

PERICOPES

2009

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Pericopes are cuttings, passages, snippets often taken harshly out of their context. I always think of them as sources of new growth, single stems with ragged ends where they were cut to be placed in the proper medium to form new roots and grow over time. Some turn out to be merely ornamental and destined for an opening, some color, a short life, and a dessicated demise.

Archibald MacLeish wrote that he hoped to leave behind a few poems that would be hard to get rid of. These *pericopes* will likely be easy in the going, but since they have now been cut away from me, I have nothing more to do with them.

A number of these cuttings are about boys, a group who are having a renaissance in the West. They have always had a hard time of it and deserve this special attention.

All of them are love poems, since each was written with someone in mind.

BOYS, BROTHERS AND MEN

MILD WHITMAN BOYS

Boys of all ages
parading *that* they are
play out their specimen beauty
of long-forgotten shame.
They pose even in motion
walking in tense iconic isolation,
only contemplable but untouchable,
defined to a mechanical precision.
Who are their never-ending, defining judges?
Who demands their immaculate self-conception?
Why their body's execution?

HANDFUL

"He's a handful!" she yammed, as he twisted,
and shouts shocked his three-year-old frame,
undone by unminding delays,
the rush and crush and push to sit,
rude shuffles and elbows,
a bewildering race,
even for a little boy.
He raged to ten thousand,
yelling at thunderheads,
got redder through ascent.

"Sit still!" implored Mama,
ordering feeling to stop.
His screams chilled bad coffee.
Turned outside in,
he raged and raved
and danced on his back.

"Holy terror!" she murmured
in disgust of his strength,
boy will and arching back,
and tears pouring out
like unwanted rain
on a humid day.
"What does he want?" asked dads fore and aft,
unable to cry with him.

But nothing worked:
not wordy cajoling,
deft baby cooing,
bribes and confessions,
then threats' desperate measures,
even thoughts of a smothering.
More good-enough mothering
and seminar knowing.
All came to nothing.

But what she forgot,
his being a boy,
was a handful of tenderness
on his screaming heart.

(Delta Flight 1160, Halloween 1999)

THAT MOTHER

When that mother hit her son
dead center,
the heel of her hand
dislodged a million stars.
All fifty pounds of reeling shame,
his wren-bone chest held fast
perhaps from practice,
but the blow done broke his heart
to shatters,
and made him first a hater,
and then a sadder boy forever.
The fierce, deep breath he drew
held back one tear,
just one he kept for her
who drove him out and gave him home.
Now on his feet,
young wide-eyed Oedipus
from here on out is on his own.

(February 17, 2000)

A WOMAN AND HER SHADOW

I first saw her lanky
no-nonsense hair,
tied close to flow long,
the girlish hair
of a tired, lopsided,
middle-aged woman
with her teenage son.

She walked, one step up,
another down,
as though with each
she jumped the curb
on a broken wheel.
With pained awkwardness,
and already old for her years,
she refused his arm,
a shade darker than her face.
They never smiled.

And then I knew.
The reason for her gait
and shadowing skirt
was his flawless,
serious face.

(August 23, 2000)

THIS YEAR

Leaves getting smaller,
I wonder:
Kids' lashes longer.

Fall closes darker.
Time makes me wander.

What bother, the anger,
I wonder.
Why posture and measure the other?

Fast pleasures follow.
No time to wander.

SHORTY KNOWS

A blonde, second-grade Pan in training,
Shorty never rests.
He enters rooms backwards,
eyes rolling epileptically ceilingward.

Shorty never sleeps.
At night, he roams alone
at loopy mosquito speed
deserted spots
and dark-eyed streets.
A true city Puck,
he makes dust whorl
at the corners.

Exhausted by seven years of delight,
his mother knows better
than to look him in the face.
Long since dead
of smiling back,
she's learned to watch him in a mirror.

An older taller boy
with long impassive face,
comes brothering him around the corner,
offers his hand for slap practice,
buys him a slice and calls his bluff,
and holds his hand like a lover.
They cross at Charles Street,
nowhere to go on a thick, close
July Village night.

Shorty never smiles.
No need to be happy he,
when one sees things
no other needs or wants.

Shorty stands up to gravity
and where he stands,
the orientation of Earth is nonsense.
He knows the position we are in.
Shorty knows.

COMINGS AND GOINGS

He looks as though he was
hung up to dry
the night before,
a clothespin at the top
of each shoulder.
Surely, this is why he walks
on the balls of his feet;
or is it that his body
is growing up to fight the sky?

One small muscle
runs round his upper arm
like an asp,
but oh he can throw
a glowering fist
against the night
that guards against
his comings and goings,
his goings and comings.

(December 16, 1999)

WHAT A LOOK IN THEIR EYES REVEALS

fastdraw
toughguy
sneerdrawl
hardwon
manhood

can'ttell
won'ttell
makeme
tryme
daddyfrown

shameless
softplace
roughshake
knockdown
tenderloin

dareme
scareyou
jocktang
ruggedtone
starfire

longpass
sharpshot
moonstruck
mummy'sboy
conman
loveyou
fearme

faroff
longpass
heartthrob

hideout
treehouse
loverboy
pipsqueak
superman

nighttime
wrongtime
dreamdrawn
moshdrunk
hotrodder

looselimbed
hunchheavy
spitfire
redragged
breakdancer

hapless
dadless
hatless
homeless
cowboy

(February 21, 1999)

L-TRAIN DRUMMER

Every-day improvisation
rave and rage
deafen skinny jazz boy.
Little by little
he hears less
as I see more
of his smiling duet
with noise and L-train ozone.
He riffs a banging chant
of ruckus, buckets,
and one dismembered drum.
Everyone cheers.
He touches sticks,
flicking cues of freedom.
"I am who I am!"
he shouts at the tracks,
nervous, pale, alive since the 60s.
Tick-a-tick, tick-a-tick,
tick-a-tick – ah -- ah -- ah – bam!

