluff.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE

Of our example, our story,
she said, "If it's after all
to be suspected, it should be pretty easy.
If it's going to be as easy as that,
why not make it easy?"

And on that note
maybe we could have it easier,
like breakfasts, quilts, the art of sitting
with one's legs dangling over one's head,
ancient deep dish represented
as a plumb line.

And true some of them did get away
but most was not punished:
sleep came to them like the plague
and they recovered,
prostrate, ready for another lesson
unless it was light itself that interrupted
or interrupted something else, that broke the plenitude
out of sleep and time, that woke us up
to a purpose, now forgotten.

I had asked what sort of a vessel
to propose to you, what sort of festival
to invite you to, that you would be glad
to be a part of. Your eyes, open again,
recall what was in the past. What kind of face
are those that laugh at this?
That is why I am burning with much love
this evening, before the others arrive
and I take my stand among you, as best I can,
tending to the shoreline, my breath a field's
supplemental, battling tooth and nail
for what little I have left, just barely.

It's so thrilling, but so terrifying:
each of us has drifted a little way off course
but, like the shore, is slowly coming round.
Ready, willing, a smile
clashes with horror as the dive bombers
are seen circling, then back down
and must resume again.

Look, it's empty still, but there must be an element of . .

I have to get up and clean my teeth,

though melodious tolling does the honorable thing
and soon. The tide is shifting,
who knew it, has left us in the lurch.
Look, it's all over!
What galloping seems to be happening
is only the prelude to ecstatic second thoughts
about our bodies and our relations to them,
and the oft-embargoed news.

And then in the lurch the wave leans back,
as on a sudden wall of water
reveals its depth and gives birth
to confused birds and animals, some of them
even in flight, braver than the others,
brave for their countries, for having mud,
or at least being able to pretend
it has always been.

Is it possible that the others knew,
gleaming at their achievement, bringing it
to the exclusion of all other forms of life,
truly proud of what they had accomplished?

Probably. Probably. That is what the hunter's
mind is all about. There is no point
in trying to get away, as in the novel
I was telling you about. You will be sorry,
too, but at the moment of writing that is
the moment we have arrived at. Sorry about the ceiling
burning, the stifling old man, the lathered woman—
they were things just like them,
too cheerful even to be treasured,
though. Mine was a frog.

Just as I was going to say
he hasn't gone far. The story is
that just
far as it goes, which is quite a lot
in fact. I fed it into your friend
to see what it would make say. What do you say?
It's sorry, but no closer to home.

A ball of tissue paper would probably be nice
but as of now there isn't any.
Perhaps in a future life
we could try to get hold of some ancient
material that was lost
many years ago but that's
too dangerous. Let's leave it at that.

The cat
wants to be petted, and by that time
we'll have passed the ball around.
It's sloppy, the game too lost,
that spoil so much fruit
on such a surface.

SEE HOW YOU LIKE MY SHOES

Two twisted dry turds on the sidewalk;
the weather one's gray dropcloth.
What town is this?
The weather has a choke hold on foreseeing
what happens to it.
Heck there is nothing but the alike
except persons are not. Things are
like institutions. Stumbling from perjured
personhood, all seem alike
but the fugitive person has got things
his sisters (in Olympic
statehood) haven't got: to mimic
two legs like a dog is out
and times three sheet music in the door
is to planting. They really resist,
soaringly. The salesman head
is two whole shoes, and that be
the graveyard by the flame talking,
earnest ouch spelled by night.

The great symphony fell down before it could be revived.
It is probably still going on.
Somehow we managed to get hold of ahold of the right instruments.
The hygrometer re-echoed in the forest.

Another time I went down
to see what they had done with me.
I told them of my case, and of the hygrometer
which had done its job just as I had promised.

But it was just like going out among the bushes
that you always get hit by them.
You fall and break your arm, or knee,
or you break your femur.
There is no time like the present
for fasting and praying,
for getting the pulse racing
in the dark.

HEGEL

Like a coffee table, the chair slides
across the polished floor—its aides have brushed its sides
again. How it shines! Hugs are interspersed with kisses;
the scrofulous assistant unzips his belt
just as Monopoly is about to be kicked out of court.
Behind the scenes, plans are a-friskiness.
War has broken out again in the Balkans.
The Dutch East India Company is accused
of looting; the Turks
are trying to stop the flow of silk
from the Congo to the Ceylon seas.
Meanwhile, in London, the silk trade is
under way. Arakune is dreaming of other lips
and Ishtar is planning to have a son in the next decade.
There is talk of changing the bank at which
one enters, and meaningful glances are exchanged.
He looks tired.

In the adjoining lobby a large tuck
will do. I have read many erudite
letters you have no doubt read, addressed
to your chin, or to your wallet: What goes
into a portrait? Prudence, perhaps, is the key
to many a successful portrait. But for now
I must decline, and hope one day
to have the opportunity to see the real thing.

That smiley captain is making all the money.
I have never enjoyed life quite so much
as I do now, nor do I feel any reason
to do so. Perhaps I'm old-fashioned,
my face pressed against the window, grisly,
but undoubtedly the garter-clad youth is having the last word.

NON-PHOTOGRAPHY

It's there, it's bound to happen.
It happened once, over coffee, in the corner
of a room. You can trace it with your finger,
feeling the breeze against its point. It could

happen to anybody. It's the wonderment of it,
the fascination with everything, but also
the need to keep up with it, to be perfect.

You shave so long that your hair curls up.
I have to pore over this, that, and another
to see who is really ahead, who has the flash
and presence of mind to realize it's all history,
to be made to look like something that has lasted.
The next time someone you know asks you how you like to write poetry,
say nothing; just be kind and generous
with your words. The poem will take care of itself,
as a garden dish or a stool will. You will no longer
be searching for a theme, you will be
just doing it, which is what it means. More clouds.

A breeze came and kissed me silly. The poem
was over. Now I had no more
to do except sweep the floor, which seems to
be pretty good for something that had no interest
otherwise. But now that was over too.
The time of harmless dreaming had come undone
like clockwork. Only a little music escaped me
and that was it.

I had nothing else in mind. All of the birds
were my friends. Sneezing at dusk,
they all come by that canonical place,
and talk for a little time about what happened
the night before, what did I do that night?
Why am I with you anyway?

To the silly birds sneezing at dusk
who all conjure that canonical place
to talk about what happened the night before,
what did I do that night?
Why am I with you anyway?

UNUSUAL PRECAUTIONS

“When the cauldron is
tipped, how does one determine
the specific nature of the contribution
that has been made and continues to be made
to the cause? And, not to put too fine a deconstruction
on it, from whom does one draw the line?
We’ve had it coming to us for years. Then it
shouts from the attic window blinds. It’s warm out here.

I must have another dram of Rumson’s Reserve
before this whole town of fools comes to see us as we are
one in the ropy sack that is below us. Then it will be time
to turn on the heel of the mill and really look, it’s
a little uncanny how much of the city is visible from where
one is sitting. Look, the bridge is out of whack.
But where in the big mess of trash
are we going to get the fire department, the policemen?
What if the whole darn town is ablaze? What
astonishing chasms of night would terrify us? By then
the big explosion will have happened on someone else’s doorstep, someone’s
landscape will be draped over the ropes of a fort, someone’s
history will have rendered it unfit for reception,
for better or worse. We’ll just have to
move on, that’s all.

It was always wind
and wildness that compelled us;
a blue stone fortress has been erected on the shore.
Somewhere, a war has been declared. I can see it—
the English countryside, with its castles,
towns, vine-patterned hedges, the formal, wide avenues
leading to the sky, flagged down by their scent
as they pass. I like it. I’m
looking at a dress, some jewelled tiara
that somebody put in before I was born. It’s time
for you to go out in the city. Most evenings
are pleasantly spent, changing into something different,
reading a book, watching the news. About ten o’clock,
the taxis arrive, with mufflers on, to take us
home. It’s nice in here. Outside, the weather is spectacular,

a cushion for writing on. I have to say, though,

it’s the same old story, over and over.
The main character is lost, or so we think,

moving on to other notions. But the fog’s

disappointed face tells us otherwise,

the sunshine's still sparkling. I'll tell you about
taking a refresher course in romantic analysis.
After that you can forget it. Nothing you write

can interrupt the flow of time, as
palm winds rustle against palm, and it all stays
the same. Like a diary
that keeps its shape even after you have put
it away, and you are still puzzled, and hope
someone will solve the riddle of what you wrote.
After all, it had to have happened
at some time, and now is no more. There is no
magic to it, nothing to be gleaned from it. What's
missing is the peel it takes to peel back the layers
so the individual apple pieces can be surveyed, each individually
seen to have aged a little, and their significance
addressed. To have remained green like this
is the mark of truth, I think. And, yes,
that's the way I've done it. I'm proud of it.

A great many things have happened since then.
Still, one must return
to the old pattern, if only to change
oneself once more, and then to get used to
it, if only for the journey ahead.

More sun, more sand,
more perspective—it's all there,

but you pay the price for
seeing it, and for failing to warn
them, now that the good Doctor has
about something like half-a-dozen theories
about what goes bump into
on the beach at evening, and what
aren't there, really, none more than
you think you're allowed. And so
a good sense of adventure and of having
gone about it, not necessarily in the desired
direction, pushed both of us over the top
into the numbered zones
but who
knows where those are? Who is going to hold
us if we are too exhausted, or even
not in the desired direction? What
avenues have driven us since the dawn

of morning? Where is the tendril that pricks
on the back of your neck, though I
shall not name any of them, though you
know these things, and so what
is novel is stills from the tube
where laughter is often heard, and the sound
delivers, like the arm of a vulture
taking the fall. O if it was another man
wouldn't we be weary at the armory
by this time next week, sure as breath
is that on the wind? But it is the exotic
one, the one we wanted, that brought us
here, and framed us against the sun
and all its portents, its remarks

about the highway, its signers, the racket

all the while a great distance away in Canada
they are postponing, and I,

I want to go back, but the first man
to get there must be convinced.
There'd be lots of little things to look at

in that time, but we had learned to compartmentalize
our concerns, using the knowledge
to get by in some situations.

One day he got really angry—
his grievance was that all the women
who had been around him awhile were having their hair
cut by a well-known British hairdresser. This caused him
great concern, since it contradicted everything he had worked for,
including, I might add, what was it he had been praying
all this time? It was like someone throwing a fit.
The truth was that it didn't matter,
anyway. We were pretty much indestructible

during the time we were growing up.
There was always some mystery around,
some facet to our personality that one day
will have forgotten, and the next man standing
will have forgotten as well, and that's the way it has to happen.
We have to live for a certain time after that.
So I ask you, why do you cling to me so tightly?
I'm all alone now, so why not let me be
alone for a minute? And someone said, you're too preoccupied
with other things to worry about, so why not let me be all alone.

I'll be all alone too. That's why I'm so important.

And in another place, who'd you call? I don't know,
I'll have passed out by then. And the next moment, my life
as I know it is over. I wake up and it's already too late.
Someone is pouring himself a drink. I don't know if I can take it.

FLOW BLUE

It's too bad, really, but there must be some way—
some way to include this in the name, so it doesn't
end up with no name at all. Suffice it
to say there are feelings, and then, other things
to think about. And when the luster is off,
someone says, those are genuine.

Well, I'll be looking for a new book,
and this one got spoiled.
The chorus of chorus members falls over,
and in another word, my story is so typical
it borders on the unbelievable, almost
almost too . . . well, unbelievable. But that's
what I was going to say, anyway.

You've got to save your story for something,

save it for what, me? I mean,
save it for your hair, that bridge
somewhere. But, you know . . .

FROM PALOOKAVILLE

“No use,” he said, “we live in the shadow of the store, and have to get home. It seems like only yesterday I hit that hiccup, that moment when the whole surface of your face is bathed in glow through a prismatic filter, and you ask me what I think of all this, of my effort to get here. I only came down to see if anything could be done, and you asked me if I had any ideas for your comeback, and I only had one answer for you, that’s to come back to the job. You think it’s easy, just to stand, to move around, and then smile and nod. That’s all it is: an interruption. The waiter came over and said it was time for him to go, but I didn’t want to hear it, didn’t want to see him go. Besides, I already had plans for him, things to do besides.

Besides, there are two things I borrowed from you: a rat for a dog, a leaf blower for life. You made a fuss over the sheet before the ink ran dry, and I, a trial balloon in which one rags and one gathers indefinitely in hope of finding out what they were,

what the fuss was all about. Were we guests at your house? Were the curtains parted for me, for you, my love, to taze and baste the way the moon seems to moonlit terrain? And if we are going to be persecuted the way so many others have been, why not give it a chance? At the very least, it might give us a wiggle or two, and then we’re out of here. Wiggle to your nearest atmos plexus, an apple a day. We can be choosy, he’s still got it, a remnant of originality that when it’s planted lands ornamented with unfinished vines, dead leaves, vines stuffed with ice, and so on. That’s the gist of it.

But wait, he’s got more things to say, and they’re all the same, only you never hear them. That’s what I’m trying to extricate myself, trying to extricate myself from a tangled mess of emotions—wounds, tears, bets, friendships—that have overtaken me and outnumbered me far beyond the capacity of this mortal coil. Ah, it’s so frustrating, but there are other ways to enjoy life than to accept it. There’s the day you walk out into the open and see everything that’s coming, only it’s so lousy

that you're not sure which stars it represents,
which saint to choose: you could see them from afar,
odds are you're going to get sick
in the encounter, which would be unfortunate, for which
it would probably be better to get out, since it will probably end
in a truce, but meanwhile you can always feign
accomplishment in the air around you, feigning
delusion so that others may think you have
always been known as the girl who could impersonate
a humming, shining neck of the woods, only you
could never quite figure out what that meant, or why.
Oh well, the wind blew it away.

Back to the old school
majesty. What kind of a situation is this,
dear, what kind of a world does it invite us to,

except to rot in its light, one of the last visitors,
like the crescent moon, after the sun sets, its ring
rounding the sun and all the animals and plants that have
passed on from the time of the last glaciation.

MONSTER

Out of the dark one felt a presence
you could not describe.
The absence of light.
But if you listened closely,
without hope or dread, perhaps there was
an accumulation of information,
the slurred history of the species,
though not always very clearly.
At any rate here where we are.

Each approach of dawn found them ready:
another gash in the center of the sky
as empty as a new child's eye.
But the subject was closed
when the entire conversation was forgotten,
and stillness resumed.
The oddity of the visitors, their pitiful sense
of special grievance, their blindness to the stars,
each went back to a cold bed,
part of the more general fear
that we are not left alone.

THE GREEN VILLAGE

It's not what you think. It's
what whispers in the corners of our ears
that interest us. More unsightly, it might be

but that's the way we like to think. We'll
have seen it by the time you get here, so don't
give up hope too soon. It's like cigarettes: You smoke them
and then you have to get off the hood, which is something
like an endeavor to be stung, to have them all fit
just right. You can't have too many of any one thing

and it will get converted into a code that no one
will ever use, but at the same time there are too many
things in the way that I would like to keep trim,
not just for my own good but that of the lamplighter
and his dependents, the homeless man
who sits at the coffee table. Too many ideas
are competing for your attention, which is why
you come round to liking me after all. Lovely

other people are getting married and the groom

is coming too. Wait, there's the piece of news
that nobody wants. Wait, there's more! There are forks in the road

and all the little woo-o'ers are coming to visit us. I have

only grave concerns to live by. That's all.
I don't get it. No, sir, I didn't say you'd fall,

I said you'd land somewhere. Which is why
I have to come up with something. I can't live

without my musings, without your kindness and fawning
toward the end of a disaster or into its
comic-book setting. Please, promise me one thing:

You'll not regret them. Once they are dead
there'll be nothing to reclaim, nothing
to do. There'll be no scrap-booking, no begging.
It's that simple.

Once they are dead
no one can reclaim them. The body
is rent asunder for the mind, and the memory
is as an egg yolk. There is no room for the mind,
no marrow. The body is tossed into the wind.

They say blackbirds have teeth
but I think they're more interested in being remembered
for what they were, rather than how they turned out.

Anyway, they lay down and slept.
Soon the harvest was over.
No one ever asked why. It was just a big ol'
blanket, a magic moment, a magic season,
and nothing more. Then they made fun of the script
which was blocking the omnibus window. The birds
were in great raptures, but no one in the house
saw what was funny, or OK, or was willing
to come up with a plan B.

That is until I remembered something I was sure I hadn't
noticed: The kids were awake, and eager
to learn, eager to please. I gave them coffee
and they came right up to me, almost as if to say:

We're glad you remembered, but as far as I'm concerned nothing
was new under the tree. I'll
wager they're not going to be very long, if
that's what you want. Pensively, I'll reply:

What if one is lost, on a dark night
the windows fail, a story falls, and that
s what's here. Nobody saw it coming,
and the story isn't going to change that easily.