I want to live his life.
Where does he feed?
Where does he roost,
when the girls have gone,
and ageing hippies in blues attire
hold their wondering in check?
Tick-a-tick, skinny stick,
tick-a-hit, tick-a-tick – ah ah ah – bam!

There is no underground to join
his jive to my travel,
his age to my lines (if I had any),
no bridge to ease across the difference,
oh my pale, shocky son.
Tick-a-tock, tick-a-tick,
take-a-hit, take-it-back – ah ah ah – bam!

THE SWAN BOY OF JACKSON SQUARE PARK

I saw him first as he came to rest,
crazy-feathered,
beside five sweating homeless men,
pigeons devouring rodenticide,
the neighborhood transgendered sunning themselves,
and the one remaining butterfly
below Central Park.
Amid sheets of wind-ripped, airborne *Times*
he settled like calm
over an ageing woman.

Prep-school uniform
white socks furled to the ankles,
a huge pink shirt
loose and open all night,
thick brown Holden hair,
he had a once-trashed copy of *Catcher*
tucked under his wing.
But preferring to *be* the book,
he kissed it on the spine
and made a nest of pages torn
from its moist insides.

A gawky Plisetskaya,
the kid drew up one leg,
then the other under it,
and pulled it all together—
book, head, wings, pigeons, me—
and like a dying swan
reposed in alert avian sleep.

Over the edge of a Wyeth field
his singing wove the waving rye
and dreamed him through
its long oneiric drift.
He shocked awake and shook his head
like a rain-drenched spaniel.
Wind from the Hudson
unerringly parted his hair midline,
he stretched and yawped
a gullish silent howl aloft,
and something vivid summoned.

FOR ALL THE WORLD

For all the world,
he looked like he was hanging
on a cross.
Arms akimbo,
draped across the back
of a plastic bench,
his girl at right angles to him
twisting his hair
between her gentling fingers,
suddenly his head slumped forward
over his meager chest.
His legs turned in unison
from side to side
as she tried to contain him
now with words,
later perhaps with wishes.
His body spoke assent,
his eyes, now closed,
said nothing.
He seemed to be dying,
I tell you,
in some unfamiliar way.
As she leaned in further,
her whirling hair
threw small shadows across his lap.
Each time a shadow struck
he shook in fearful exaltation,
concealing small messages.
At last, his joints gave way.
His silent places spoke
and like some broken dragonfly
by a western Pennsylvania country pond,
weakened by light and gravity
and bound to a short life,
he pulled the hood of his gray jacket
over his head,
ready now to die,
fell off the rackéd road,
snapped but saved,
and broke nature's promise
whose wish had put him there.

TO GUYS WHO HAVE NEVER GONE HUNTING

Set passion deep
and made for roaming,
their hunter's eyes
are now the haunted eyes
of days near closing.

There in the glow,
dug deep and longing,
fire hides
and burns its owners.

But will they see,
before time rounds the bend
and breaks their joy
and puts it down,
that love has made them
love themselves too little?

Or will they leave us then tonight,
all dulled and pointless
without their light,
to wonder just
what could have happened,
if only they had not gone hunting?

i. vena basilica¹

The handsome way
drains daydreams
from his fingers'
pause and wishes.
The beating heart
is far from known
to the drumming palm,
its course and pulse.

Hard pressed
to feel its source
enclosing, webbing,
the trembling fist
will sell his soul
for a well-made arm.
The ventral smoothness
of a blood-route's bed
betrays the limits
of bone and terror
curl and press,
where chocolate smeared
and roamed the boy's short arm
only a week or two ago.

Learning the way of the shaken hand,
the pinch and probe and wary slip
of too much lingering,
the strum and handling,
holding, petting,
figuring, beckoning,
these lessons leave behind their traces
in the prominent way
now thickened too by brushing hair
and stroking touch,
the signature of strength,
begotten of pleasure.
A hand pulls back the hood
and grasps and groans in solemn tones.
The sacred aperture opens shy to praise.

Way of the royal house of Alexander,
you are the archon, prince and emperor
of much choice treasure,
and ore-stream of the Nile.

¹ Basilic vein, rains the medial aspect of the dorsal venous plexus of the hand. Runs along the posteromedial surface of the forearm and then runs forward onto the anterior surface distal to the elbow. It is joined by the median cubital vein and then runs superficially medial to biceps brachii muscle and perforates the deep fascia about midway up the arm where it runs medial to the brachial artery. Joins with the brachial veins and becomes the axillary vein at the lower border of teres major muscle.

ii. vena cephalica²

The overbrimming emblem of manness
is carved from headwater
and moves rarely made.
Aiming for the chin
it swells from climbing
and points to the mouth,
to say I cannot speak, feed me.
Crawl inside the darkened word.
Desire is tense in that topped taut ridgerunner
east of the heart
just under the edge of dominance.

² The cephalic vein begins in the radial part of the dorsal venous net-work and winds upward around the radial border of the forearm, receiving tributaries from both surfaces. Below the front of the elbow it gives off the vena mediana cubiti, which receives a communicating branch from the deep veins of the forearm and passes across to join the basilic vein. The cephalic vein then ascends in front of the elbow in the groove between the Brachioradialis and the Biceps brachii. It crosses superficial to the musculocutaneous nerve and ascends in the groove along the lateral border of the Biceps brachii. In the upper third of the arm it passes between the Pectoralis major and Deltoideus.

iii. vena jugularis externa³

The short answer to old men's rages
is the first to speak in infant screams.
The way shows strain and flow,
the urge below, the tide of grins.
Crying's fluent icon,
the tanned prominence of boy-pleas
and tamed seductions
is soon cut free from recollection.

Now appears the broad rack and
wingspread proudly splayed.
See the mark of how he spoke and swore,
a boy who took his grinning power seriously.

In the sudden breach of an early bright
before the slay, he arched its back
like the hump of a heel-gashed worm,
and shook, engorged, and gasped.

This is the path from ear to throat,
pumping rhythmic eye-thoughts
to his heart's own well-known Pascalian reason.
Consider its rushing speech and serpent mark.
The silence men perform,
their birdy spread and wingless flight,
the late or never smile,
shames standard syllables,
and underground, the stream
heads north to Orion.

³ The external jugular vein receives the greater part of the blood from the exterior of the cranium and the deep parts of the face, being formed by the junction of the posterior division of the posterior facial with the posterior auricular vein. It commences in the substance of the parotid gland, on a level with the angle of the mandible, and runs perpendicularly down the neck, in the direction of a line drawn from the angle of the mandible to the middle of the clavicle at the posterior border of the Sternocleidomastoideus. In its course it crosses the Sternocleidomastoideus obliquely, and in the subclavian triangle perforates the deep fascia, and ends in the subclavian vein, lateral to or in front of the Scalenus anterior. The external jugular vein varies in size, bearing an inverse proportion to the other veins of the neck, it is occasionally double.

iv. vena saphenica magna⁴

As rarely seen as touched
along inner verges,
it peeks below the gymnast's stretch,
the vaulter's launch,
freestyle flutter, the dancer's thrust.
This is the way that drain the toes,
the scarry knees, the boggy thighs.
Upward bound,
it strains into the trivium
of desire, wet and waste.
All converge deep in love's body,
briefly showing up, then losing face
like an off-course root
briefly out of its depth.
The inverted why spins out its imperative
where body meets flesh
in chemical devotion,
urge and submission.
The softest place to write about
is where the groaning hums
that mimics pain,
unsettles smiles, the underblush of joy,
relief and shame.

⁴ The great saphenic vein, the longest vein in the body, begins in the medial marginal vein of the dorsum of the foot and ends in the femoral vein about 3 cm. below the inguinal ligament. It ascends in front of the tibial malleolus and along the medial side of the leg in relation with the saphenous nerve. It runs upward behind the medial condyles of the tibia and femur and along the medial side of the thigh and, passing through the *fossa ovalis*, ends in the femoral vein.

GIACOMETTI'S BROTHER

All my life, Diego,
I've drawn the same young form between my fingers:

dusky, somber, tenuous lines of life,
your body's long, invisible lines of heat.

I worked slight streaks into bronze flesh,
stringent, compelling metallic strength,
still, as slight as memory.

All my life, Diego,
I've worked your face with a feathery brush,

to shape your shadowed eyes,
and cast around one finger
the ring that married you to your smile.

NIGHT CRAWLERS

One night ago like this,
weather-heavy with meteor
before the weather was numbers,
we lay for hours on the grass
waiting for the burning
up there, just one rare streak
like the luck of being a child.
Finally it came,
as unforgettable as the longest
thunderstorm on record in town,
like the real first coming—
last things, what's immemorial
in Greensburg, Pennsylvania.

But I was getting to worms,
those thick spies from earth
that follow heavy rain
after a day of heaving storms
made my neighbor's brick house
painterly glow red at six o'clock or seven.
We gathered them for fishing.
It meant staying up later than usual,
walking softly, slowly,
reaching for the languid one,
absent-minded,
something dark emerging from dark,
swelling like the ground itself,
free in the open to stretch
and safe at last from sun and shame,
it thought, to search—but for what?
Just to be caught?
It knew the robins were asleep.

I had it handily, held on to one—
“Got it!” I whispered—
eased it out under dim flash-
light, gently, careful not
to tear the slimy thing
from its tendency to hide,
stay deep and fast,
and unconnected in truth to anything
but rooted all the same somehow
in everything.

We had all seen the few unlucky ones
caught at dawn,
no chance to escape by water
under cover of night,
washed out of our yard

and beached on the scarred asphalt
of McArthur Street
too far from saving cover.
There they were, exposed,
barely distinguishable from twigs,
dessicated spaghettis for the late hungry swallows
that arrived at dusk.

If I held it long enough
and didn't pull too hard,
it came free
from its subterranean someplace
deep in the turf on which
all cows are dark.

We saved them all
in a coffee-can
filled with handfuls of musty weeds
in a dark, cool place
for fishing next day,
next month perhaps.