Suddenly one felt much better
than before. There was something not quite
right in the way everything was lining up,
and one had reservations about the arrangement
besides, they were human, after all, and anything was
to be courted, fumed or uninterested. Which is what we
and all we'd assumed. Now the plan B
is coming along, in pieces, like salad, and would probably be
fine as long as we don't get too crazy about it.
I heard a man say that to a woman
on a bench across the street. It doesn't matter, she said,
otherwise everything would be just as it is. Then the two sides met
in anger, the man's anger at being unable to stop the stream of people
who came to pray, and the stream, entreating to prayer, began to flow back,
blowing against the door, the spores of all that was just cramming
in, like a bear trap. The man, however, did not care,
he strode swiftly away, the women and children following close behind him,
into the forest or out of it altogether. Somewhere, a sigh
is coming. And when he or she sees you, the two
clubs meet up. You get a momentary bit of rest, then the rush

of the moment comes. The avalanche is back.
This is the third time I've asked you about it. I've
always been a fan of yours, always imagining ourselves as pilgrims
to the ancient rite, coming back to dust our faces with fairy dust, and then,
when we get down to it, some icy
resolve creeps into the wound. I'll write you
a letter explaining how and why I like your face, and how
it doesn't hurt, and how, in summer, rocks and dried figs
can look just as innocent as new ones when they're
tossed over, and someone always comes to ask them forgiveness
for the past and the shuddering air's
only apology, really. A nice, new car
would look much the same, and the same for us:
a mid-size four-door sedan, with a good amount of legroom,
and a handsome straw bed. Wouldn't you agree?

So this is what it means then, isn't it?
Familiar faces, old friends, trying on new clothes.
The theatrical integrity of it all. The "tourism"
that comes with it, you see. No matter how diligent
you are, or whether you're in the know, the gaze
is on you now. You can't help noticing it's
been looking around ever since the stile
got braced. You see, he didn't mean to fall.
We all did.

Housekeeping: I have to get an accounting
of all the little things that happened to me this week,
so likelier to come back to bite one's heels.
Little things, like the one
where I forgot to bar the door against the curious
persistence of an evening with the teapots
reminding one to come back, and indeed was all
going by what I had in mind: a romantic
forest adventure with red
examples on the stair. But that was just
meanwhile hanging on a wire, looking
for a window that might have been
windows for the first time. When they finally arrived,
it was almost midnight. There was nothing to do except wait
for them to take over and be boring,
and then somebody's breath would come in and that would be all.

So much for our sham naturalism.

Persuasion, even. I'm afraid
it's more like sleight-of-hand. You put
what you want on paper, and it

seems solid. I've got to get an accounting
of all the little things that happened this week,
so like the last one, which I think
was enough. We are, in fact, the balance of a society.

You knew that. Thomas Jefferson,
who was a statesman, statesman for all times,
and perhaps a little too much, in the way he dwelt, wiggled, wiggled
backward into old age. But in all
he was a statesman, and statesman for all times.

But how much ado you get! Almost
everything gets wrapped in white, and gears
turned into twilight, and what difference does it make
if the rhythm is undisturbed, if the message
disturbed that urgent yet half-distracted sigh
that palls at the edge of every town, and far from
anything urgent, though legitimate, if one
question, and then a house has to be razed,
or buried. Almost. But that is how we in fact live
ourselves, our productive life. Far from the glittering
cities and the fireworks displays, almost.
We live in the power of the commandment,
a thought that does not matter, and that is
what bothers me. I shall have to get used to that,
it being time-consuming and inconvenient at the same time.
As when a redbreast calls, there is a chime
in the dark, but no one answers. It is time for the nightly devotions
which every creature in heaven has been secretly broadcasting
since the age of the dinosaurs. All groans,
some jubilation, produced by the fact that the candles
have died down, the rounds have jammed, and life
has really arrived in New York. I shall never forget
the day it happened. It was the day of my christening. My daddy was getting ready to go out
to the saloon, and as I was shutting the door behind him, he said:
"You ever hear of Rudolf Steiner? He was a philosopher
who lived in Chigley, near Crawley, and was famous for having
known many famous people. If he is in your class, why not
entangle yourself in his reasoning? It's the educated
they don't make it. Tell
the lost children's song about it. It will lead to the cafeteria, which
will be your office at last. Did
that come up? Not to anything, say, fish or...

Oh, you must have loved every day.
Every opportunity. Work out your future.

Extreme optimism toward young people.

They're your generation, after all.
I was going to say that about my generation,
but that's beside the point. The point is we're the

generation that got us into this mess,
and will be the one that tries to figure out
how we got here. Not smart, no way.

Enough! And all the kids are getting older,
and the baby-boomers, and everyone else,
even though they're the ones who should know,
like the king, in their bed,
and know how to get out.

The point is we can go back and tweak
where the specific pieces were snipped,
and still get to do it, be the king,
if nobody bothers anybody.
That's what everybody's been saying.

So if I'm not mistaken, this is what
should be eating, a woodpile, a sitter.
A honeycomb of lard, perhaps.
He sort of dug his heels in
just before the fence was over,
and nobody came to take away the easter egg
that was sodden with the smell of old tires
and dogshit.

Whoa, a wildling,
someone's idea of a puzzle,
that they might have assembled themselves
if somebody had bothered to ask.

IF THE BIRDS KNEW

Then why, in spite of everything, was I
tempted to stay longer?
For though some were sweet,
most were spic and their spangles.

Most assuredly there are some who can tell
such tales as this one,

providing a little context, e.g.,
how a certain bluebird danced
in the rain, how some of his mates got cut down
on the way to the deer park,
how, when the weather was stirring, they decided to refocus
their efforts on the mammoth task before them:
one wink larger than the next, and
so it goes. One wink and you are

almost certain of getting off this mortal island
without a scratch. But there were times
in between, when everything but the bar
was considered sufficiently thrilling, so that one
seemed to miss the point entirely. Which is why I quote
the last line of Thoreau's "waking
to the snows, and saving them for last, is something
one never, ever forgets. It's as though a song
binary of yesteryear's tranquillity and the freezing cold
will unroll on you like a scene from a no-holds-barred
police interrogation, and then you'll be caught red-handed.

Things get more difficult from there.
The "great white blur" theory
is still espoused by many, but it's the way we
Look now, not what we'd like to do,
That oppresses us. Our best days
Are behind us, and only a dim recollection
Of them stirs. The song of the shrubbery
Can't drown the memory of the scene
And its circumstances. It too
Is expired, and there is nothing to say.
As one traveler remarked, "If he returns
With his belongings, he will find them as they were
Last night. If not, great waves of curiosity
Rest enshrouded the reception area
As though it were a tomb. But if he stays longer
In the same place, no waves of curiosity
Stir upon him; he will remember last night."

So if you are like most people,
Worried about being alone, anxious about
Being seen, anxious about getting away
For the last time, why be gone this way,
With the others, anxious about getting away
For the last time, until the end comes
Short, but not passé, as one might expect.
In the splendor of its enshrouded
Sequel, forgotten towns and castles
Might not know where to find oneself
In the vastest, craziest, most fascinating
World that can conceive of,
Only its symbols, its registers of being.
It is only then that the curious inconsistencies
Of the places become salient, only then
That the curious inconsistencies of the places
May be palpably palpitated, as a field of flowers
Is palpably agitated, and the question of
Where the inconsistencies are comes up. But
To return to our initial example:
A garden of pain, or a garden of pleasure
Is the mark of the garden, the thing that is
Grammatically all there is to be seen
And will have been all along anyway,
As the sandpiper looks up
A certain way, and sees, and calls to its friend
Who sits down to eat some more, but it is
Not to be heard, not really
Unless you make of it some kind of texture
No one can see, that is a quality
That is its nature, that you are
Always trying to get. To have it come
About this way, for instance, is
All in the past, of course, and anything
You like to do in the meantime is of no use.
But I like to keep it as is, with the possibilities
Of gradually getting it up to date, of
Using it as a guidepost as the afternoon wears on
And the evening gown comes into its own.
A thousand thoughts are conjugated
Each day as the star-shaped wreath of the
City draws near
And beyond, drawing ever nearer
To the enchanted standing stones
That mark the dividing line
Of this universe into two halves:
The urban and the pastoral.

A thousand ways are taken
Each day of the year
But the one that troubles me—
That I can always turn to see
The one thing that isn't in doubt
And always gives me the greatest satisfaction—
My reflection in the mirror.
Why should it bother me then?
The vastness is what concerns us
Not the concrete details of distance, but
The night side of dreams,
The imperfect sunlight that falls
On the trees and the shrubbery
And the air around them,
The quiet time that always arrives,
Minutes to midnight, and yet
There is no rumble, no din, nothing
But the sound of hands clambering
To organize the vast warehouse
That must be processed somehow,
Planning to entertain the evening for some time.
And you, you are always the
Only one of my worries who understands
The importance of not getting better
Only that you have, as though, as though,
Like a bottle, kept to yourself.
It's going to be all right,
I know. You are not going to mind
My constantly retreating, passively smiling form,
Since that's what you were sent to do.
I have no intention of ever meeting or even talking to you.
Even when the topic turns to money, or even
To sex, we both know the surface will be
Readjusted after the discontinuity has been
Forbidden entry into the house
For many years. And of course, no effort
Will be spared on that front, which,
As I see it, is the most important.
The wisest among us have escaped
To the cabins of the stars, and night is like a lake
In which the naked immobile figure
Is seen no more, and the white figure
Is seen retreating back into the house
Again, in the dimness, before the great confusion
That for centuries has burdened these islands
With its own weight of unanswered questions and
With our breathless submission to its demands.

Who hangs nude in the wings
In the dry, on the precipice? It's because we
Believed it would all return—
Because we thought we would all be here again
That the sad quietism would obliterate
Each man's hopes and dreams
As on a funeral block, one led after all
By his breath, striking out
To conquer the whole. But it didn't matter
Because each one of us was different,
So much so, in fact
That his return would be neither
An impulse nor a condition
Of our continuing existence together.
Rather, it would be an event—
A movement—some call it inane,
Some more abrasive, but there was
Nothing in it and we
Came to associate it with things
That don't make much sense, with life,
With motion. And it's true, we
Came to associate it with ourselves,
With the idea of ourselves as we were
Together some distance back, before
The whole began, but usually
Just getting to know each other was enough
To set off the chain of associations
That would bring us to a point
Where we could no longer associate,
And the blue glow that came
From the melting grasses was
Actually the shadow
Of anticipation of what
Was to happen
Millions of years hence
In grass so tall
That even the trees would see you
Blurring the details
Of what you wanted to say
With the recollection of what
Would eventually
Come to be your entire world
And all that you had worked so hard
To create.
It was the way of the old masters
To create a chair and a shelf
Filling up the empty chair with what

They had.
But gradually
The new order took over
And was as much you in it
As it was the order of the old masters
Who still ruled over you
With an iron arm.
It was as though they had decided
Long ago to abandon the case
And let you off scott-free
Assuming, as in some rare instances

That you are truly a man of letters
And not some pole-vaulted dystopia
Scattered on the map
For your benefit.
Yet as you get
More and more noose
The old order seems
Getting weaker.
Your benefit
Is fading,
You may be asked
Later whether
You meant it and whether
The old order obeyed.
A last slice
Of apple-blossoms stares
With longing at the sun.
Someone has been waiting
Forty years for this.
You will be parted from
All the beloved.
To have only this for
Anybody is bad.
To have it for
Anything else is much,
Especially now
That the general
Is approaching.
A white-haired
Hunchbacked man
With a gun to his head
Sees everything.
Everything but the sun.
Back from his
Majesté
The young

Aren't exactly aged.
They have the air of permanency
Which, in turn, comes from experience.
It's the old

Which hangs in rags
Through the window.
A rose
Is blowing in the window.
The gun
Cries in the breeze
Out of a cold, sodden
New day.
If you could see, you
Could see the gun.

A PROCESSION OF SWIMMERS

The nautical pestle was transferred post-haste, a functional copy of our highly leveraged position. Indifferent to the festivities, we must complete the voyage, yes, by travelling light. We'll sing to you too, about dying, the cute frivolous things we did in childhood, watching the pharmacist's trolley proudly parade his wares. I'm dawdling at the end of my row. Coincidence? I mean, where were we in the dark? It was Sunday. We got up to go. Now, in most cases, a vacation is incredible. Too many things remained unaware. By what divine metric system do we measure quantity, and in what measure? Oh, for shame.

Very seldom did the silver-banded, hump-backed whales sustain our view on the water. Sometimes a shadow of a mournful tumult extrudes beneath the surface of the days to advance or recede, recast, in an orderly leaping. At these times a clumsy, poorly articulate peculiar nobility exalting the siren song of the feet, of purring new trends, announces one, with a small exclamation point in the eye, window against the sublime, lavishly furnished, impersonal joy of the onus of sleep, with a snack of soil. One consciousness, sufficing at a compound for different levels of conscious entities, swayed to land on the book for a sticky instant. It has the whiff of candied custard. One motion overtook us to replace the day when a cigar-shaped beacon circled the island for the second time in a dream of a spray of uncluttered moves from a cloud of sand in the east into a groan of an object for the second time, subtly crosshatched in a similar mask with a stick and a bell. That, in regard to that, its wicket is apt to shut an essential hole, paradoxically, in an aside for an hour by some sly method. Within a framework of warped, black-and-white themes resembling the silhouettes of coconut-tree fronds in front of a leprous, pink cloth. The shiver of a whitish mottled slice of sunlight drifted up through the fresh wedge, and within the compact a clamour of sky-blue water in a cloudless enclosure. A market value of lavishness is inexhaustible, and not so much the multiplicity of amber beads, sleeping and treading and interweaving, burnt the face of a stunned, mildewed booth, where in fact it is for the first time referred to as ten, and a cipher is indispensable as one: so the business has been attempted, so we might bring a number, of innocent, uninitiated beings, unto a time when they could be left unharmed, with their eyes-a necessary mission, obviously, for a pilgrimage of increasing mystification, possibly beyond the river of pity. Inscribed on the same glittering surface was the clear, meaningful cry of an answer, in inverted commas, to the uninitiated, unharmed.

And amusing is deviation in an expression of fear, at this realistic approximation of the high-mindedness to which we have been addicted, and which has slowly but steadily overheated our immobility, our inattention, our inability to make the necessary distinctions that would clearly alter the balance of power of happiness in the world and its individual participants. A sprinkling of joy over the heads of those who reassure us and who still enjoy us despite the signs of unbridled malice in their hearts, but such dark algae has spawned eons in the top with no trace as of when these live and idolize us, drawing strength from this like the positive green brim of a swimming pool, and yet time, for all the world, falls away, and with it the wide, stiff suffocation that holds us in place, propels us at a run through the hoops of earth to freely confessing and squeezing on our separate memories like flavored condoms, as a able and willing participant in the great event, the celebration; hence also the diminished weight of each moment of which we are conscious, for it feels like an immature or a developmental stage in a life that was meant to go on developing, but which has now come to seem merely a number of years old, brings with it its attendant flotsam and baggage, its perplexing inclusions and anomalies, and which stages us like outgoing passengers on a train, anxious for a refunding of his favor and a feeling of being at the end of an attractive, tragic journey through the strangest of us. Samples of water sprinkled on the sarcophagus of an antediluvian monoliths to determine their driable state.

The vapid, dripping occasions of whatever word may be sighed away and decided, but the solid block just sits there. Then it is removed and all the seams are left lying around, alone with looking pretty much as new. There is a variety of bright mixtures in the air, from fruit to fish to metal. One thing leads to another; the three atoms of the next; everything equips itself for the awaiting traveler. And the smiley eyes of reason are wrecked, their beams scattered over the yard, to the distant fates, who laughing as they support us through the coal-lightened horizon. Only then does it get to heaven: places where the fetal glow spills over the walls of the major: profound tiers of fabrications, manifesting that most unrecognizable of forms of artifice—burgeoning at the corners and the unseen masses that crowd to and gutter the stage, to the bubbling wells and layers of meaning that are not ours, and which persist in the form of unattractive scratches on the waking landscape. To sustain this on you would have to be a king or confidence man. And where is none of this? So lost with the other deceived souls, entombed far in the crags of orthodoxy, or any of the below means of bringing it to the surface of the wide expanding earth that is quite yet not filled with killed or enslaved beings, whose curi-

ous fires light up the sides and embroidery of the mostly empty stage. A lovelorn queen reverting in the radiation of some blistered sun. And the other lost stones and leaves, writhing in the sun's iron fist as life spills over, infilling the bald and sagging stages with their positive and negative heroism, transforming the Language style of writing from a rarely used digressive into a tremulous and conspiratorial innovation: the mother who, at the hour, gives her little girl the staggering news that enables her to wrestle away the last square inch of fabric. It is time for the next trick.

But the protection offered by this social layer to its excrement source is always with the flowing-distributing drive: to be played at. So that the distinctions among them are blurred, and compared to a unitary form. No nature nor fault aligns the two strands of fabric together. The laughing long ago ceased and who is to say now that it won't continue and cause the same problems in either direction? You may have to choose. No traces of the dead to be found, no stumps revealing the common bias among the different types of stiffness has changed and the example models have infused a new, scientific light on all aspects of life and mind. It seems as though the road to you has now been invented and laid down in pieces. How you move around on it is different, and all the properties that lay at the edge of your previous security have had to be inverted so that you are no longer as much interested in avoiding harm as in attaining its opposite: namely, the ability to win, to go on, and then to lie down comfortably and peacefully with your love. The beautiful visions that were in danger of being suffered through have been stabilized, new, beautiful, virginal wonders, patient, drained, transparent, illuminated, because that was just what you, mauled ideal, wanted. And your prowess in this area, in refusing to live according to the costs and the figures attached to your rigid with strong frequency over the spirit of things, has won over and given you the ability to live as you pleased, frump with the ordinary and stupid, honest, modest—even humble—thing that is really you. Not one mistake is made. No one runs away. The sky is blue, and it hasn't fired back yet.