WILLING FINALLY TO LOOK

Having been steered
by endocrine magic
into the hard world,
only as men age
do they know the body
they were as boys,
the bony knees,
the suspiciously smooth calves.

Yet as sand is firm but yielding,
so is muscle, little man.
Are you are willing, finally,
to look good?
But now it's time to be old
and you're looking really bad,
aren't you lad?

LOVE POEMS

DEAR WALT

When Jack grasps Jill,
I am there at the shoulder
that fits the hand,
at the hip or the mount
that fills the palm.

Not the curve, but the curving,
the weight, not the rest,
we long for the scanning eye.

I cheer the falling forth
of every step,
all precious balance,
last-minute save.

I sing the seeking smile,
the closing eye,
the breathing bones,
the arching back.

It is the gesture we crave,
not the fact.

(October 14, 2000)

FOR RUMI AND SHAMS

He is the treasure.
She is the vault.

She is the mouth.
He is the breath drawn in.

She speaks. He goes out
like the last light

on his block in the middle
of her night.

She is the moving target;
he, the arrow's sound

fired at dawn.
He is the prisoner who drops.

She is the reach.
He is the arm.

He is the boy who ran away.
She stayed home.

He is the longing;
she, the lure

that skims his stream,
running east.

She is the sentence;
he, the word not spoken.

He is the secret;
she, the charm

hung loosely round his neck,
the jewel in his throat.

She is the search.
He is the thought.

She is the season.
He, the angle of light.

She is the board;
he, the game

played out in waning light,

in muffled sound.

He is the spoken line;
she, the play.

He, the living will, the testament,
she is legacy and love.

She is the window.
He is the space

between the mountain
and the table where she sits,

the view over the grass,
the scene she sets.

He is the missing chair.
She is the broken door.

He is the swollen sash;
she, the staring mirror.

She is the solemn shadow.
He is the stain on the floor,

the burgundy mark
of her lover's blood.

She is the flowing air;
he, the scent it carries.

She is the heavy pitcher;
he, the half-empty glass

full of waiting,
rich with saving.

She is the sign to drink;
he, the broken promise

she knew he would make
and pass along to others.

And when you close this book,
she is the page

and he the word
that she wrote down,

to say that he was there
for her to tell:

This poem wrote itself.
I never saw his face.

-- March 23, 2001

THE TABLE (I)

Tonight we spend the last currency
earned one evening months ago.
It ends now that time has been
all but swallowed down with cups
of Russian tea and springwater ice.

I already miss you,
who conceived me a surprise on the grass
one summer afternoon in the country.

Marvel me with your voice in this old house,
and my story will tell
how the light in her kitchen
was oh so clear that night
around the table where Druids worshiped once.

You fashioned me a table,
the ache another left behind,
and a bench on which to seat a constellation.
The evening was long,
the lines on Whitman's face wanted to be touched,
ageing lines like distant trees
guarding the falling rain outside the window.

Listen now, and hear the tap of twigs
laid side by side on a light branch, I said,
as your arm made a home on the table beside me.
Wrestle me with your eyes when I hesitate.
Press your face against the oak,
where the world is only a disc
and small ships are forever falling off it,
lost for looking.

Call me friend finally,
when it's later, closer,
to say how the summer went,
when autumn and you together
were earth's one gender.

The table lay somehow in those trees then
and made its rest there,
but then the tree was felled.
Last out the night.
The pause upon words makes little sense,
making me, in knowing you,
a welcome guest.

THE TABLE (II)

Your eyes blinked slowly.
Full night entered them,
all that remained of the bright day
living in them again.

They spoke as though your words
had taken up new life in the heavy
oak table we rested against
facing each other,
our arms just touching,
the near light of two small candles
pouring out in cupfuls onto my hands.

We talked of meeting another time
to play on earthy silt,
while the moon washed the road
we sometimes had walked along
all night together.

Then you leaned in to me
to better hear what I would not say,
and in that pressing summer air,
I turned down my head
like a rain-soaked comfort
and began the dream
that only the seasons themselves
could bear up my face to look at yours again.

HOW I WOULD WALK UP TO YOU. WHAT I WOULD SEE. WHAT I WOULD SAY.

Your eyes are mythic,
wild and darting,
set pale in a face
already let go of innocence.
Those eyes that see mine
test my smile.
They've seen smiles that say nothing.

Crouched behind the dusty table,
you know nothing of this,
the tested smile, nearing passion,
and wait without a way
to be sure just what I mean.

IN MY OWN WAY

In my own way,
I've not refused,
not walked away
from that image of you
coming up below me
in the darkroom tray.
Close as you came,
I didn't walk away,
as though from something ending.

Now in this locale,
one put by for friends,
in my own way
I now refuse
and walk away.

THE FIRST SUMMER

Your twentieth year ends today.
The sun stands still,
grows brighter.
You pass the pitched
top of the earth.
A rare wide smile
ranges its limits across your face.
Houses you dreamed about
call you in,
to come on, rest easy.

CUTTING LILACS

Let me put it this way:
When you're past your prime
and it's time for lilacs
the first warm day of the year,
call me long distance.

You'll narrowly miss me.
I'll be out with the cat,
cutting a bough to bring inside.
Ring ten times.
I'll miss you all the same.

IN THE GALLERY
(Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh)

We decided to meet at the "Water Lilies."
I wondered how you would look
at the milky edge of that maze of galleries,
how your voice would sound in that light.
Would I know your footsteps there,
where a camera shutter explodes?

It seems we talked together on that pond
last year, drifting under the heavy sun,
and wondered how we would meet in a gallery somewhere,
our contact hanging in the air like an Impressionist painting
for questioning eyes and the relentless white surround.

Your staring eyes took the blue from hidden flowers
buoyed up by islet leaves and steam
as thick as heavy cream.

INCANTATION. LEFT AND WRITE

for T.C.

I imagine my hands together on your chest
forming a closed bicuspid valve above your heart,
you standing there, tense,
untouched by what haunts us both.

I write with the right
but think with the left,
and you at home under both
the words and the thoughts.
I watch the rise and fall of your heart's bony cage
as it steadies, is regular, rests.

I couldn't begin to imagine my hands
on the soft skin of your belly
with its flush of hair warding off
the stranger's gaze or grasp.

I am there not to be seen,
like the moon's other side
or the inward life.
I cannot imagine being there.
What would you feel?
I merely want your rest.

– March 3, 2002

M'AMUSE (ADMISSION, CONTACT AND PRAYER)

What I want from you--
manic, wonder-struck--
I finally admit,
is all I want for you:

loves of every kind
and a great heart,
as that Aristotle fellow had it;

your hand from time to time
plunged deep
into a mountain stream
like the one my father showed me once
that flowed the same
no matter how cold the air
or warm the ground,
July or December,
year-round, always there,
always the same;

tenderness as touching
as that day in May
when you stretched your arm
across the vaporetto's comfortless backrest,
the rest so safe and close,
and we so far from home;

and what speaks out
in tiny wordless, worrisome winks
(those grasping spasms around your eyes)
of someone who knows
but cannot say
what hit you one day
when you stood up to pray:

Robbed from an easy god,
make me a boy who knows
what he may never have,
but let me be as surely Yours
as what You want from me.

– July 25, 2003

INCIDENT IN VENICE

La Fenice had fallen again
into Socratic dumbness.
I stumbled over your shadow
along the Lido.
Nothing will hurt you, I said,
and then we walked back.
Light in the garden end of Venice
kissed the Adriatic dusk good-night again
and pushed our moment east,
death at the end of a day
in love with your boy beauty.
I stretched the point
along some hidden line of cadency
and made you my descendant.

-- June 26, 2003
Langhorne

AN EXCEPTIONAL DAY

for RAP

Because you are an exceptional day,
when I go out in you
I am almost ashamed
of the boy I briefly become again
in your light
this late clear afternoon of my life.

I remember the huge oak trees,
now gone,
at Seventh Ward School,
sacrificed by architects
for a better view of the building
like the Aztec ephebe I stared at
in fifth grade in a *Geographic* layout,
his beating heart being handed up to the gods.

And I know they will cut you down, too,
like those trees
that reached for our classroom windows
for seventy seasons.

But in the meantime
as long as the four flashing
red tower lights are there every night
in my dreams
you will be the man
I never was,
no stranger to the day like me,
the sun, where it comes from,
and where we go from here.

YOUR HAIR

How does it come to curve
just there just there and there,
elastic tempo?
Barely audible ringlets wave to me.

So it would grow for miles and miles,
so long so long as left untouched.

February 17, 1999

TWO OF THEM

She saw his hide and secret sense
and smiled.

Out of sight,
he wouldn't blush.

That was his need.

Inviting his, her caution-
starving patience
staving off the liquid creed
(waiting none the less)
that was her gift,
revealed to him alone,
to stay that way.

Could she make him smile?

The only chance past banter
to bring him close who wanted eyes
and nothing more.

Was that too little to dare,
to ask?

WHERE IT GOES, WHAT IT COMES TO

for M.G.

"O love, how did you get here?"

- Sylvia Plath, "Nick and the Candlestick"

Towards the end,
the aides from Tender Loving Care
stole her costume jewelry,
but left the first editions of Cummings,
the score from Rachmaninov,
the Tchelichev,
even the drawing by Ripley
showing the close of winter
as the end of an extended Broadway run.

And when she died,
what became of me,
my voice, the long look
that finally turned me on?
Like Britten's Polish Phaedrus,
when you go,
I go, too.

What remained of her
was the serious black wood,
three sleigh bells on the inside door,
always warped,
a leaning hitching post,
the recipe for English Monkey.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN?

Because somehow you have news
the world will never end
and do not know the lie
being young has told everyone
since childhood's invention

of your kind, slanted mouth
square swinger's smile
and told your days are long,
no urgent need to re-
ply, only want of release is due
that must come now
come now come now, my darling,
and, so, done come, so done

you are merely relieved
here find the fresh splash gasp
enough to overleap the streets
expanding rising rivers
wetted down like a film set
to make the image brighter.

Let us all wait for you
we suffer fondly,
fools of love, there—the word—
I said it, there I said it
quickly, gladly
the longest word there is
that scares the biggest man,
the most seductive one
while you, friend, you man-
ufacturer of desire
are working over-
time.

You liver of life
you heart gut balls
huge feet, wrists wide enough
to span their fingers
through shocks of a grassfield
or hair, respectively,

parting the ways we look
at each other and you
like one of Chillida's wind-combs
pink lungs, lunging blood
beating plunging into my brain's *sulci*
the *corpus cavernosum*
better known as Plato's cave

the wilding pulses globs aloft
that keep you awake

or diving into deeps
fishers' bottoms, hunters' nights
stars
invisible October clouds
all filled with coursing caution,
blood lymph cum
starry ambergris,

very starry sprays
ambush groanings
comings, goings
and all of this in *your* good time.