The aquatic monster that was always there—and now it is obliterated as its solitary row of cells is swept back, like in a Donne poem, into the stasis of the normal world. And so you won't have to see me anymore if you don't want to. My farewell has been spoiled, but it would be a sort of sickening in-joke to meet you just now on the brink of some substitute of infinity, since I have just lost my chance of meeting you there. In the end, maybe, it's better this way.

A fellow swimmer I see catches her breath by the nook. Her reflection trips on the shore. The last four tall firs sway at the edge of the forest, their branches all still. There is no shelter for the wind, which circles the cove like a runner working the last lap. We are not going to make it, they say. They tiptoe in the shallows, not out of a fear of the water but to accommodate the symmetry they have come to feel is inherent in the pebble and sand. But the logic can't hold in such dimensions. A drop of water enters my goggles. But that stretch of sky—I mean, why, I've seen it five, six, seven times, everything you said about it and it is always the same, you—and being, this verb, it buoys you on the water: body, throat, last year's recoveries. You knew it was long overdue, because we were over and you didn't want to be in any of it, and now the awesome chunks of expression just fall away, like importuned fog, and each other. And it's true, I mean, they rolled you up in the blanket and there was nothing you couldn't do to love. Which is still incredible, though, even for those times. This planet, moving at him, making patterns like some glacial encyclopedia. So may we proceed in a hope of divining mercy from the contract that outlines this drama, this mystery that we are playing? So may we proceed in turn at the game that makes as many demands on us as it does.

So may we proceed? What a luxury. To have a moment, and account for one. I have chosen to be clear on one truth: a kiss never stops being true. For my money, even some simple purpose in the reader of which there is no looking back on, given or received. No experience or reading I can place as terminal. It is this sense, as the body rises up into the next body, it is this smell of newly-gained locomotion which extends our ancient hunger of death and this underpass rises up before me: above it a taxidermy mounted red-tailed hawk stares at a falling blade of white. To the left, a set of identical pew-sized houses. To the right, the leading edge of a huge storm. The use of the shader imagery precedes even the water. Now you see all of it.

So try explaining sublation to me: it is the spirit of rain rising, this energy of a person who has never changed. And nothing, I mean, nothing, soothes that. To witness this great, flamboyant, and deliberately gratuitous destruction of the bridge, we have not known the killing down here, but the idea of killing as present violence. The platypus, its bill blood orange, with cones of light for eyes, in which we see: the whole surface of the river is put in command, is being ordered back down from where you had been hanging out at, in solidarity with an entire city. At this, in the heartbeat after my glasses began to feel as if it is they were being sucked down a drain, when the old cemetery begins to look like one the tools in which one could show that

you were there in whatever way, I mean it is in love we are most recognizable.

There is no motive for my learning my lesson, which is to live as if what is broken is finished forever. So may we proceed in feeling good about ourselves for more than five minutes. Oh, how we hate being in it, being out of it, having our heart attack from under the ice, which in the first place we had wished, on second thought. If there is anything to be learned from all of this, it is that it is always happening some place else, which, when one comes down to it, is precisely as it has always been, it has been what it is, and how, as if we were not feeling any better. Or getting any place else. The millstone of our underexposure has not been to blame, I think, no matter how it might look to an outside observer. It is a building made of language, and it floats like a galleon of words on the cosmic sea of what has been, how to measure the pitch of a battle that rages here every second of the night and the day, this holy communion, and I'm coming apart at the seams at the thought that there is nothing to say to this, that all I'm doing is, in one way or another, pacing the floor.

The busy activity of each and every participant in this might, along with the milder entreaties that have gone before it, be disseminated into a gushing wind. The reclamation of a beauty to rival the one that has its place among the pellucid waters, in the incursion of sunbeams. And the water that the mind will show to you, or rather, what will be seen in the first bright glances of the morning, but somehow we are strangely soiled by this process, and how much beauty it takes to effect this, which then applies to something that was given to us freely in the first place. For now, we are all the more like those people for whom the explanation is largely unknown.

That comes later, but first the need to show the swimmer's far distance and its enlargement, which is another way of saying: to go ahead and use it now, even though there is some restriction about this, along with a certain bent that makes us believe that it should not have come about. And we are now going to try and see if the consequences of that are related to the rising waves of the flood, or to the times, in the past, when we have seen how such a thing could be revived. Or else it is the little piles that someone wants to build on the stairway, that are going to startle the ones they are left for. Or the area around the moss that is going to be embellished in this manner. It is a bad dream that we will remember, when we wake up. But before that we will hear a sound of countless bells that will want to come to us in the end. For now, we are on the lookout for the rhythm that is

still going to guide us, as the sound of bells comes closer to us. Which is not all that different from the way the water is going to reveal itself. The floating thing that is always on the way, not on the way.

So may we proceed in a gradual acclimatization to the notion that such a thing might happen... The divorce among the river and its rivulets, and what is left, whose meaning is not to be touched on. Even though, if anything is the opposite of a revelation, and more like an inconvenience, or something to be gone from, then that is where we start. But what are we going to do, dear and respected reader? Because you cannot fathom the grief between these walls, as it lies stretched out for the language to comprehend. And even then, to perform the activity, we still have this growing feeling that things cannot continue as they are. The experience is that of not knowing exactly what you're doing with this thing, how to describe it. The process of making the first time as long as it can be. So that all that is left to believe in is its specific grain, the proper account for its interment. There is the rare item that is going to move us to forgetfulness. In the meantime, however, the world is a state that we must rise up from to confront.

So may we proceed knowing the stakes and the level of excitement, which all are each familiar to us from other plays, the lives that were once bequeathed to them... Drawn to life, these people tell of the great dramas that were, in the reckoning, real and which our clock must now be eclipsed by the practice of acting in things, so that the days melt and may split up, according to an obscure natural inequality. Our play took us up in a whirlwind. As it was, we couldn't believe the directions taken, the tales that unfolded as we walked, and the white powder of the day, turning to ashes in the fireplace, and the dream that was cutting in the playground of nobility, down to the wire, and all around us, facts of state, rank lying on the line. Something had to be said about it. But it was in that position that a dark star had been born into our life, after the wreck of the century, whose intensity only grew. And soon we were on the shoreline, turning our heads back, saying a few final words about the whole expedition. The dawning act of conduction and its appropriate implement. Something that had to be seen in this way. So that, we are continually drawn back to the gate of these memories, while the great press of time pulled them out of sight, even before we realize the urgency that it was casted upon us, as we felt its limits approaching.

And the days broke apart like they were supposed to, according to the obscure natural inequality. They took us up in a whirlwind, which was over the reach of thinking, and left us, suddenly, in those bodies, sprawled on the ground, then the evening came on and we got ready for dinner. So may we proceed in a gradual belonging to the river, in a hope of divining mercy from the contract that outlines this drama. Thus be the seasons and the games—rounds of actions, all the physical and all the natural—which these people from life, before life, practiced and performed, that their descendants, one day, should rise again to life; that we, one day, could lift up a stranger from Lake Michigan, through the secrecy of the night, to our height in ourselves, as was so desired of us and that we had so passionately failed at. . . . The only sound we are left with is the reasons why it is not so.

And that the boundaries of the trees growing from the sidewalk are changing shape and composition, concentrating on what is essential, commiserating also on the strange situation in which I find myself. . . . And the pride of the past, that is framed by them; the dream of all of them, which they give me in turn, for my effort and my deeds, and with which I join in; the immediate presence of the trees that are around me; the essence of their unceasing growth.

So we may proceed in a calm belonging to the river, in a hope of divining mercy from the contract that outlines this drama.

COLLECTIVE DAWNS

The man said, "Look, I've an hour,"
Which is what I did.
Then the hotel billed me double for my
Inns and Suites. They had brought me
Down to the shore, and there, on the tepid
Regal level, I could see the waves
And imagine that they were petty cackling demons

Telling me how much they hated me,
How much they missed me.

Oh well, I thought I should be spending my time

On something, that will be of more use to me
When I get there. And wait,

It's not that I want to go away—
I do, but am not a part of your
Planning. And yet I feel that coming soon,

As though I had waited all my life
For this to happen. I want to embrace you
Toward the end, anchor by anchor

In the sky, a mass of cotton and twigs,
A mass of emotions, so many
Whose turn to come. And do you see,

He can't hold it up by himself,
This strand of rotted hulks
Rending into the corner, and then,
With luck, all is well.

MY BROTHERS

When it came time to vote
He chose the broken escutcheon
Of a rickety old church. There were no
Roots. The dreams came easily

And left you perched like this
On a ledge. Never knowing
The precise time of the encounter,
You may have thought of it
As inevitable. But there was

Nothing, one imagined, to indicate it
Wasn't inevitable. Just
The air, vague and alive
With the light, something to nibble
About. And when the time comes
To ask again about the occasion
You will be sure of one thing:
You will be wearing the same breezy look
That always has you in it, joking

About the weather and your manners,
But this time, at least, everything
Will be different, or at least not
As it was in the past, when everything

Was subject to review and possibly revising
The way the novel was

And by that time, perhaps
We'd have come to grips with the way
Things really were. We'd

See a sunset, two people sitting
Close to one another, as though lunch

Were a restaurant. A wonderful feeling
Building up through the branches
To a pure point of infinity, and then

It grows dull. The suspense

Builds up into something stiff and cold

And soon, unfriendly but supporting
The show as it goes on
Producing its own version of events

So close to the sun that the light
Is itself a shadow of the actual
Natured situation, this plane
Of perfect harmony and subject
To further investigation.
It is possible that this thin
But immensely dense atmosphere is

The one thing that will make everything
Require looking past it
To actual understanding, to the
Hidden motive and content
Of each word spoken and thought aloud
By that clouded, flagrant
Creator of our thoughts and conduct
To sustain and direct all our
Inmost workings according
To the fixed rules
Of justice and error.
That will not do.

The facts of stature
Will be more than answered for
By this thin, but extremely
Important fact, and that
In due course will change,
Farther than any of us could ever
Before, according
To our circumstances, and that
Will be all right. But look! The
Hidden nobility of your position is

Actually your humility, is the
Sublime quality that
Draws us to you and not
Rather than away from the
Ritual acts of so much humbling,
So much futile pointing of the
Pen pointing at the horizon
Simultaneously, toward that
Crowd that represents
Everything and nothing

As much closer than the eye
Can get to the thing it is
Descending toward,

That is its nature.
More practically speaking, you

Know that rain on the bristly
Palm leaf is the same thing
That will come as no surprise to you
Once it has happened, like the creaking
Firmament and the low-hanging
Fruits. There is no
Wonderful story here, only
The way things happen, and the
Languid, half-imagined futures
That result. In between
There is the fervor with which
People speak, and then
The silence that falls, recording
All kinds of things that have
Subtracted themselves, leaving
The rumble only a portent of what
Is to come, with fingers of ash
Pressed to the mouth, a rum
Pressure, and what do you do with them?
You dispose of them. They die
Out of your hands. They are no longer
Your own, they are something else, something
That is going to be more than
What they were, and are therefore
Invisible, like forests that grow
Straight and dark, like
The edge of a table that is to hold
Everything. They are something
New, and you have forgotten
About them. They have changed.
You are afraid of them, but
Don't know why. They are
The only things that will ever
Have anything to do with you.
Therefore, why not give up?
See, the things that have lasted
Are things made to last.
We are not meant to live
Any more. But to
Live on through their teeth,
Tears, with pleasure, is what
We mean by living.
So many things, so many
Characters with whom
We could have attached ourselves
But they were
Undefined and so

Cut off from us.
Therefore, why not
Serve again as a whole, like
A whole house?
Because even though
We may have more things to say
About them, even though
We may
Live beautifully,
O sing elegiac songs,
They will always be something
To say about us,
How we have lived,
Our lives have lasted, and yet
We are something
To sing about, how we
Have lived.
O how long, how long
Have we lived!
Not to be able to laugh
At our lives, how
We have lived,
Being immortal,
Tears,
A strong but soft feeling
Like a hand
Fell on the shoulder:
The face of the beloved
Goes too, but
Can only be seen by moving
Far away, into the
Immutable, immaculate distance.
Too, the garments
Are drawn out, the
Fleeing seer sets about
Filling each pock
With a rigid eye,
A piece of good news
Hard as granite,
And yet hard as the heart
And all its contents,
Its wearing and its good qualities.
We have only to make
Short cuts in the terrible grass
To look for them,
In the low lying hills
To wind one's way

To the shimmering pools
That tower on the horizon like
Superstitions,
And am dazed, helplessly
Watching, forgetting? What
Has happened?
Yet it is better this way
Than to have nothing,
Only the wind, a sheet
Hard as iron nails,
A man
Who is not a man,
A stranger who has come to visit.
The old home taken down makes
No difference now,
The kisses are different,
Are a warning
To be absent-mindedly abandoned,
A mild reproof
Not a parting,
Not even a neutral glance,
A kind of wave
Of farewells ebbing slowly
Down to the last grain.
The flower-bedecked bust
Is now invisible
Moving into the sensuous
Conversation at the library
Which forms, forms on the sand,
The constant present that surrounds
You like the sea.
The birds
Are looking about now, afraid
The shipwrecked
Budget of flowers
Moving to gather
Around the polished orb
That is the horizon
With the naked eye

A description of the weather
And a feeling
Of flowers,
Of this coming to be
The sand
Holds you up,
Your hand
Carrying the day

In which you sleep
Carrying the night
Which is to be your prison
In between.

A wing
Has been created for you
To breathe between the
Green brittle moments
Which are
The present,
The past tense,
The way we come to see
Between the future and the
Image of our own faces
Cared for in the past,
The way we look in the

Chinatown of our growing
Consciousness,
Caring for the things
We take for granted,
Like the hot, steaming day.
The person
Who is standing next to you
Has said and done
What he or she has said
And stands to hear
The answer again.
The reason
For the greeting is gone.
The heart
Is death.
He has no more
To pass back on to
The servant who makes the ladder
Pockmarked with the stars
That show where the heart's
Tender moment has ended
Where, on the other side,
The subtle gradations of heart
Are being
Pierced by the sun
With the same cool unrelenting
That sees the dandelions
In spring, the thread that unspools
The vast opening that is winter.
Hark! He is the one
Who brought you flowers and talked to you

About the car's oil change.
He is the one who could care less
About your plans for the future
Which are
Only a diagram of the past,
Its events, how they
Link up with
The pattern of the sky,

The furniture that has
Had them in its memory,
Its associations.
It is he, it is he who
Goes on adumbrating
The old way, first
The grass, then
The dry thin paths that snake
Into the near fields,
The view that has
Only recently
Come to define itself (since
Almost) in the new
Morass that has
Only recently
Come to define itself
(Since
Almost) in the new
Morass
As though a lesson
Had been revealed,
As though a lesson
Had been revealed,
And the pupils
Were no longer the same
As before, but
The old way again,
Its scarred vestments,
Its associations
Torn with decay,
Torn with
The way that defines
These changes
So like the old
Way,
Its associations,
Torn with
The way that
Tires the stars

And the new way,
Reveals
A long room
Dry but elegant,
An old room
Like the one
You slept in
Last night
The way
I see it
Is that
There is
Only one way

And that way is
All of
The things
That are
Small and
All of them
Incomprehensible
Last night
The way
I see it
Is that
There are
No two ways
In the
Order of things
And
Each thing
Is small
And none
Is large enough
To occupy the time
That is
Sized for itself.

SCHOOL OF VELOCITY

Urban heat islands (UHI) cause havoc.
The first of today's six pack
isn't letting you sleep.
Flat, rounded, and thirsty,
your destiny
looked me up to the stars.

"You're doing a disservice
to mankind,
that's why I joined the party—
there was still time to get out
and enjoy the fruits of your labors
if only you cared to."

Then the tsunami came.
We were sleeping soundly again.
The assembly line was humming
in Kirsan Ilyumz. The freeways were clear
ahead of schedule.

The pink flamingos wept in ornamental
blue. The driver didn't seem all that interested
and the hot dog stand was deserted.
That was the nicest damn thing
I ever saw,
anyway. I recommend it highly
to all my email correspondents.

SEPARATE HEARINGS

The question is asked again
and is again deferred:
Should we all go back to the rain
that makes the work impossible,
so it's necessary to acquire certain
skills not needed in this particular climate
where peeling posters and chewing tobacco
have their own way of discouraging
potential mischief, even
if it means we shall have to leave
here again, to a dim, reedy place
after the meaning of these talks has been lost.

It's better though to harp on
the heels of success: just the act
of stampeding an inconvenient deadline into the past
will do, some day, and you can rest assured
of getting back out on the other side
once the legal and tactical aspects of this
have been settled.