Deadly deep like dear Walt's
wisdom-guarded nest, its eggs
draw up into your devil's chill
your billion children swarming,
damned up in temperate silence.

There's always time
when you know you are a believer.

I know that this is
far from fair, but I
for one cannot pretend
I do not know,
how life has lied to you
and what that does to me.

There is no sense in this
(another lie)
that we might give it
to make a way,
make way for you,
and the others,
the rest to come.

Everyone lies about this
without fail.

HOW YOU KNOW YOU ARE IN LOVE

When you want to count the nape hairs
leaning over his collar
or comb the feather waving
up to his wrist.
Men must have walked
on the sides of their hands.

I COULD BE NEAR

You had the window,
I the aisle,
an indivisible stranger
between us.
I saw that I was near
as long, far off,
I did not peer,
since I could tell
to be seen in men's eyes
was like a glancing blow to you.
I saw each gazing burned you
where your image cleared,
and so I chose to burn instead
from some slight warmth
that I could feel by staying very still.
It may well be just
that heat is heard
and looks can deafen judgment,
making every word
as monstrous as the siren sound
of a Manhattan ladder truck.
I only know when I feel,
and turn senseless
when perception makes
or meets—I don't know
which—perfection.

-- American Airlines, Flight 1800, somewhere over Tennessee
Late afternoon, Friday, November 12, 2004

NOTES FOR A POEM BY MICHELANGELO

Like every maudlin one, I'm sure
that no one understands me,
and I yearn for transparency.
But I have made a calling of it,
a monastic habit.
Wanting something from one of these
boys I go in for,
out of my way for,
out into the rain for,
is wanting to be *have been*
understood at their age,
to have been understood *then*
at that age, the nice,
neat age of twenty.

I want someone
I can give things to.
This is what I am missing.
What I miss most is not
having such love returned.
Requiting love is willingness
to be gifted,
to be at ease in taking a gift.
I can spot them because
not, *as*, the people I have sent things to
enjoyed doing just that.
That's how I know I loved my mother.
But then as now,
it's always the boys,
nothing given, nothing gained.

Maybe they sense
that when I look at them
I take something from them
beauty, energy, desire,
and this they do not want to share,
and since they cannot do without it,
they take nothing from me.
It all remains guarded,
safe.

SIGHED UNSEEN

for BG

Reduced to touching youth
with our eyes,
we know full well
these fathoming brain-
betraying sneaks that
gazerape every surface light
lights up-
on are tactile organs themselves,
tactless, though, and wild,
invasive, moist-
like your eyes,
my young friend,
that oversize your face.
I am here to see you.
That is my calling
and so it seems there is
no other reason to be
on the scene
and not the seen.

Eyes do touch eyes then
after all
through the connective air
that lets it happen this way.
I lay my invisible hands of sight
unseen over that place
where the way into your mind
(some call it your brain)
is as thin as your skin is pale.

Helpless, you brush it away
not knowing what
you feel praying
over your face.
Light as shadow
grazing your hair
it was nonetheless a direct hit.
You reel from the glancing blow-
never to know what hit you.

The mystery solved,
the longing over for me for you,
when eye touches air,
touches eye.

SHORT POEMS AND LYRICS

FOUR LYRICS

I

In clouds raining on lower clouds
ice heals itself with water
that finally reaches earth.
Under the one wide-open sun,
Socrates' solar aperture is no eye
for his Alcibiades to gaze into.
The light that makes us see
first blinds us.

II

Night has the custom of waiting,
patiently staring
into another's eyes.
There is no secret,
only the fixing glance and gaze.

III

The sun returns in time.
It waits for the moon
to satisfy its boldness.

IV

A crowd of ice crystals
confounds the site
of yet one more beginning.
Who can stand it?
The eye is closed to no other's forbidding.

HAIKU

Sunrise on downtown
brick, slowly ripening orange.
A gray deafened cat.

LONG HAIKU

Sitting by the kitchen window
at one
in the morning,
frost forms slowly
on the trunk lid of my neighbor's car,
parked there since last night.
Wisps of heat from the cooling engine.

SHORT OLD SONG

Ev'ry day
I hope the night
will come.

The yellow leaves
drop down
to sweep the street.

WHERE TIME AND DESIRE CONVERSE IN RETURN
FOR WAITING THREE MONTHS TO SEE YOU AGAIN

You're *beautiful!*
Now what?

OLD MEN ALONE

Begging for words
from anyone,
money means nothing.

THE EVER SLOWER GOING OF THINGS

for MG

Things were going
so slowly,
so well,
I didn't hear the chime.
My namesake's mantle clock
rang the between time,
4 a.m., when it's neither
yesterday nor tomorrow.

THE KISS

In my mouth
where salt senses sweet
and bitterness seems
transformed, I am tasted,
and by some
time magic
desire curdles the milk in me.
I cannot feed you any more,
instead imbibe the bland,
simple baby potion
of unflavored love
and drink it in
like a rhyming mariner's mirage,
slaking the very horizon, every-
thing still between us.

THE POET

The poet knows
how things are
better said
when better left
unsaid.

TO LIFE

The only way to live with shame,
the price you pay for seeing someone
other than yourself,
is to turn yourself in to time.
Give it up!
A warrant is out for your arrest.
Let them empty your pockets
for everyone to see
what you carried close.
Stand still for the head shot.

WHAT MAKES US DIFFICULT

What makes a poem difficult
is just what makes something
difficult for us: the pivot words
both and *and*.

WHEN YOUNG

When you're young
that's just about all you have
to be, but usually
it's also all you are. All, after all,
is everything, too.

MOTHERS AND FATHERS

THE FENCE

for JJ

The fence was secured,
the story goes,
between the final rows of stones
by grandpa and mortar
as a way to keep me safe
from rolling off the grass in fun
and down the wall
to the graveled driveway below
and certain death,
a concussion at least--
or was it an elbow bruised?

So began the mantra
"I musn't get hurt"
I grew up hearing
that kept me from roughhouse play
and dirt, and asylum from boys.

I hated that fence
of gas pipes and farm-field mesh.
Finally, the wall began to lean
away from the weight of years of morning glories,
rose bush roots and bales of peat moss,
the weight of rain,
and the inevitably shifting earth.

At five I escaped by the front steps
and later by car into adolescence,
and eventually on to New York.
Now that the guards have also gone on,
the home and grandpa long since away,
the fence is finally down for good,
but far more has been broken than an arm
and I've never found the boys.

THE LAST PAIR

No one now to embarrass, I admit it:
my mother bought my shoes
and sent them by mail
for twenty years
since nothing matched our tastes
in any other way.
Cordovan loafers,
burgundy Riva,
made in Bombay.
Years on end
she sent them,
wrapped in Christmas paper.
I'm wearing the last pair.

July 8, 2003

AND SO

. . . and so
alone at last,
so soon after all,
although I would not
have thought the time
would pass this fast.

It bade release
and gave relief –
who would have known? –
and waved away the bitter time
that's now no better time
for the end of bother
than a half-century before.

My one mother –
saddened silence! –
who worried loneliness
more than any thing else,
left it and me easily
alone.

-- April 22, 2003 (rev. January 17, 2004)

MY GRANDMOTHER

I remember my grandmother
bending to pick up lint from the carpet
when a vacuum cleaner was just at hand.
Why renounce the convenience of a machine?
Did she want to touch the places where we had walked?
What was she reaching for
every time she bent down?

THE CELL

Only one cell is the father's,
but it's everywhere
in a man's body.
It tastes the opening word.
It sees the high-speed road bearing down.
It lines the heart
and presses down with every step.
It's in the finger's whorl,
the iris' stars, the wandering vein.
It lifts and listens,
licks and smiles.
It bodies out each lash and nail,
and in your musty hair
it hides and smells.
The flexing knee,
the curling toe, the waving hand:
all are daddy's code,
though grown and lost
or read and known.

(March 2001)

MY FATHER'S EYES

His fingernails are long by now,
much too long for him.
His five-o'clock shadow has lengthened,
too dark for him.
He always shaved.
But, oh, my father's blue eyes!
I wonder how they look now,
what they see,
that so rarely looked at me.

PEDAGOGUES

We are an occasional smooth stone
on the cliff face they must climb unattended.
We have been there, but know
few footholds among so many promises.

We are the stepmothers and missing fathers
they've clambered among along the way,
whom they must leave behind,
and leave without regret.

But how can we tell them
there are no guides among the starry orders,
no resting places,
and the way up is *not* the way down?
Sure of wonder, they grow suspicion
in the clear medium of their eyes.

eorthe weorold

The skin lies still, dormant
even on the latent, imprecise flesh
of a woman's arm, shifting parts—
leg, breast, the upper arm—
so many pieces from a game box
God found in the hallway closet
and assembled
for serious games.

But something pushes up
like molten mineral love a-
gainst the single
integument of a young man's body,
its edgy terrain
nonetheless a desert scene
of windblown flatlands
betraying shifting plates
tectonic beneath.

She, the first, is a settlement,
homestead, sec,
a founding thing
for foundlings and changelings,
a heavier thing than it looks,
at ease for fondling,
simply to be there, at rest.

The other-hand sex,
he in fact the second
(*Mme de Beauvoir au contraire*),
in pressure to reach
unto turrets and tower,
all rampart,
with unexpected strain
announces the simple investiture
of upsurging awe to every one
who has the heart to see,
though in terror of being still,
so scares us away.
His flesh gleams
in its slow rising
like the shiny caul of proofing dough
for "a stabilized biofoam
of wheat endosperm,"
this bread of life.
Tidal blood pumps faster
in tribute to him
through a thousand striated courses,
returning to its sources
only for air.

All surface,
never seeming to tire
even at ease,
an always sparer frame
(of the gods) tenses,
making its landscape and firmament
tenseless,
all together at once.

And to think these things are
not much spoken of any more.

Why do we then
almost fondly steal
looks away from the stoic stretching,
straining, so taut as to seem insensate
and *not* to be desired?

At what a loss to mother,
who cannot give him a
way to steel himself
to be the ever other
from a start in her in-
difference.
He is a primitivity
that runs and hides
from the source in her,
and ever on the run thereafter
an escapee from womanhood,
in hiding.