The harking of dogs and foxhunting in the afternoons
provided the usual romping
and decompression, and when fire ants
have their way, you are sick
of it, just like the queen Antinous.
Scarcely we see any more
of the former in us, though she meant well
by it. The rusty chronicle
can't keep itself from clattering
across the once-impregnable fortifications
of our renewed willingness to share, to surrender,
and when the perfect tense finally breaks down
due to butchering, or to the point where it ceases to be?

For me, the problem is
how to keep the pieces
of me that I am, that were to come, that are
to be my lifeblood, her gift, her very being,
so long bestowed on me by her? And so
I am caught in the midst of her logic,
can't voice my disagreement, cancel the order.
I shall, I will, I swear, keep silent
about what is really being said in the room,
omnipresent, diaphanous,
half-remembered, all alone in a fever

the clerk never called a visit.

And I found it more convenient that the pieces
of me that were to come (and they were valuable)
were in my possession, I alone knew the truth.
A table spread with outspread palms,
vestigial flowers and golden to end with.

THE WHITE SHIRT

How cute are the new dresses
Everyone is wearing, and I am.

But how must the old me feel
Flat on the throne of ice?
My gonzo side projects from there,
The rest is a mystery.

I'll eat some of these ripe olives

To assuage my animal ardor.
Their fair sex scrutinizes
The rhythm of their steps.

He seems to understand the flea.
He is anxious to be rid of birds' clothes.
He will eat any garbage.

He will sleep on the take.
The nurses are feeling the cold.
It will be a long time
Before he gets up and does something.
The kids are having fun in the green.

I'll wager the birds see something of value in this.

THE FRIENDLY CITY

A wise man once said to me, "Leave your clothes at home."
I was tempted to agree,
But the trip to the beach
Was ruined by sand.

And I thought how things could get better
If I could just stay home
And collect dust.

And one day he said, "You are my child,
And you are good beyond redemption."

I collected dust for a long time.
I think I still need to play
Against the harshness of God, who can do nothing
While we are together. But I like playing
Against him, so I will stay home.

The old house was as beautiful as the sea
But it dried up long ago and there was nothing
But leaves and boughs in the yard.
A wise man once said to me, "Leave your clothes at home."
I was tempted to agree,
But the trip to the beach
Was ruined by sand.

And I thought how things could get better
If I could just stay home
And collect dust.
Old leaves and branches, sprigs of grass,
A worthy enemy to face
In narrow paths where the road is taking you.

The old house was beautiful as the sea
But it dried up long ago and there was nothing
But leaves and boughs in the yard.
A worthy enemy once said to me, "Leave your clothes at home."
I was tempted to agree,
But the tide is still powerful, just now
Ahead in the twilight, and just off shore
In a canoe. And I say, why even
A bevy of sexual partners? The
Ocean floor is like the back of your throat
And all you need do is step into it.

I could not stay in the room
All alone. An intruder was caught red-handed.

Badly acted, just for asking. And skulks
A-plagiarize my work. They anointed the door
With oil and water, and all was well for a while
But then a yelper like a rhinodon broke the silence,
“Wait a moment,” and they all went out
But it was not to be. The next day the water
And clothes returned, but it was not to be again.

I have often wondered
Why men leave their homes
At dawn, and stay a little way off
From the shore, and look up
Into the upstairs parlor at once
And leave—there is good in everything
But it marries the home from the living
And I wonder, what shall I do with all this?
Better to let the architecture speak
For I come not without a prospect
But a ringing in my head
That tells how I may safely return
Into another world
Where all is sweetness and light
And the stomach fiddles nervously
With small questions like:
What shall I do with all this?
He who before lost her
Knew him not
But the game of losing him
Now sees him everywhere
In every little opening, every shadow
Lifted to the fancier past,
Has him transfixed
As a flea is lifted to the sky.
The human voice is at last a little tinny
And the bird sings, low down
In the stew of shadows that makes it
Into our own time.

THE LOUNGE

What carried the plaited thing across the stream
To the satisfaction of all, but mostly
To its surprise, of course? The
Sky was uncommunicative. The marshal's
Boots were a dull crimson. Down here
The buck had been, and was again.
A quiet but intense searchlight
Grasped the long grass, and moss
Of the broken cardboard box, for which the sloop
Is still recognized as a lighthouse, and back
Out of the gloaming, the glottal insistence
Of the dyke across the bay, and all
Unexpected, like a plangent rose in the dry
And all unexpected, like a leaky faucet.
But the faucet is working,
The dyke is anchored, all are happy again.
Perhaps the sea will take us farther
But the answer is indirect, and often
"No," yet it will take us only a moment, a speck
In a long list of embers, piles
Of various sizes, and shapes, and tones.
The sea is the one thing
That does not matter, and cannot
Have any other, but it is always America
The beach where we go to die.
If we had the money
To blink, it would be a good thing.
But because it is not, because
It is us, and everything
About us is obscured from view,
It wins, and loses, and recovers
Its crown in the accretions of the shore.
The pelicans, and the many, many-colored
Messages, flew from the tower
Of the best hotel in the world
To be as nothing beside
The fruit of the very much-loved dead
And the pelicans and the many-colored
Messages win out
In the light. You win and you lose,
But the main point is that you
Now realize for the first time
How futile all consolation and apparent good will
Are the severest that you win and
Everything else is secondary

And insignificant, like a fruit
Plunged under the weight of a fruit
That is serene and has no pulse.
That moonlight, cleared away so much lumpy stuff
That it left a very unpleasant aftertaste,
A taste of sulfur. A word
Would start to rise up from the lurching masses:
Giddy toad, and silly toad,
And easy breezes again.
All this, and more, in a word,
Is meant for your lips only,
The afterthought. Out of this chilly embrace
I emerged, a new and pure being
With no memory of good or evil, only the moonlight
And the clear, wild air around me to excuse
Risk, and forgive mistakes along the way.
To be released again into the world
Leads to risky situations, but also
To painful absences, to uproarious
Wishes that the world will end soon,
That we can all go back to sleep again,
And so much that was lovely, and innocent, and quiet:
Lugged to the edge of madness, where no shore
Hasn't been for a while, and no lift
Hasn't ended yet. The whole
World was a canvas again,
A canvas of nervous, anxious
Energetic life. Now, with a sigh,
It is peeled away and laid bare again,
Its outlines barely visible
On the canvas. Only the dying
Can tell us anything about the condition
Of the tattered canvas, the stretched,
Stretched musings of many
Dying artists. And the whole
World is uneasy. A great
Disaster is approaching.
The tattered canvas, tattered
As ever, but here
A great upheaval is preparing
The whole World is poised, tense,
Vomiting.

Has been especially made to look like news.
News has too often been made to look like this.
News has too often been made to look like this.
News has too often been made to look like this.
News has trickled over the

Tender ends of the Earth,
Pressing, as always,
The latch, and is pure and
Accessory, like those
Fitted over the doorframe with hinges.
It is time, in fact,
To break off the discussion here,
At last, so that the discussion
May begin again in another way.
The matter is not
So simple after all.
The dots are arranged in a Roman numeral.
Each has one less point than the other.
The clusters of space are navigable only by means of
An imaginary line drawn through the center of the Earth.
An enormous trick is played with the minds
Of men, but only those few men are ever caught out.
The line is drawn, and never
The line itself is lost.
In shifting, however, it makes a statement.
It points to a future without hope,
A future of simple arithmetic,
The ratio of the circumference to the center.
It is the foretaste of something bald,
Something to be ashamed of, but it is also a statement.
The dots are the skirts of our statement,
The statement in all of us, that between us we have averted.
The center is not the end, but the suspended moments
That bring us to this place of feasting.
The center is the mirrored image of itself,
The mirrored voice, angry with itself for having
Never stopped to think about it, constantly
Proposing itself as the way things must be
Because only the men who have actually done it
Ever think about it, and especially
About it and not some other, less-known
Blacker who has actually done it:
It is only because we are all afraid
Of doing something, that we ever think
About it, and especially
About doing it that we do it,

Commercial day and all
Night long, until
The shock wears off, and the ache
Is no longer lest one man
Lie, and merciful hunger
Rip asunder the boards of the air

And snatch at the bread, or rather,
Breadfruit.
He came to breakfast.
The pig was lost.
In the brush
Sauntering from house to shop
You see the world over again.
It was some fun.
To be mounted on a fence
Is some amusement
Too old to be new.
The bride
Of long ago stood on the balcony
Flat, grimacing. The bride
Flat ere the sea gave utterance
To sky, and air itself
A victim of the sun.
The mountain-mad world
Flows to the rescue.
A board mounts
The wind's cry: help!
Otherwise, what is life?
He came to school
The surly ghosts give him
A wide berth
And he moved to Enna Jettick.
There is for sale:
A turquoise harp, bride-of-leaves,
A sail-seeker's fare.

To sail back to the USA
He had to be cured.
Now the children are unfinished.
A pregnant sibyl slinks down the stairs.
There is no time to pass without celebrating,
Without drinking sake and singing old songs.

THOUGHTS OF A YOUNG GIRL

“It’s the old dumb thing,
The belly, the gin, nothing but the wit
Of snow falling across a field.”
—at the end of a long day in a remote, remote house

Dropping fruit and nuts, trying to make eye contact
With a shadowy figure as the paper-yellow bread of winter
Fleshes the tundra and stars, brings blandity

Into the same bargain. The houses have gutters
Painted over them, the landscape looks different.
The person who made the offer
Is gone, but the image remains,
Tan as a crescent on ice.

And though the horns of winter
Slouching down on us like mullions,
It is the same image, the same thought:
The tar sands in progress. The remote marshes
Polished and brackish, the amber eyes fixed
On the globe. The carters still to be found
In the old place, and the tassels pulled out of
The carnival dust. A sign of things to come
In the backward places. The shoes
Don’t work. The house where it took place
Came to be recognized internationally,
But the image remained
And was as green and grave as an apple.

FARM FILM

A long time ago, in some other life,
I had the good sense to leave the kitchen
And wander over to the trees. They were all green and hearty.
I asked what was the fashion again,
and they told me to relax my standards,
which are no longer out of control.
I suppose it is still a little girl impression
To make people think they can feel embarrassed
About what they have, and they think they have it

In a kind of package. I thought I had never seen anybody look at me
So long as I continued to shine in that sea of tears
(Which is still not too much to go on)
And then they think of me as though I had never seen anybody.
They look to me, not to me, for leadership,
For the future, for the future of their posterity.

And I, I continue to shine,
I the guide they gave me, and like a sharp iron
Projector has fixed firmly into the mold
Of the recesses of memory where it behooves
Me to speak, and move swiftly toward
The shadowy but not inconsiderable space that is almost
My heart. These people, these youths,
Are the remnants of a bygone time
Graffiti that is my soul,
My very being, and as such is something
To be prized up front
While the song is still and dark clouds move
Insatiably away, out of sight.
The present is but past being
And in that time I too felt I was alone

And wanted to get out of there as quickly as possible

But I could not do that, my train was slowing

And I alone, and so I continued to enjoy the feeling
Of being alone, of having once been

Someone. And though I no longer had any
Conferences to cancel out, conventions
To be at, they still found me occupying
The central position I had once held,

Without my having done anything about it.
It was still possible to imagine I was mounting

A diagonal trajectory upward, through
Space, but the tempo was also
White-knuckling, without the finality
That had once been my thesis. Its walls

Were opaque, it was possible to imagine only walls
And above them a terrace full of windows,
Sky high with evening stars. Above us
A vast crater, more straw than you need,
But I wanted to emphasize the importance
Of this singular moment of happening, before
All could be negated and its illusions
Speak to me in terms of continuity

Instead of paradoxes, like yours truly,
With all those red herrings like a hat
Around your head, and those turtle tears, my
Conceivable, inconceivable, inconclusive ones,
You know, the kind that gets you into things,
And then spins you around in a molten stone

So that you are once again on the move,

Glyph of youth suspended in mid-air
Above the tumbling, rat-infested ground

Which, when it's time to put up the fence,
Is once again a frayed joint in the near distance,
An acute, scorpion-inflicted wound
Showing no sign of healing—only death and bankruptcy

Woven into the rough welcome which has become a treat,
A true one, as only true treatings are rare.

THE WET CASEMENTS

A bead of persimmoned water
A tall building to ascend
But the wind is elsewhere. Thoughts of diamonds
And strings of pearls floating around.

So, lost in the serene
House between two streams the child
Becomes lost, again.

And, again, the heart is on the point
Of its leaving, its wishes, wishes to be seen
Again. And so much more
But the mind makes no pretense of explaining it,

The child becomes the star
Of the ocarina. Raindrops fall hard
On the rut of the pear tree,
Its starched plumage an intense shade of red.

And the mind makes no pretense of explaining it,
The rose wants to explain it.
It can be—has been—a convenient shorthand.

So the mind makes no pretense of explaining it,
And the rose wants to explain it.
It can be—has been—a convenient shorthand.
To explain it, one must go far away
From the friendly but ominous mushroom-shaped figures.

One must go far away
From the friendly but ominous mushroom-shaped figures.
They want explanation.
To explain it, one must go far away.

THEIR DAY

The face extended its sorrowing light
To the whole universe. All that was left was pine-tree bark.
Pine-tree bark was everywhere, readily
Accepted as a sign of things to come.

The face extended its sorrowing light
Far into the night. Accepted as a sign of things to come.
They extend their leaves,
Lips, and dab at the sky. The sky is pure and bright.

THE SHOWER

The water began to fall quite quietly
As a cat in a dream. How quietly it all grew!
A lake rose from the sea; its foam
Covered the ground, and the sea returned the salute
With its pelicans and its music. To have followed
Such easy, meandering paths as we have on other days
Is to travel in a time-vaulted song, unfathoming
The secret behind the scenes. And when the censure
Of certain moments too far in the past, surfaces
Against a teetering sky, and one cannot avoid
Reverence for the women and their stories,
Their justice, in the time it takes to make a dime
A sermon on a deserted sea find.

A PASTORAL

I keep my cigar
In the crook of my hand. It is delicious.
The Cardinals salute you with their feet.
The President of Mexico, with his men,
Drops into the background.
The lady next door, no longer appearing

On the lamp, is working.
She is not dangerous,
But the boys, in their way,
Are. To keep the train from tipping over

We kiss again, against the sway of the trees
That open out on us,
A kiss terrible like the next one.

You knew that.

The grass is greener on the other side.
Are the Cardinals really out of the way

By that fountain in the pasture?
Will the Sandline rout be causeless,

The senseless slaughter of innocents amount
To nothing more than that,
A frown stricken one, and the wind

Shelters us from that view.

The fife and the harp are fierce,
The arrow impacts in the feather as it swings

Across the once-molten shore. Blood oozing from the wound
Caresses you, gives you back the

Feet that were taken off and carried back to the beginning

Of this journey in lost, dank alleys.
If the Sandline is indeed our home
It is a sad though a joyous one,
Home to ravens and bonbons and all that nonsense.
It is the blankness that builds up
Long-ignored debris,
The impassive façade that all men must someday own up to.

The fife and the harp are fierce,
The arrow impacts in the feather as it swings

Across the once-molten shore. Blood oozing from the wound:
If the Sandline is indeed our home,
It is a sad one, though a joyous one,
A place of heated debate and closed-mindedness
Leaving even the most obtuse to their cubby holes.
The Sandline is indeed sad,
But cheerful, as the last frozen dinner is plastered
Upon the walls and furniture of those who were once
Householders, and those who came after,
Those who are dead, or so we believe, at the very moment
They last saw them, and those who are merely
Interior decorators think otherwise, but those
Who are here only to stay, to tiptoe up
Into the eternal puzzle box, are in fact ecstatic:
The walls are decorated with graceless flowers,
Some of them too graceless to be called grief,
But the point is they are here to stay:
They have never had a chance to breathe.
But if they had, and it makes no difference,
The sad thing would be offset by the placid
Propagation of the Infinite, and all good
People would have ceased to argue, to sigh
Toward the end, the end of history,
The end of any book, the end of reading
Any more: whichever way you turn
Is the same as the unexpected gift of endless
Whitecaps on the horizon, the present
Of ice cream and satisfaction.

MELODIC TRAINS

A little girl with scarlet enameled fingernails
Asks me what time it is—evidently that's a toy wristwatch
She's wearing, for fun. And a shadow-faced man

Sees farther into the night than any child should.
He's wearing a shirt the color of molasses
And there are shadows on the stairs

That shouldn't be there—
There's time enough to go back inside
And wait for the bus.

The shadow-faced man comes down the hall
After midnight's wild foam has wheezed and grown
Deep under the steps where it was supposed to be seen

Only now does the sense of its presence
Become something to be probed by
Its own recondite history

In the vigor of tomorrow's arrival
At the appointed place
And now the hour as we now recognize it

And the place,
Are fated not to meet and stand
Together, though not to defeat
The designs of those hours

That shatter like wind,
Wave over the solid earth,

That destroy trusting architecture

And leave in their wake only a faint outline
Of what may be seen.

THE EARTH-TONE MADONNA

"I give my all to the great persuasions
That make you break out of your habitual smile
And stride forth onto the terrace
Hungry with dreams of fire."

But I do not feel myself

Cared for or desperate.
The days are veiled
With olive-oil thinking.
The federalistic congress
Skulks here and there.

To be rid of its associations.
That is all one can do.
The lyrebird sings

Of tribulation and melancholy
In these hills that end

Behind thee, like clouds fleeing

Across a field.
The sunflower feels the cold.
The barn has begun
To bruise.
The greenhouse is heavy.
You, on the other hand,
Can build yourself a shelter any
Way that leads to death.

He never knew the end of the tale.
It seemed some lyre
Had been built for him, but others
For other purposes.
The Ponteveda is blackening

Its name into something unrecognizable
("To the end of the tale,")
Its paroxysm, its duration, whatever
It is, goes something like this:
The tambourine is about to sound
Terribly unpleasant, but the words
Don't matter, and they
Keep coming, like water from a duck's egg.
The man in the moon hears a woman
Sing the folk song of the dead

(It seems to him that
Man has not always been this good to himself),
Grabs his ankle, hurriedly uncloses his eyes.
The weeds lie scattered around
His yard, dead leaves, clover
Biting its hollow. The steed
Graciously steams toward
The horizon, all is forgiven
If only the stag can see his bones.

SCHOOL OF VELOCITY

Urban propinquities
And strings quartets grace the table,
But what does it matter for the pig
As it sways along, fooling around,
Looking for delights to eat?
Tinkers and craicers will have it

As the metropolis fades to a past of night
And we pass over to her glorious empire,
Goodness itself. Farewell,
Theus. Farewell, my son,
The girl thinks. Theus
(A bit frustrated, he sees now)
Remembers the death of Diana,
The beige pyramid with the teakettle.
The black clouds stride slowly past.
Goodness, what a terrifying
World. Just dying for it.
A terrible sloughing-off.
Dip pen in solution.
You can't get away
With that anymore, not without
A fitting or two.
The students raise their glasses.
The dead are stirring. The whole
World sees, not just in Chile
But over and against the fence
Of the United States, sympathizing with
The pursuant statistic.
She reads the riot act again.
The Husband and the woman
Called Nurse Superior—you had better believe
They're not alone—lean against the window.
The Venus of the sea is stirring
In the violet corner of the triangle
Hung up like a squall on the house.

THE WATER CARRIER

I see so little difference between your health and mine,
Condé Nast style. Just a little fatigue,
Water the way you like it, in small pieces.
I spy early reflections in the paper
And feel the dry, patchy stuff. The perfect
Object of your game is not beyond
The conjugate, the romanticizing
Of a still-functioning heart, but
Slightly askew, out of balance.
The fad will pursue you
Toward the coast, then you too.
The marshal has his say
And is wise beyond his years, or so it seems:
An open, angry face with a trace of whimper
Scarves the crowds off, to go on as they please
Shelving up, ceaselessly.
The mask slips like a sneeze
Around the broken remnants of the past
But stands, and keeps standing, to urge
Summonses from the undecided, returning
To the fold even as the stars are winking
Out over the wide, empty street.
You, in your tent somewhere deep under
The glacier, now, not so important
But important as the next time a stranger
Into your house comes.

THE SAD THING

He has a lazy father in Minnesota.

I hope you never have to do this in life, with its crazy little
Cards and its little red save-the-dates.

I have a friend who is about your age, and he is
Super-annuated. He's out hunting down the German
Bats this morning. It seems they left their trash all over
The place. I asked him if he knew where their kettle was,
But he just smiled and said, "No, I guess that's for later."

I'll post this here instead.
He seemed to want to read it.

THE KISS

Sometimes a kiss is all you need
To flush out the darkness and make way
For breathing. Sometimes a shake
On the jaw just before sleep, a glass of water
Upon a chair-valve, a mildewed look into
The past as we all pass it slowly, haltingly.

They're letting you out tonight,
Too, like many a bird once was.
We'll make another club announcement
Later, but for the time being it serves its purpose,
Flushes out the darkness and making room for breathing.

And the rain that was glittering gold
Is now a thorny issue, just as you were planning
To remove the cement that was making the boardsqueaks
In a last ditch effort to save face.
The sprinklers worked marvelously
But the iron on the grate had read an error
And was lurching toward the stars.

You're looking at an easy meal.
On second thought you may want to reconsider
The angle at which the kitchen is to you,
The landscape that you have reduced to a mere memory
And which you may very well be the forest
By the topple in the grass.

A SHADOW PLACE

Whoever shall come forward unscathed
will find the water stained a deep crimson;
thyme is about to go boom.

And if he who shall seek to enter into life shall bewitch
the bounciest thing that ever happened, so be it
for the other, just barely: whiplash, nosebleed.

So, basically, it's what it is. No, really:
it is what he or she does best, that's all.

THE CHATEAU HARDWARE

A brief but fascinating account of how it all began, how it all came to be, what each finds next, what blows up next, what comes to an abrupt stop, what is called accretive, ungainly, or just plain ugly:

The portrait of Alsace-Lorraine, with its distant shacks and meadows,
falls far short of the ambitious Zeitgeist, and I have reason to believe that the story is no more than

a patterned photo of a man, sitting up straight, a picture of mild concern.

The grief-stricken maidens, in their twisted way,
understand each other, they matter. The great wide-eyed clouds,
Olympic in their solemnity, have their own agenda.

The horses are domesticated. The horses are happy.

The mad horse wants to go home. The whole wide world is like that.

SKETCHED PRESENTATION

I would like to suggest to you
a departure from the hollow
ceremony: do not laugh or smile
at the same time. And, finally,
you may wish to break off this endless speculation:
it is but a phase, a phase like the others,
and like the others, your turn is at last here.

And I shall abide by your wishes, as indeed I do
all others, by dint of appearing to be someone
I am not, yet nobody seems to notice
the difference. All that I say and do
returns to exactly the same muddle
that was in my earliest childhood, though in another,
older, more civilized
way. And the rain that dissolves
in the sidewalks seems, well,

Is that so difficult? All those years in the wilderness?
Did I ever try to hide anything?
If I did, and if I didn't, why,
that is news to me. And if he whose hands
guarded my wrists ever forgot to unclench them
before the trip, why, it was all right too,
I was just saying, but it seems I am too late
for him and all his cushions are springizing
in the crook. Water to the dog.

THE DONG WITH THE LURE

Was that why you were
trying to say something?
It's just as well you know,
light is lost on the tarmac
again. Tomorrow will mark the first day
of a new series of gestures.

The doggy day is for lassitude.
Heads in hands, the waif's head bent over
like a complicated clock, awaiting orders.
Paci Gordon, slinging her hair over her shoulder
like some sort of barbara, is trying to make sense
out of what everybody is becoming. It won't
matter for me, I am onstage already.

The lassitude marches on.

In short all hell breaks loose.
Not cannonballs, sauced rimes,
but razorbeetles, the sort of thing.
Well I wasn't going to say you had gone,
but really the only way out was backward through
more-or-less empty permafrost, the sort of thing.

And thus we mutually understood.

There are some who think nothing of traveling
off this way, into open fields,
off the scent of late-afternoon smoke.
They stop to ask directions, the landscapes get blurry
a little as a transgression of time.
But that's enough, you know. We'll take it over
then, over, and make a decision.

There are some even who think nothing of traveling
into the hypotenuse of a field, the cottage industry
sparring from memory. You would think,
if so and such, that if we can't get this mess
over with we'll at least have something to talk about
when the newshounds bide their melancholy and awed
dawn. But the fields,
in which so much of life is found,
are more than a little unnervingly magnanimous.
That's what they're made of.

A thin, gruff-looking man OR "woman" stood near the threshold
as the door opened. The one who was addressing this was none other than

the dashing young officer, Jasmin. She was dressed in plum-colored
principles, with a simple, graceful flourish
on her hair, as though it were a facade.
She saluted the whole crew, then turned abruptly back
into the shipyards where her hair-line
prod the treadle of several million pounds of gravel
and other minor-key matters. The silence
then pierced out on several levels.
The crew, including Harry, were riveted.

“All” he said, only matter
in the long run, and seaward, or up close and personal.
His gesture suggested no affectionate gesture toward the
virgin on the beach. The idea of a perfect world
was as a kettle on the rocks. The stench of sulfur
was everywhere. You could have mistaken it for love,
if you chose, but that was a bad dream. The truth
keeps us each at bay, at least until the day
of reckoning comes undone. By then it’s too late.
The day will come soon.

“If I were you I’d get an unlisted number.
Strict about my personal matters:
no mail for you today, no
I thought those boldfaced G-men were setting out
with a vengeance—”
“No, sir, it’s
I wasn’t consulted, and if I was you
and it wasn’t
accidentally that my phone tapped you,
cleared your name from the list.”

Now your house burns with coal at its foundation,
but if we let the weather get completely out of control
we could rebuild, or, as sometimes happens, just drop dead.
But we can’t afford to make such small talk.
The sun stakes out a lunar crescent.

“What would you want to do, Harry?”
“Nothing,” he answered diplomatically. “The past is gilded
as frost, and shiny as luster.”

So often you find men of letters
like each other, in the pit of the world.
Do you? Then answer me.
Do you still want to wrestle with me,
or are we cutting throats at each other,
even breathing? And the very air
is bitter, because I stopped, and went on.

“I do,” he confided. But the very fact
of our meeting was to assuage
that long-cherished but still largely imaginary
pot of mischief. Like some rabid dog
it circled, then scampered off—it was never
to be seen again. And I, I too was resigned to the fact
that I must lose the folder by dying,
though only for the time being. My wish
(desire?) was, in fact, granted,
temporarily, and I ascended to a kingdom
not unlike my own, only I shall not inhabit,
as I would that my very being be the test
of whether I am worthy, and if so, whose:
the balls of light?

MY GOLD CHAIN

Under your fatherhood, tangled in hair,
climb up that tree. And if it be not,
where are the children going to school? Already, the pretensions
of the noumenon have been set in motion by a child's
ambulance that whistles in a ear-piercing void.

But the tree, rich in nectar,
yet laden with seeds, is only shade.
The inflated beaks of dragons embrace
the very soul that like its shape
of nobility, and the lights that shoot up
into endangered hedges
speak only forgetfulness. Where are the children in that
brightness that is everywhere present?

For the nectar that you drank
you were a part of something,
whether it was to make you understand
us, or to win admission to the haphazard
hinterland that overlooks the horizon
wondering what was there before.

The tree of the woods, steep and white
as a cat's head, wanted to secede
from the moist heart of things,
and all things must die
in order for the raging imagination
to float slightly above the maelstrom
that breaks over the horizon like a wave
and change forever its provisional self,
become the anchor that holds us.

The actors remain at their posts.
The people, that very afternoon,
were almost invisible.

The weather was especially pleasant,
To the point where I had to do something
with my life and it was getting late
even before the bus came crashing through
on its way to take me down to the station.

A HUSBAND WEeping

Nothing can improve the state of one's physical facilities over the other, though I do so in such a way as to maximize my own pleasure. This has to be over. The client is dead. The client's unhappiness is, in fact, terminal. A pleasant, generous woman crosses the threshold peacefully. Another is coming to stay

with her. And they let him in. In the past, one's bunk extended limply into the next, then the water purged from all the puddles in the floor. We never did get along very well on account of the fish, which nobody seems to know much about. I let you believe in something, even though you didn't believe in anything, and in spring an ass was beating a dolphin, which I thought was very much in keeping with the kind of people we were, these optimistic, swept-away types. Soon the moon poured out its volume of grace on me too, flooding the whole of my landscape with a radiant exuberance. The hills were shaken off their moorings. The parched earth seemed to melt rather than stand still. Strangely, in the dimness of my thirties years there was some intangible but easily discernible quality about the past: its teeth, gums, chalk, even snow. And I still believed that the hills were absolving me of some important but delicate business, so I chose, I'll bite less [sic] later on but have it all happen/sound the way I always did, so there's no use crying over spilled peanuts. But I was dying to get you up there to prove my doubters wrong, so I suckered myself in with a lark and all the horses of the draw came trotting back toward the ring with a hiss of steam. It must be a pattern of shuffling cards, some card is always going to be ripped out of many an otherwise decent deck. You never know until it's too late, and then it's too late.

Some of the young boys wandered up to me and asked if I could sing their song, which I gladly did, but the girls wandered off in a huff. Soon the whole scene streaked by, in rags and shawls, or mothballs, dimocrats and their shit-stained napkins. "Why, why not?" I sternly replied. "Because that's the way girls are, and a greedy little boy must suffer through another crumb, though he cannot, will not allow it."

The boys and girls dashed out of their psyches and were in each other's thoughts for the next two or three minutes, and then it was gone. I never saw such fun. There were colors to choose from, and you could mix and match them, but you couldn't without making a sandwich, which is the only thing this side of the great globe can stomach. So I say, why weep

the man who made you weep
will soon be avenged by the lamb
on the golden platter
of your fame, multiplexed
and the resulting sweetness diffuses
the sting of talcum poisoning

even as the assembly line revives

its slightly altered form of work

and we see how far

we have come, painfully slow
in our advance, but everything

is pace, and sense, forever,
unless the crumbs

you bestowed on your tomb have been misplaced.
In which case we're back
into mist.

How far has the blue line pointed you,
O thou myriad! When the gryphon

turns and shifts on his back, it is no longer
overtaking its prey, but rather

sitting in a wood, with the rime giving way
to sudden intense happiness, brought
on by too much sleep and too little water
and a bad cold, not from the rime's

fullness, but from the tepid, hesitant breathing
that every now and then interrupts my thought
in these parts, and elsewhere, and comes

to seem as though it were here, if only we could get
to the point where all this were possible, only
there was time left. Now it seems as though
the point of all this were to be breached,
pours itself evenly on the table, and one's breath
arrives contently, in an orderly fashion. As though
one had always been this way, and now,

there was time to unravel the ruffles.
A strand of starlight dances in the damp
windscreen, and that too quickly.

What faster way

to outwit life?

In finer grains of fabric one chooses
to express oneself imperfectly
though with a little faith and lots
of filler, enough to make up for the

loose bundle of contradictions
sitting atop a rock, and it is their fault,
not ours. And if it was I I would
wander off now, far from this rock
that so long ago became a temporary holdout,
from which no one now returns. The

temporary holdout became an actual city in the
17th century, and later a bustling
mesque whose poverty
no one now bothers to hide behind.
If I had gotten my period now
I'd have had more time to prepare

for the conversation that would have ensued,

and I'd have found out about your period too,
if you had one. Now it's too late

for regrets, they evaporate quickly
when the time for them is past.

And I, I walk out over the dry
road, against the painted scenery
(whose facades, why cast them aside so soon?),
not against anyone's expectations,
though that's the last thing on my list,
yet I am prepared
to give up some important things to win
an important thing, even a nonexistent one.
An old codger has approached me
over the phone lately: How does it feel to you?
Have you changed in the intervening time?
Do you still feel the same way?
Do you think it's important to keep secrets
from yourself and others, even your own
best interests? The prize money has dried up
in a moat somewhere; nothing
can stay there for long. So if some
child were to get up in front of me, knees buckling,
I'd still have the upper hand; but, just as a
picture takes a grain of truth from a din
of eager voices, to pass the buck.

The great artist has passed over.
The crowds have come undone.
The wrong shade of lipstick on the sidewalk
attracted attention; the buglers have returned.
They say it was me they came to,
we parted on friendly terms.
And he said, you're
right. But—
his first question didn't go unpunished;
it was as though a strand of light suddenly appeared
in front of him, and he hastily put away his hat,
reeling from the sudden intense sunlight.
And the seer said, what comes after us
will take us down to the harbor,
where no moon can exist, and the tuna can.

Why keep on selling the different varieties
of seeds? After all, there are only a few of us here.
A lot of people are going to be making a beeline for the seer's,
seeming to want to run him down.

What did I ever do to offend him?
He's only gotten so many followers,
so it's hardly any use. Not to put too fine a point on it.
But if he wants to sue me, that's fine. I'll run the gaff. The suit
will then press me to the ground, where it finds me.
Over a spreading tent-tip, a hoarse bird is watching.

DREAM OF A RAREBIT SEQUENCE

The man with the going sickness
and the white hat, seeing only
the seams of my mind, cracking me open
as though because that would . . .

And the truth in its bruises—

After all this we could only be serious.
Like that. The moments, the
first blind and the ugly,
sharp with the white noise we,

those stones—have the time on your wrist.
The rolling thunder, the changing degrees,
everyday happening, coming to an end.

THE HATERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

How much should I let this pass without remarking
about it to you, my pretty lass of luck?

Is it too much to ask for this sort of treatment
from a stranger, for so many shadows

and displacements? If so, I'll go over

fine. And you, of cherry syrup and garden soil
should probably be rubbing your hands the way

you always do.

SEVEN-YEARS MARCH

This was my four-legged horse Mumm-Ra.
He turned up in time. His pelvis was bruised.
He wasn't very happy about it.
He wanted to go. But the others weren't

going to let him go. Some took exception to this,
causing the others to give it away.

The napping scent of twigs and branches
waited to be let out. One by one, each
came captivity. Now, some are natives
of this part of the world. They'll feel more at home
where the grass is short and the trillium is grass.
The bird flew across the meadows,
a feathered friend. And the rain never stopped.

After the race there were still others to rouse:
Was it for this you came, to rub elbows with me,
or was it for other, unspeakable ends?
After a leisurely breakfast, it was off to the races
again. I was the only member of my family
who didn't crack a smile.

And after I gave the all-clear, in triumph,
the gangly equestrian mounted his feet in my honor.
He wasn't sure if it was a trick question or a
simple trick question like: Whose beans are blue?

But the point was we were all agreed
on one thing: Never trust it bareback.

This had been one of those times when doubt could
be cast aside so completely that it seemed a sin
to have wondered further, as though doubt were something
one might be tempted to do. Well,
I was tempted just once, and that was before I knew
the Internet. Now, every day brings another question
back to the mat, and the answers are like footprints
in the snow: Was it for this pile of ashes? Or did
God ordain these spangles instead? Now, even
the cluck of waiting can't dampen the mystery
of the Superdome. And I, I sit here hopelessly,
unable to reach for my wallet's emery,
unable to extricate myself even from the first
bump of snow that studded the ice-blue January day.

And one swoops down from the heavens: Justice. Can't you see

it all? In the grapes of your eye you let stumbling
blockade the port and barrel, and you let the ombudsman,
an allegory of swaggering boards, into your soul.
He sees the board, its empty parlor,
and sinks, humbled.

Now, what did you have to go and do that for?
We have places for the weary and the lame,
and fiddler-upper, too, who can write
on what remains of the Métro's luminous viaduct
that clings tenaciously to the earth even after
the sun has winked
and dropped. I'll settle with you
on the couch. You're too close
to the china closet to overhear it
but the valedictorian urged his case
back into the open:
And should any body want to extricate himself
from here we'll look to that other past, kindly
and unassailable, for consolation. Our genitals
are squid-inked now, but the city and its cemeteries
speak to us through tears. Remember
that.

WHERE IT WAS DECIDED WE SHOULD BE TAKEN

They start it off again and we are rolling
helplessly between the trees—we need
more time to see what we have wrought.

I have a thin white handkerchief
that I wrapped in tissue paper
in case the horrors of space ever
again made me think of cotton candy,
in the post office
on birch-leaf stems, and want
to say I am as I look today:
a goateed, goateed old man
with lint, and a rag in one pocket
who looked just about ready to leave
on a glittering strand of zephyrs

leaving the others to weep and toggle
on. And I'm all alone.

You'll have to beat me over the head with it
before I have a chance to see you again, protector
of my sensibility from the vodka, gin & tonic
and the other things I forgot. And really,
the suit was only skin deep. The oak plank
(I believe it was a gray one) was the wrong shade of brown.

Now, about those missing documents:
they were in balti, or in some other word
somewhere between the ankles of the time and now,
billowing like structure out of some indefinable churn
(but not enough to hide it) and the pylons
that brought us forth were stilled, though no one

saw it, and the seer sputtered. The days turn over.

I come in sundown, always a little worse for wear,
and am always grateful for that, though I do have
a sore on my arm. It was nice of you to
angle the ending to what was really a question of life and death
long before anyone thought of asking, and you did,
but I'm sorry, the seer said, it's all right, we'll all live

another day, and that's all we can do about it. He looked tired.

He has now been living in your car for several months.
You have several bright, brand-new things to do.
Clean your room. Eat some honey. Put a good face on.

A beautiful girl awaits us in the station. Don't give up. There is still time to go to the hills.

MOUNTAIN

All of life is like a desert
wherein one may stay for days or
we can't have both. The
snowdrifts and turns into a rime of snow
that is a fake sun pecking at the air
to remind us of ourselves

Days without end or prospects
utter darkness. There is no
reason to linger:
the pavement is thistles
and there are bears roaming the sagebrush

and the thistle dries on the meadows.
If this landscape were a commodity,
we might be in one now.
But it's not our fault that so much
brass is traded on, that the absent-minded

found it congenial. He returned to the sea
with an entourage, some furniture,

a silk stocking. Do you want us to go out
and search for islands? It'll set us up

in a way that good intentions never
could. We'll put out the light.

PATHLESS WANDERINGS

With coquetry,
unfinished,
like castles captured
in an inner room,
an outer one too,
as it were.
The line, woolly as a bat,
runs counter to itself
in the figurative sense
of time,
which is something else—
something to be excavated
back into the earth and to ashes
for sakes.

So which of us are we
to be feeling toward the other
by the stalk?

You, I suppose,
moving your head from afar,
know it's yours.
The one who was going to say
so was poisoned,
so there can be no death
in these shaded spaces.
And the jesters knew it.

There is attrition
in the tall boy's cradle;
turbulent, brooding clouds keep him up
at one's return from his tangles.

There is death on the bend
of the stream—a dull,
comic evening.
The bends are like dark visits
to the alter of a melon
before the melons begin their fall.
The alter is too small now; the river comes
to life in the rain. The melons begin to stink.

There is in the haze
a pleasant taste of base
material. The base-flavor
is gone, to be replaced,
in whole, by a new, sharper,

flavor. The hulks of base
still inhabit the hollow
behind the table, but their scent
is nicotian, and more, a rose
in a magnifying glass. A perfect
scent of rose petals.

THE DESPERADO

Have you had enough of
water, earth, and flowers—the seven deadly sins
in one basket? Then I'll chew on it another time,
when things get quieter and hens pluck more nectar
from the floor.

But—but there was something I just had to say,
even though it's hardly necessary.
Like when the Des Moines police
force their way through the ghetto,
I must be thinking of Achilles,
if only I could remember which gauntlet he was wearing.

Instead,
akes the day, all sweetness and no edge,
the grain of the desiring grass
against the apple of my cheek.

How was it supposed to look when we first started,
and how were our wounds still fresh and red,
fresh and red? Now it all looks dried and brittle.
How did we expect it to look when others
catch up to us in the voting booth,
and when they vote we actually win,
even though the other ninety-nine are enchanted,
only to break out in a cold sweat at the outcome
(see what I mean about the tailless monster)?

The other saviors could just lie and tell it,
that is all we cared about.
And now it is our turn to tell it,
though we may not know the truth.

He walks backward through the trees.
His face is a millionth something.
No wonder we call him Mother.

She always knew it was time to go, but chose not to.

SHORT-TERM MEMORY

A breeze blew across the dock,
fresh from the tap, from the grocery.
It looked as though the long-ago incident
had been averted, that the city was calm again.

Yet one felt that something was following,
like the motion of a falling man.

Going down the street one at a time,
blocking until one gets there,
gets one's hopes and fears wrapped in
a kind of garment.
See, there is a disturbance in shawls.
The girl who was spectacled
came closer and pointed to the ground.
Thoughtfully, she uncloses the wound.

There is room for but one more in the rout.
That's all there is to it.

Go finance the trip
now. You must. Otherwise the summer
will come down to nothing, and nobody will care.
It will all blow over.

The boy who was there—
He was suspended in the air.
That's how he saw.
He knew it was time to go, but couldn't,
so came nearer. Seeing, the city again
came to stand in its shadow.

It's hard to get the weeds out of your craw
But you and the dog might want to rethink that decision.
There are indications this was once
a street in some city.
Afterward, when everyone got fired
and nobody came to work,
the one who's got the black hat on
went on strike for five consecutive days
and was not back before seven

the next time you were around him
the other night in the club you said
it, he was up for re-election as mayor
and was voted down, again.
Now it seems strange that someone like him

could ever have a stake in our well-being
as a people, let alone be pissed off at us
for it. The good Doctor, you know,
wants to own up to that part of the story.

So the lovely, dimpled city
made up of tectonic plates
crawled in on itself and did not want
to surrender, even as we stared in its reflection
and wondered why, given the abundance of foodstuffs,
and the lavender petal of hope that grew it's headlice.

The kind soldier wants to own up to his homeward bound
and indignant march continues unabated into the night
which he describes as his own personal idea, though one
whose idea is nothing less than the entire surface of the universe,
to use as he sees fit. Does that interest you,
Mr. Cleanwater? If it does, why,
it does, but at this late date one must be content
with merely approximating the ideal, no more.
Petal on the petal, more of a squeeze now,
than if it were an exact science. But it all comes off as compliments.

Well, I'll be perfectly frank with you. It wouldn't
matter so much if I was you, just me. The usual demons have
got to go somewhere. They're restless, sometimes.
But—and this is the gist of it—it all comes
smacking into one's lapel. And the music, the vague but important
bits, start to get squeezed out of the pressing
questions. Isn't it enough
that I brushed your hair, that we talked for a while
after that, and left early for the train
back to the station? Because iff I was you,
and this was the way it was, even just now, anyway,
and nothing should prevent us from returning at the end
of that journey, with its many dreams and misgivings,
when all is said and done, and can
be used to some purpose other than undoing
the favors we were given and keeping them,
if we are going to be beaten by the wayside
into a drum of quiet desperation that cannot
be outlived, and returns to win, even
if that means delving into an old theme
to end up with a different headstone no one knows
and bringing it home just before it expires.

I could tell you about the time I started to cry,
and you would have heard, but that would be

fake news. The time I found out your sister
was pregnant with twins, and wished to
send for the children before they were schooled,
and when the postman came along the stars were on his tail,
and I became as one who had never shied away
from a conversation with my feet, the thoughts
on a variety of matériel, and wished to
rejoin the fray in the near future. You were
since dead. Now I lay in the grass, enjoying
the once-in-a-lifetime chance to prove once and for all
that I was once indeed one, and that no, you are dead,
or at least you never were one, and your ashes
latter lie in repose, shame upon me, I suppose,
though it be as much earth beneath my heel
as anything, earth or stuff.
And I shan't be the less proud
of my past, though it be but a pittance compared to
the erasure (to which I've sometimes been subjected)
of so much other human activity. It's enough
to put the "cow" in "macabre."

And birds of prey will hoot and a few will even sing.
Sure, you'll get your hopes up, but other than that it
isn't going to get done until someone contacts
an unlicensed person. By then it will be too late,
too late to change anything. The ice cube
has been thawing in its place for some time, its potency
only recently restored to its velvet cube.

How come nobody ever asks me my opinion
on these matters? Is it because I'm a jerk
or a little crazy? Probably it's the latter,
though I try to hide it. Besides, nobody wants
to talk about these things. They see
us as we see them: distasteful, out of step
with the times. Which are right for some,

but not all, as the tree of knowledge
is black and white, while in the sky a patch of white
consists only of patches, and glittering patches of shit.

I don't get it. Why must it insist
on its fundamental emptiness, even as it presents
a convenient way of looking at things, that
could just as easily have been dead on arrival
in a town street, and long after the change had effaced
the galloping horses and made room for pavements
with reduced visibility, making it seem as though the changeling

had never happened, that we really lived through
something else entirely, only to emerge exhausted,

and the pavements, of course, were only skin-tightening exercises
that must bring about some transformation in the underlying architecture
before the underlying concept can be put to the test, but which also have
the effect of tightening the wound, while the healer
stitches up his sleeve and prepares to leave, exhausted.

But the problem isn't so much that we can't achieve
some bare minimum of common decency—we can, if necessary,
give up a bit of dignity for a few simple
extraordinary elements, this is a philosophy, after all—
but is it our place to inquire into the details, the fabric
inside the shell? And the torn page yields a faint
sign of its owner. So it is this:

Shall we ask the faerie sled to fetch us
back in time to before this, when things were better,
before ali these and others could exist? Can a bare canvas
sent me to a café where the coffee is
and too many people like cafeterias? Am I to be anything but a recluse?
And the faerie-sleds negotiate the spacelane
with graceful discharges, one for the books, one for the stars.

A NEW OCTAGON

In Cantúlia the climate is altogether a diva.
The scenery is nearly indecipherable.
At Berkeley the water-tower
is splashing salty foam. Across the bay
a plangent mist condenses into lumpy gray
or pumice stone. Nearby a cauliflower farm
is being renovated. Gold scrubs the towns
of any trace of chalk.

The windshield is spliced.
Nearby an antelope melts into fat commemoration.
Palaces are being eaten. The big one
in the courtyard is Suzan, her magnolia
brilliant, down the narrow path from the nineteenth century
into the twentieth. And toward the end of the walk
Suzan is scanning the horizon for distress
so close to the Thwaite.
They are being followed by a sixteen-wheeler
that squidgies beside the railway.

Slick Willie has just pulled up in their black 1940s
grande ducalies. The Obozessen is deserted.
Across the field a plume is weighing on the
heck of eternity. Nobody
wants to talk much about it.

I was mounted on a dung-heap
the likeliest candidate. Now I am unlaced
with a deadliest contagion:
People who were never much for each other
are doing remarkably well

generating mutually agreeable
results. Additives
divide the day among you,
supposing you hadn't. In all
except for that
mold under the door
we never did much to conceal, except
when I was carving initials in it, and you were mad
at me for it. Now I am over your
blame. The thing I signed never
dispelled doubters, only stoked
cinders and soot, now
that's done. And all got along
better.

JOYCE UPON THE WATERS

“It is the motion of the seasons, not the contents, that matters.”
—An Ancient tome, quoting Thucydides, to Elisabeth (1591):

To be living off the exploitation of others
is the problem, not the content.
Therefore, why say it to you, when you already have

the content and the need for it
completely mapped out? If I were you, I'd tell you

that content—the useful, nondescript
material that doesn't matter—is what's wanted.
There can be no Disappointment, only Contract
with the Now that is Motion. The Now
has to be constantly renewed, but it's not that
it has to be perpetual. Content, that is,
is what's wanted. There are other things too:
plumbing, tiresome timetables, dim
orange grocers in the outlying
areas, no matter how much one pretends
it's still 1914. And drink, to top it off.

So there are a few things that get left out,
even though they count, and aren't themselves.
A fence couldn't hold them, and the sea
is bigger. Ain't we better for it,
your notes on life get lost somewhere,
and you, you exempt yourself from the reckoning
even as you make love to the portrait
of love that never was, but is nevertheless the truth,
the one we wanted so much to conceal, the one
we thought we would get but didn't want to see until the
timing arrives and the clothes is picked out of the ashman.

THE GARDEN OF FALSE CIVILITY

The eighty-three-year-old
 Her name was Margaret—
 Her last known address was
 In the greenish-gray twilight
Near where Her clothes She passed with Professor Herschel Williamson
Along the bank of a gorges
At a restful, two-way street
Farragled with ivy—
Perhaps she was a Centennial Park
She was buried next day
At Woodbridge Cemetery
In the autumn the cedars
 Painted a wide, sun-
 Fitted grays
 Fitted with roses
 A kind of hoop
 A kind of cut glass—
 A large circle
 Sunlight
 Painted a wide, sun-
 In the winter
 On the jagged borders
The eroding line
Fitted grays
Fitted with roses
The eroding part
The sun
On the jagged borders
The eroding part
The sun
 The eroding part
The sun
 The sun

The eroding part
 A slow
Sun
Sun
 The sun
At some appointed
Place
Solitude
 An exquisite dining room
Succulent trees
 For what

The sun

Sun

Sun

Sun

Sun

Sun

Sun

The part-time paupers

Sun

Sun

Sun

Sun

THE PICTURE OF LITTLE PEARL

A collection of ironed ironing boards,
bare branches sniffing glue. The sense of
everything sniffing glue is gone. The mice
have taken over. The antlers I mean.

What more is there to do, except
put up a fight?
And that's what we did.

You know, I wouldn't have it
(isn't it), yet something always intervenes,
some little command at the end.

You know, a down payment is in order,
or is it? "Yes," the bank teller said.
We looked confused. We had just left the bath.

Why do you always want to ask that?
It's not the clothes you wore when you weren't dressed.
Someone else could care less.
But the bank boy comes back with a sack
on his back. He was about sixteen or seventeen years old.

DARLENE'S BATHROOM

It was a quiet Saturday. A steady rain
minced the air. Patty the parrot flew over from California.
“Oh,” she said. “Don’t you ever want
to go somewhere, fly, fly away?”

But why all the fuss? Nobody seemed to notice
that the bowling alley was closing at noon.

Patty flew back over the hill to the parrot.
He had forgotten the key. Its parrot flew over
and the door was letting out. A sad, sad parrot.

A shy young woman stood on the step.
She had on a wide brimmed hat. She was wearing a yellow lace sweater.
Her face was somber. She carefully unwrapped the voluminous voluminous hat.
She held it in the air. It was gray indeed.

MURDERED

Dear cousin:
My late wife was ailing.
The afternoon is always kindling for you,
sweetheart. Though I'm sure it wasn't my fault.
He died in the little house next door.

Anybody could have replaced him.
But they didn't. He was replaced
by a morsel. And that was just fine.

In my earliest days I wandered the cob.
There was always something sour
about whatever they served you.
The elders, I mean, would come
to the door if they saw someone going in
or out. You knew those things were about to get real

with us, maybe. And then some of 'em would go it alone.
That's how we came down
to that cement wasteland.

They just sat there. Years later I saw
the elders. They had just left.
"Be sure to come back in later, when the swell
has taken over and one is cigar lit
at the plaids and poppy ceremony
and all that's some phony shithole again."
"It's all right," they said, "we will see
where the real monster is,
barbaric morning dreamed
of by the absent groom to his bride."
Then the bells in that old shed went crazy,
for once. The jingle of hoarfrost breaking
untended, discordant notes in the doorway's dismay.

Once, a mighty wind blew across
the Crescent City. It was,
it must be, sad. And I, I too
came from a long line of witches
and heretics, and now I too am sick
of the real deal. And you, I'll tell you
so. You can come with me if you wish.
We'll start with the basics.

We shall, I think, make a sensible
intermediate. Then the artifice
will move in and be awe-struck
by our tables set amid the ashes.

A HUNDRED ALBUMS

A hundred years have passed
since I set out on this epic,
but I still feel it
like a jacketed, unassisted ascent
into what is outside, what is behind
the wardrobe's iron shutters.

There were still
two paths to take:
(1) bear in mind
anything written down
before the century is over,
(2) continue onward
albeit with less panache
and less cheerfulness than before.

The first group of zinnias
reached the settee,
which is a kind of a nest
in a wood somewhere.
The second group disappeared
like dew on a hot, livid afternoon
in July.

The tassels on the castello wheel
didn't matter much,
they said. The three rascals
(in red)—that was all a bunch of truffle
cough. So whatever the heck,
whatever the elders
crawled along the silk carpet for,
it was all right. And the tea
cups nowhere.
In snowshoe shape, catalpas,
the spoils. Zounds!

Now, according to some,
a voice like a chainsaw blew.
The traps yanked the pin
out of the air. A thousand hyper alternatives
broke across the land
showing no signs of healing—
think Ziz and Obadiah.
We'll tell that
voice to its kaiser, but it just shrugged.
The bricks needed to build a minuscule,

minuscule cathedral proper—ugh.
And the complex never did get built.
They're the ones we need to worry about now.

In the next field, grass
and tall trees, the rendered blood-red of the
shade adjusted. Finally, we'll rout the
pirates. Isn't that something?
A perfect afternoon's work.

A TONE GROVE

A twig skewered my head.
I felt a twinge.
It might have been something I said
or someone said to me,
so I just shrug.

I'll take that theory.
He was brilliant. And so,
hanging by a thread,

I am left to conclude that a face like a cloud
once more saw the light,
mottled with milk, and tilted
down to the passing of strange livestock.
It is truly a satisfying encounter.

THE LAMENT

For the disciple nothing had changed. The mood was still subdued
with shadows of plants' roots
and bright, spoiled noises. A calendar still invoked fear
in the gutters, not hope.

Have you ever tried to open an old,
dirty, old magazine? It makes no difference,
the vibrations still cancel each other out.
But I am prepared now, if not to say
so much, with what little strength I have left,
and if I must die to defend my ideals
I'll do so in a spirit of exchange
for you and your kind. It would be unwise
to approach these at home, any more than a chicken
can ask a banana stand or the telephone company
where I live, any more.

So I thought myself bright, and at once forgotten

the singular sulfur smell that bore me back to my dim
idea of myself buried in a can of soda,
and for a few moments, stand like Jesus on the edge of the bridge.

The cynic in me wants it both ways,
the schemer in me first, then, trusting in aquiver,
just as it was intended, a pair of tongs up against the sky.

PALE SIBLINGS

Cheerio. Nothing on the shore
today. Far out to sea, some eczema
mimicking sunlight and shadow, with but temporary success.

Was the bark strong enough?
I need a reason to go up and see what all the fuss is about.
At least, that's my feeling anyway.

In the past I mimicked the behavior
of seals, then cowered in the shallows
of deep water. But now the seals
have returned and are preparing an immediate exchange
of marks. I shall go on a little time, perhaps
not too much time. That's all.

O the cookbook has arrived!
He must have forgotten to put it in the fridge.
All through school
I was a time-waster.
Now I believe in the futures
as frozen yogurt is traded
from shelf to shelf. The world
we must claw back, one by one,

from the heights of our delight.
The girls like the book,
it tells them fairy tale,

but the oven mugs are slick with oil.
The man said he would make another
in a word that my lips could conjugate,
but I said I couldn't, that we must return
to the original Hades, with the seals,
and that is how the error was forgiven
when it was finally realized that the error
was something other than a simple spell-silence,

something more like a deliberate falsehood.
We have to "leave something"
of the original, I guess.
Somewhere a child's illustration
of how the mountains see them, with the sun,
drawing fewer and fewer smiles from the adult cast,
a thousand strong at once—isn't that poetry,
that easy? A thousand strong at once—
and I'll tell you why: it's because the
boys in their houses can, and do, go off and do it.

Not that I think for a moment that
this austere compromise is what you call

progressive, or even true. The dictionaries
keep getting corrected.

What I do think is, this space
of respectability politics, is really a substitute:
a glass of water in a pinch.

If the oversight menaces
me I'll be back before breakfast—oh,
there goes my tin horn.

A SHOWER

For a long time things seemed to go astutely.
Every afternoon in the thirty-two was a pleasure
for the ladies, and the sodas were delicious.
At the post office off Main Street

I would stoop to the ground and look for Red Star,
the warlock's spindle, lodged in the bark
of an old tree. Nothing was mailed until the twenty-seventh
Street establishment was over. The lava-colored

signs told it was time for the census, but didn't say so.
There was a choice of more than one kind of salmon
but nobody ever asked what the stuff was. Finally a dog would come out
and say he'd had an opportunity
and should go back inside, for his master was sleeping
palaver. In the bedroom Fred and Alton had
a good laugh about the whole affair.

The branch Abdulmuttal-Akbar had committed to.
But what really did grow under the cabbage
was the home we destroyed. The lilac
flavor had left an impression.

The staircase was stone.
The doorbell continuously rings.
One of them will very soon be standing
in the doorway, like an extremely tall man
with a leather wrap up his sleeve.

AN EXAMPLE OF EXISTENCE

OK, this one is for you.
You see, most of us do. Or, more precisely,
we lie. Or fudge. Or fudge the facts
on the table. They're your business,
you know.

The example of the snow,
which no one sees, but
some of us skulks here and there,
prodding the lake about
where it goes.

The fashions are old, they're dirty,
they don't fit. And the hats say "H'm!"
No one sees anything but plain black.

The taxis stand crammed with people waiting
to board. They don't serve food on this damp

teetering platform. And there are only two drinks—one is enough
to set one's mind at ease, and that copes well,

though the martini drips from a glass slipper across
the station platform.

How far you've come if it's
the last thing you're going to tell someone!

Do you imagine a village,
light in the rigging, a tall, panicked old man
on a fishing trip of some sort?
If so, we'll help you along. You see

it works both ways, like the way a mountain patronizes a waterfall
to excite its own effervescence, then shuts up,
the stall's bolted shut.

We have orders to go out, showered and put on hold
for the night. It works both ways,

provides instant relief and ends where the hoe
left off, there are no tears shed.
The bird flew past us, anyway.

THE SAD THING

He has a lazy father in Minnesota.
My sister's head is nowhere to be found.
I had hoped for a long-range imagination
but the haze of the prairie
suggests otherwise.

She liked to play dress-up,
stroll, through town in her fancy dress.
It makes me hungry. I like to keep my reasons
secret, this way, and eat
the outsize snacks as my conscience guided me
through the maze of alleys
to where the nearest convenience store is.

Don't you feel comfortable?
I welcome your feedback.

A HELD THING

And if he thought he could get away with it
why, he might as well, as the years mounted
in ever-thickening waves, there was nowhere to go,
nothing to do.

The change was more than a switch. Old
chances had returned to town, something
almost nothing remembered. The shabby décor
returned, another ensemble, perhaps.
And the rugs looked slightly better.

THE RITZ BROTHERS ON HELL, BY TRANSMISSION

A tall building in Hell's narrows pours
ice cold. O tap, would you mind if I dropped you
in a basket this way, so softly that you
might not have noticed the light around
the corner? A rosebud grows
from the vine and sticks close to the lip.
If it were me I'd start by dropping you
in a wine barrel again,
now that the last leaves have fallen.

A LONG NOVEL

Better that the world perish
of small things, than that
this boy and his sister should.

Let the bedlam bide my soul
as it chooses to bid me farewell.
The days that come after
are bleak, but a joy
for me. I see a half-demolished paradise.
There is nothing left to be done
except to sleep, this night, resting my head
on a thin chain of paper.

Do you often go to the country
to take pictures of things?
It seems that all the mountains are melting
at an alarming rate.
The days to come
will have to be erased from your book
if you want it to stand.

The boy and his sister seem happy
lest you believe them when they say otherwise.
They have neither the time nor the wish
to reach the unlived state.

The day arrives for my visit
though it was not yet time to go
because I had to do something
before the end was in sight.
Something about the death process
I did not know about
yet. I think I am content now
with living, though I did not do it
to please anyone. Some have reason
to be angry at me: my sleep is disturbed
by inconsiderate fingers,
and always a little violence as a gift
from you, from you both.
Ours, actually, is ambrosia,
a sound like banjo-strings clashing,
romance of apples. Still, it is
difficult to pinpoint the precise moment
when it began to matter again.
There are so many witnesses.
The polished exterior of you and your

obsession, my red faucet, seeking
eavesdropping on me, our shared eternity.

The now distant crash of cyberspace
attracts us, seduces us to a spot
far from the concrete base of the flight
where the sausage festoons are, and twister.

AT THE INN

It all began as something you said to each other—
“a place to drink tea in from morning”—
after which, by evening, it was all over.
The eyes of the battered old man stared at the empty courtyard.

The windows had never looked worse.
A thick mist from the ceiling
wanted to be like that.

“I come from Spain,” he spat. “You from Siberia?”

And one couldn’t blame the blogger
who has two destinies to his name.
He thinks he’s found the holy tricycle.

He doesn’t even know how to count.
After the bad prologue
of this new story, each story built around
an axis already exhausted from the cold
and from natural causes.
The point was, not to mix the two extremes
but to blend each rarefied slice of life
into the rich and recurring mold.

VARIATIONS ON A NOVEL

We don't know much about them except
that they want us to like them and to combat
the strange ambience of our situation.
Off and on the city blocks they gloat
about how sodality ruined their plans
over the years—it ruined ours, sure,
but it wasn't my fault that the elegant chronicle
will outlive you, though. After all,
the morning does come round again. Wait—
did I say that in order?

A FRENCH TEA LEAVEN

But what I see is
I see a forest,
a forest with forest roots, and
moving on,

Remounted and remounted
from distant mounds,

Trees of the night renew their visit
to the near outpost

This time with more grace and less rage

O calm sea
the morning after yesterday,
the day before yesterday,
the middle of last week—
Nothing of the sort ever happened.
The dispatch came unsheathed

In a gutta-percha spin.
The dispatch read as though it had never been.

What does this have to do with me?
Nothing, nothing and nothing
except that we are now the unpopular
dictator, rather poor judges of character

Who—you ask—can appreciate character

Which, in turn, contemplates character

Which, in turn, derives pleasure

From character assassination.

What is this?
An inconvenience? A kind of feeling
After the event has occurred?
I see. Well, I'll go over, see if
Thebridge has its moorings, if you want.
Otherwise, well I get out of here, okay?

"You don't want it," she pressed.
But I don't have a car, and the light turns to ash
In the alley under Interstate 8. I drive,
Though it's against my better judgment.
When the burliest male flowers bloom in the new

Look, though the silvery curtains have endured
Peeling off one after the other, does it matter?
Otherwise, does the action work too well,
The picture just spring out of the oven, or is it all
The action, with the added twist of color,
That we wanted, just not to keep?

FRONTISPIECE

You want this frontispiece,
But only if it's forbidden. Otherwise
What base things do you think I am! Frontispiece
Of me hanging up on some vagrant breeze,
The rest I'll have to rely on innuendo and tears.
He comes for the rum and the roses
In his backyard. You backtrack to
A past when they were forbidden to have anything to do with each other.
A time when fronds were on the ground and snow
And ice matted the naked back.
But now is as far as it goes. Prudence says
Let's take the train to meet him at the Monaco
And afterward sit under the eaves. You want
My advice? Okay, I'll take it.
He's as adept at deviousness as you are.
You might want to rethink that decision.

The brief was for naught.
The rest, as they say, as they say, remains
In the realm of chance. If it were me
I'd opt for the purple over the gray.
The chessboard is silent. The whole of us
Loses a sense of purpose. The air is moist.

QUARTET

Always sipping a straw,
someone famous once
and now is as unknown as Hades,
though wealthy, an "Olympian."

The man said he'd achieve
soul elsewhere, though no one knew it
except those closest to him,
"close enough." The memory
of a vacant stare,
concealed, acerbic.

So it was in those moments
before we learned to balance on
the edge of sleep,
not knowing if the mood would suddenly change
in a flash. We drank the grass.

We were curious,
then afraid,
then playful,
then all of the above.
The time is up.
We belong to no grouping.
We look each other sadly in the eye.
We may be obliged to support
the rumors of our acquaintance,
but we must look the other way
for the doing. The trimmed little head
of youth, the avid absent-minded ash-balcony,
our relative pennants litter the dung-heap
in ever-more-detailed ways,
and the house where it was found
must still be standing despite the slanting
windows and squeaking gutters.
There was always more to do, with fewer
effective options. It was time to go
back in time, even though
that didn't mean going back into
an old memory. The enchanted landscape
of boy scouts was only a "v" or a dot
in some matrix somewhere, and even then
the leveling-down process still had to take place
between the legs of the present, so that no
one, including myself, came out any better for it.
I may have been less eager to comply with another's

sense of duty
in such a situation, but in the words of “The Professional”
I was faithful just then, or so it seemed, though not to the satisfaction
of voracious twin sensations, twin tunics
sizing us, and that wanting too was but one
of countless choices, all the others being rarities.
The finished product—a pencil, an envelope, something
no one has ever seen before—came to stand
on end, as though in reproach for its *raison d’être*.
The customer, confused, staggers out of the store in the dark
maddeningly, and the situation worsens.

There are shadows still, like old shadows
dusted over with a glossy sheen,
and small talk that ends in a smile
after all is said and done. The snow is real

now, but the fragile feint at the heart of everything
is only noise. Racks upon racks of ice—
they don’t care, they are not
deliberately deceptive, but something
keeps them from feeling complete
for they are not in the here and now.

I said you were all too cagey.
No thank you. The dealer undersold
the stock and there’s a shortage today.
There are cancellations and there are bootlegs.
Of what? Well, there is the fish,
that’s a yes. And the goat, well he
oversaw the gopher diorama at the suggestion of his
colleagues, but—is there,
can’t you see, the shadows, unfinished,
slickety, poised, edged with remorse?

A HELD THING

Then I said you were too far out
and that I wouldn't come round.

He loved that story, which was truth
in a nutshell, and anyway the sea
approaches, shall we say,
toward some encumbrance
to sum up its thinking? There are no shorts
any more, at least no new bikini trends.
That is, unless he got something
on his mind, something to say.

I thought the time was up
and I had intended to go, if only
to drop off the mail at the post office.
Oh, he was cagey then, but all rose petals,
a rose in the violet sky.
The office was surprisingly quiet,
though it's still not very much.

We could all go home, play
within earshot, knowing the rules don't matter
any more. The rose
wanted to know why it was OK to apply.
If it's so, then—here I go again, bringing the bench
and the dish soap. But the dish soap
isn't old enough to be dirty.
On it will depend on the fashions of tomorrow.
A sunny day iss all it needs.

Sunlight does matter,
does not care. This is true even
of pasteboard hearts as fragile
and flabby as ours, which have built
their case on the briny fallacy
(not really) and are now being tested
in court. The architects
should be ashamed—weeps to them
and us.

A MOURNING NOVEL

He said he only needed a brief epiphany
to make up his mind. It would be an evening he could let
out into the open. And lo,
hundreds of people answered the call—
some returning from a trip they had taken
that way, some returning from a long overseas
tavern where no one had ever been
lest they think they had seen all that will ever be seen
on earth, with a special lantern
for a moment, and then it was up to the actors
to choose just one black casket for themselves.
And they did, in fact, have one
that was all-black and would have had no friends
if it hadn't been for the all-hands meeting.
It's hard being in an epic and not knowing
what links to bind the hands
of the fingers, but if the present
can seduce you, even just get a handle on
the heights, and you're on the right track—
it is, in fact, all right with us.

Where are the kids now?
They could use a bath.
The grand impermanence
of the waves is seduced, it turns out,
though it couldn't have been seduced just then.
The tub is ginned up.

So, old dog, what are you going to do now?
We'll see you in court, hun. Good. The tub is ginned up.
The situation isn't so dire anymore. I'll wager the kid
who's behind you is no longer your boy.
The old proverb proved true in an inane setting.

THOUGHTS OF A YOUNG GIRL

“It is the face of summer,
the naked eye gazing out at the shore.”
It would all be just as if it were true.
The rumor mill is humming again.
And some fabulous things have been discovered.
We must stay on this course until the betting man falls.

Excellent is the snake oil, the never-ending stream
from which fragrant leaves spring.
Man must move on if he wishes to survive.
Unicyclists are spraying the penguins.

It was all a drawing on canvas that had once been.
Now the wolverines and the hyenas are suing
the coloraturas for it. You can’t
smell the Difference. No one can.

PRETTY QUESTIONS

The men are divided into two groups:
Casey and Main.

In the case of the empty suitcase
the options are nearly empty.

How Casey got his hair cut
is one of the most beautiful secrets in the world.
It belongs in a book.

The woodpile in the corner
is a question mark.

The men are trying to leave.
The doorbell always rings.
They are irate when it doesn't go off
and they are probably on to something.

ELEPHANT VISITORS

Sweet young thing: What brought you to this lonely,
unsightly corner of the earth?

Was it always a vision, some grand organizing principle
that you now recognize but that was never your conscious
experiencing any more than a distant but milky-white
moment when reflected
in a mirror? Or were
you ever a contraband to begin with,
something one has to be thrusting?

And the loveliest to forthighted
spangled eclogues are in some way to be
the descendants of those just aliens no one talks to anymore.

At Bergen-Belsen-Murmansk-Czech
("It's a pity there are no more camp counselors but
we have plans someplace else, sheltered from the elements
if you want") the visitors are forbidden to speak to the press
while the new moon is up and running but the hostile
instincts in us still are: to go on to some place,
no matter what the cost. Then you see
where the element fits in. It was not created equal.
It was built into the skyscraper
to shield itself from the elements
while the tenants drank and smoked and talked
reflexively no matter what it said,
and the dogs followed with depleted furies; it seemed
at the leash-rack where his feet should be, or where his balls should be.

These things be multiplied on earth
by the invisible hand:
bummer traffic, dim older ladies,
more faded signage on the avenue.

The posse had seen them from a safe distance
but who were they to count those who weren't
in the driver's seat? Some of 'em might have been satisfied,
put their bottles down, walked back
to the ridge that overlooks the ranch and placed
their bets on the rearing of as many calves
on this side of the deep
as will sit in the car for a couple of decades,
after which we can all go back to our homes,
sipping martinis, life being so pleasant
as it is.

UNTITLED

In my previous life I was a street urchin.
I was too young to vote in primary school.
In Year's End I found myself backstage, composing original
scores for the famous
brute species he thinks he's met.
He thinks he's found the formula
to lead his life.

To hear him complain,
read him the time
it would be to go to bed.

Ribbons were billowing down from the heavens.
That is, well, everyone else's was.
Can you still debug that one?
Extreme vetting policies were in force.
No one is allowed to work under a certain
exhibit name. The mice were chiding us
in a wood vest.

If you're interested in finance, you could ask Mr.
Berkshire.

The sun smiled on him
and the woods too.

POEM

While we were walking under the trestle
we passed a shop with a disturbing
existence in its back lots of winter
mending tools and hardware
for when it was time to strike.

It seemed more like the people
who ran the place, and were therefore also
the barmaids and tease-masters of this
dry but vibrant town we thought we had arrived in.
Speculation mounted, more rapid than before,
and by morning it was all over.

Well, let's take the first bus,
trundle down against the wind, pray
at a red-painted stone crossroads. What name does
this apply to? I shall see you there.

The coat I'd wear would be ashamed
of me.

And they grow older, you know
how much of a classless creature they are.

I would just take a walk.
Grow some more, talk with someone.

TOTAL ECLIPSE OF THE HEART

They always win. That's obvious. But you look at them after the first wild laugh, and then they are gone. No one is interested in catching them, even at the risk of having its immobility come to seem a reproach, as it were—an occasion for striking the mother-of-pearl facade in some fresh unsuspectingness.

The north faces a constant billing, though—as in this local business the joke is on the other side and we have to figure out a way to have our concerns heard without creating the appearance of a rupture. Our identities are never addressed as a resemblance to glory, or obsessed with a lauding spiral that promotes public relations. What happened in any era is no matter for concern even for the present. What happened is that the moment embodied everything that was wrong, and that this way of doing so, like a parachute and so on, was the appropriate immersive medium for finding out what is in essence wrong, and bringing it home like a hidden message to you.

The vehicle of this nightmare is you, so that the shocking details can scare you now, but you are safe because you have been kept in captivity by liberals for so long. As long as you live your life as you can manage it, you can forget what broke it—the lifetime of misanthropy before it turned into this. And you go on being a target of curiosity because you are the under one, but not the cause.

Everything says that you have to live for a certain time and then you are free to grow and make mistakes again.

Yet, you see, nothing in this is going to be able to harm you. The eyes of the tree, halfway between here and the sun, knowing itself, known as Ali Baba, known for his gentle kindness, known for the accurate application of small artillery on imagined portions of Russia, known for putting a horse in a helmet and driving it iron-clad, all while looking straight ahead, like a pilgrim above the mills.

Once, you were in this and it seemed to succeed. Then the towns got quieter, and the original leather roadsters went away.

All the little trains now

in the gray, rubbery welter
of the sky are here to remind us of the great times
they had. We thought we'd been cheated
on by our father, our grandfather, the chattels in his house.
He'd (for the printer)...
Shed with regret, he'd say.

THE PSYCHIC SPIRIT

If all there is to be done
at the moment, why, Father Time will do it
his way, and we'll go down to the sea
as though we never had lied,

because that's the way we wanted it to be.

Just as waves are anchored in the Golden
pool of waters, I see you
with the eyes of a fish.
I think I can speak for the music
we're not getting too close to.
Father will graciously
take a vacation from here.
We'll go on the safest way.

And we'll sing a song that I
wrote, after all the other ones.
I think it's safest.

A PACT WITH SULLEN DEATH

Clearly the song will have to wait
Until the time when everything is serious.
Martyrs of fixed eye, with a special sigh,
Set down their goads. The skies have endured

Too long to be blasted into perdition this way,
And they fall, awash with blood and flowers.
In the dream next door they are still changing,
And the wakening changes too, into life.

“Is this life?” Yes, the last minute was too—
And the joy of informing takes over
Like the crackle of artillery fire in the outer suburbs
And I was woken by the examiner,
“You are the best of the bunch. How come no contestant
Has ever won?” “I have no reason to compete,
Since I have done all I can for you.
Perhaps my blond head has won. Perhaps I am superior,
Beyond all dreams and conscience, to all that was
On our last journey, and won.”

The day comes for me with the wine and pastry
It was so important not to mention, and now I must, just
To be there beside you, sheltered from the others,
On your level. That’s all I ask.

THEY DON'T JUST GO AWAY, EITHER WAYS YET, EAST OF THE MOUNTAINS

Until we get down there it will be a mystery
How they can live without her there are always
Needs to be met, and immediately
The psalmist thinks of his steed.
How many times have they sung to it
And how many times have they sung to it
Even as children it had seemed all
That would control it, now it seems not so
Well, but who knows, perhaps for the better
Because now it seems like it will all
Come tamely to life, as a fowl
Will when food is on the table
And the wine sours toward the end.

BOGUS INSPECTIONS

The morning of school started unseasonably,
With thunder and rain pounding the sky.
Pelicans flapped, and the huge, seedy mess
Underneath. But the principal may have known that
By now, and let it slip through his fingers.

All around us plague and plague
Seeming to emanate from some porthole or other,
But the poisonous glare of a sun kept it
Apart. A child with a smudge
On her forehead would be tempted
To gesture for the eye at a cousin,
But that was another story.
For now it was best to forget what it was and
To embrace the ghost of ragged old things,
The houses, cottages, everything that was
So near and so brown.

So much has happened since I was little
That I can scarcely remember when I was last here
With these red shoes on,
And the bell ringer tinkled in the still-blue
Sky. To be in a fight
Again, to go over the wall
Would be suicide.
But there was one thing the boy
Noted on his way to school: "No dogs Allowed."

Now there were no more waves
In the harbour or the grass at the edge
Of the swamp, which is why
The old picture is no longer visible

It seems it grew up with the light
Now lost, with much of its former self.

It had decided to celebrate the season
With a little black dress
And little green hat with a green bow.
Invent a new hat and give everyone their presents

So that the whole village, bright in the early sunshine
That just keeps coming on, more and more,
Like a pestle and harp, though kind
And all-purpose, so that the little girl can read her poem.

YOU, MY ACADEMY

Maybe untwine my words
With the perfume of woods
Or the spit of birds, the spit of all mankind.
So much that is separate
Is the perfume of all mankind.
He pointed with his pointer at the air.
There was a sound, or motion, beyond this point
That we might say more freely now,
And still your story would still be

You first, then me. And we would all profit from knowing you
By this time. The nose on the face of the tallest
Tree in the forest broke into a smile. That roadbed
Beside a gate, and all you cared about was how
The snow would hold up, and how the little ferry boat
Would keep up with you and the other prisoners.

But on the day he came back the other prisoners
Wanted to throw the book at him. You see they
Might have been after you, that day. "For you
Not to know you."
So I became as one who in hope
Of finding you again followed after you
To unknown hails, which the wind picked up.
The sky was white as paper, and somewhat transparent.
On the ground there were white flowers,
And in the barn a white roebuck that cawed.
I want the flowers, the roebuck. I
Am willing to swear that if heaven is gracious
I shall be led away from you
Into a chamber far below,
And that there is a flower,
A white one, that does say I
Want the flowers, the roebuck."

Heaven is gracious, and far.
We must travel on,
Through blizzards and desertions,
And all shall be asunder
In the meaning of this:
We must first trick the sense into staying
So as to be skulking around the stars,
And then look back at the statue of Mercury.

THE BLESSING OF AMERICA

And as you hold
The hand of honor, tread
The grass, the chaff,
Perplexed by your accent
Thought I might have struck
Under the stairs . . .

Under the circumstances it made sense
To stay home. The sea

Was there, green as a cloak.
And I said, if it pleases all my constructions
To collapse, and if that water
Leaves my bare mound with my toe
There will be no further occasion
For games, betting,
And the lines of division
Beyond the great waterway.

And he (she) said, "If it pleases all my constructions
To collapse, and if that water
Leaves my bare mound with my toe
There will be no further occasion
For games, betting,
And the lines of division
Beyond the great waterway."

And he (she) said, "If it pleases all my constructions
To collapse, and if that water
Leaves my bare mound with my toe
There will be no further occasion
For games, betting,
And the lines of division
Beyond the great waterway."

The two mountains
Laughing at the sun
Are a flat sheet of water
Stippled with moonlight.

Are a flat sheet of water
Stippled with moonlight.
Still the air is grossly negligent:
It does not know, it cannot know,
That the dish of milk is broken.
It does not know, it cannot know,
That the dish of milk is broken.

Yet it knows, instinctively, that the milk
Is spoiled, that it must be remembered.
Therefore the child's song
Must be remembered with all the stars of the sky
In a harmony of duelling glory
For the peaceful appetites of children
And all appetites to young adults
For young appetites
For anything of the kind, though, oddly enough, none
Of us has ever tasted a quartet
On equal footing with the great waterway.

Yet it knows, instinctively, that the milkman's
Pterygonzola is inferior
To the darkest and driest night
And knows this too, as though "evil
Could not know good," and so
Bubbles the blue dam and steppe
With the moon and stars, the night
And the plains with a riper, graven appearance
Because of this invisible constriction.

Yet all excess is allowed,
As nature makes it known.
All grow anxious for the almanac
And for meat that cannot be had
As long as those with the moon
And the sun mean it and those
Not in love with it
For who moves through the house
Wishing only the rough outline
Of what lie hidden
There, like a moonlit city
With many moving parts
That cannot be seen because
They are not visible
And their movement leaves
The outlines of old houses, barns,
Anything that can be conceived of as
not planning or planning a twist

But when the day arrives for him
To take the piss, and the cat
Approaches an alarmed shoal:
Something is definitely not right,
There are sound diversions in the dark,
A hawk in the meadow, and the shellfish
Press girders as one after the other. A siege

Is definitely going on, and within
That framework one can live and love without worrying
About the ceiling or the walls.
And when the crows return for one
It is on the same wavelength as before,
The same holy condescension toward animals
And computers. In one way or another
We have all traveled together,
Wished to return to find one's self
Dependent and waifed at every second.
So it is with him that the world
Will often tell one in its subtle allusions
That it is he for whom the line
Was drawn, and whose it was his effort
To draw. The point is, he
Can still play and is better for it,
Better for us, although we all
Live with him and know him better
Than the tepid hedonists who flocked
To imagine him some day, but he
Was all along what this scene was:
A scene of inadvertence, a chance
Shade. In the light
Of the intense dream he chooses again
To be just, careful, careful not to offend
What is so near and comical in the sunlight.
And the lilies, the mulatrics
And the damned triplets obey
His every command, even if they don't follow
Very closely the instructions.
He is just, and you are too:
Too much is written about men like
What they were like before, and too little
About what they are today.
Yet they can still do good deeds,
Relieve the poor, clothe the naked
And go on a little wild with wild ideas.
He is just, and you are too:
Too much is written about men like
What they were like before, and too little
About what they are today.
Yet they can still do good deeds,
Relieve the poor, clothe the naked
And go on a little wild with wild ideas.
A year away from the pigpen,
And look at him. The one who was
Never much for conversation turns

His back on us and everything
Is pitch black outside. So, I say,
Stay out of harm's way, but please
Come in later. We'll try again.

The black dial has taken
Over his forehead. The gesture is
Not like a fortune, it's black,
Firm and steady. He's lost
The child he was, leading me
To this, a moment later.

SOMETHING SIMILAR

I watch the evening news.
The latest atrocity: heads
Fleeing the ablaze buildings.
Elsewhere, architecture is brutal.
Our history is still
To be rediscovered, a thread
Of ashes among the sun's corrugations.
In other words, why do you live
In the wound, lest you forget
The history of strangers as it unfolds
In ever-thickening clouds,
That brings sleep to these empty,
Meek nights.

Let the fire go Anarchi,
Fire in the ashes, for just deserts
Are an abhorrence to the living.
Therefore do your gardening
In cold daylight, the aleator
On the wall of a house.

WET CASEMENTS

The article I'd like to read
Held in the original, with his anvil
And spear point. That was before he took a—
A sudden fit of pique.
St. Patrick's Day is today
The third largest day of the week.
The leaves are a semipermanent cover
For what's really seen
When the street rumbles to life.

A foolish boy came to pay the piper.
The slab of stone he
Painted, and artfully, with the help
Of a stuffed panda and a miniature donkey.
Another day we read the news.
That large drop of water
Poured from a well over
Shoulder-height into the eye of the valley.
Another massacre. That cartoon dog

Was patted on the back of head
For all the days he didn't stray.
Which, of course, was the wrong one.

All art is relative
To what animals
You and they look like
After the farmer has plowed the field
All alone and thirsty.

The stone he placed
Thought it was artifice, but it
Wasn't. The following day the birds
Again banded together, fought back
The tears that had been sapping
The morning before.
The following day you rose early
To prepare the surprise.
The garden, already half-past four
With stars in the sky, is still at bay
With respect to what we two think.

The news was always different.
Now it's the height of fashion.
What were we taught all our lives
To ignore or suborn?
The sapphire eyes of woodland

Reflecting away, almost apologetically,
At this distance from anything.

The night is a sentinel.
The naked form
Painted bright colors, like a boy
With a feather booby.
The boy seemed to think it was art.

He began abruptly to weep.
Worse, he said, than the other kind.
The other was artless
But at the same time detached.
He never cut any corners.
Today, the other, half-past four,
The gloved hand of the window, now gone,
Painted bright colors, like a schoolmaster
On a sabbatical.
And the blue chair
Fashionably uppity, for a change.

All around us tides, provocation and provocation,
Waterspout and flood, construction and demolition,
These and other things too in short swelling
To be broached, broached
Through the window.
The song, heard through a megaphone,
Prepends a quiet future.

A PACT WITH SULLEN DEATH

Clearly the song will have to wait
For the hour it enters gets moody,
For the metronome to engage the melodic
Passive voice of reason, in the hall.
Thus, all options are on the table:
 burning man,
 squirt of Leuchter Grassi,
 redekker.

The song also foretold this,
That the thunder-god would one day
Climb aboard the ruins
Of that otherwise excellent city.
Thus, all areies are freshening up.
And us, like scenes from a baroque or burlesque opera,
Frozen and/or too tidy to stand up,
Spotty and out of focus, till the right historian
Produces the proper antidote: the ripe ambiguity
Of not having done anything to deserve it.

A SPARKLER

The electric colors
were more intense then. You could
see to which lamp-parts
I belong:
a bramble in a parking lot

Or a seagull in a suburban garden.
They were so... impatient.

We drank miscellaneous items
on the website.
The jar of wine tried to hide in the page.
I can't stay here any longer
I have to go to the bathroom. Oh no you don't.
We'll go somewhere else, Arkansas
or some other place with less to see.
Go on now the swim coach
will be in shortly. I don't want to hold your hand

I guess. You're mine to manage the propriety
while yet unchallenged. Then when you get home
in 28 minutes flat the rules won't apply
and you can go and knock yourself out really.
You're a handsome coach,
the swimming pool familiarly writhes

in the wind. There is a lot of colored
imagery to sort out and sift away,
I mean we must go where it wants us to go.

Son, I have a pretty good idea
of where we are. But I want you to stay right here.
I really do.