And as much a loss to father, too,
who could not bear him then
nor can he now
to recognize himself
in him, the boy,
who should be taken up
in rite, in celebration
of there being an-
other one of father's own kind
and kindness.
But he like Abraham
denies the son his own
selfsame on loan
from father's boyhood
to learn the world's invention,
manhood, "the great impossible,"
the unnatural complement
of what his mother earth
had made out of her deep ground,
and makes instead a sacrifice

of the both of them.

I see we have this something
wonderful to do with
as often as is possible.
Hearth and we are old,
and never together.

HOW LITTLE I THOUGHT

How little I thought
of myself, how much
about my self
till she who, burdened,
carried me to term
arrived at her own
simple term.
One small outspoken breath
whispered her away,
the telling word unheard.
She had entered on her own
and later set me on my same way.
A little breeze later
And just that soon passed.

NEW YORK POEMS

NEW YORK

I will one kite-perfect dusk in April
send myself out on a string,
pushing away the clouds,
and free the sky
at thirty-thousand feet.

Guest in my heart,
the City lies below,
its crossings open to view
hiding the downtown streets.

A pilot voice says,
"Look what's left
of an unforgettable life."

I pull in the string,
cut the pressure lock,
and sail.

SIXTH AVENUE

Bodies harden.
The breeze stirs me.
I've been inside a long time
and half expected to find myself
on the skin of others.
I was starving,
always saving.

All us loners,
being older too soon,
can only get younger,
feeling less.

I live in the groove,
never straying,
never stirring,
watchful waiting
bashful burning.
How foolish.
Always naying,
never knowing.

(July 1986)

HAND ON THE SUBWAY CAR POLE

Just at the Canal Street jog
on a Red Line downtown express,
I wanted to take your pulse
(I would gladly have given it back)
to make some sense
of the minor blip
I saw above your thumb,
the telling arterial wink,
blood nod,
echo of your heart's
constant knock-knock,
pressing to get out
above the freshly laundered
pristine cuff.

Your fierce, restless grip,
holding on for dear life this morning
gently brushed against your lover's lash
while he slept this morning
and you left.

Fall 2002

THE TRAVELER

His hard face and fine eye
fixed stern and impassive,
asleep in the morning
is a baby's face.
Before leaving home
he practiced the look:
Don't mess with my business!
Don't touch!

But there, leaning back
on the Staten Island Ferry,
the clenched jaw relaxes,
the tough boy's chin hangs soft.
He might be Mother's little Oedipus.

I SHARE A YAWN WITH A PERFECT STRANGER

Two languid posers
riding ESCALATOR UP,
keeping the two-stair rule,
moving together,
staying apart.
He turns on his heel,
like a tree hell bent
against an early March wind.
We yawn like hungry nestlings,
mouths meet agape
across space,
eyes closed
in nothing-spoken eloquence.
Two perfect strangers,
we reach the top and disembark,
at one, just once, with one another
on the way to heaven.

(Whitehall Terminal, April 1998)

THE DEAD SQUIRREL

On this cold December day
a dead squirrel
is an especially pathetic thing.
Splayed on the wet walk
under a chestnut tree,
he still looks airborne.
Already, perhaps only hours
after the fall from grace,
his once meticulous fur
bristles into a sprig
of gray pine.

DARK BIRD
for Hitano MFM

i first saw you
more than thirty years ago
this time of year
in a heavy snow and as bitter cold
standing in the street
at Bedford and Carmine bundled
in a long heavy coat,
a dark coat like your hair
my christ! you're still here or come again

you were far away in the blizzard
looking for drugs or a place to stay
i blamed the wind
for hiding your face
behind your hair
everyone walked slow steps
against my ally, the wind
even the taxis weren't running

the night before
i had looked down
on that very corner
from an illegal rooftop
at the edge of adolescence

now suddenly there is no wind
and the hair holds onto your face
like a dozen bleeding worshipping
rhizome hands guarding the crucified bones
under your eyes

by now i've unlearned as much as I need
and since you disappeared on me that night
i know less
thank heaven!
about corners and snow

but when you appeared again
oh jesus! i laughed like the believers
i danced with their cymbals and other instruments
and the words printed in red
on paper translucent as the skin on your face
purified by days of cold air,
your impassive face on Prince Street
washed by more daylight
than i've seen in all the intervening years
since your first coming
into sight

after you left me tonight
to walk in the gardens of early night
i went to sobs about the dust
on Duchamp's broken glass
that moved you so much

who talks that way any more?
you see the Sixties were a dream
and since you've come back
living life harder than you have to
i look at you
but how can i believe?

perched like some dark bird,
you whose "happiness is seeing
other people happy," you said,
or the way you eat bad bread
from a Greek diner
with grace and gratitude
i was the host for what i knew
was our last dinner

under your stern smile, prim lips
when the angelus rang somewhere
you fed me one more bite
the blood returning
from feeding your hair,
the vein on your forehead
a lightning flash when you laugh

you from my past, come out you
lover of the *kairos*
as it draws me out and in
to the future
in that one starry instant breath before creation

you see the places that things are
the random light of everyday forgotten corners
the chancy shadow
emanating an invisible reflection
people stumble over passing by you
to whom you give in return
the prize of your notice and the thought
that here we are and this is it
as brother Alan said
what's what

no comings or goings
only *Gegenwart*
the spellbound moment

but can anyone be in it with you?

-- February 14, 2004

WHAT I LEARNED FROM MY CAT

to Mr. E (1986-2003)

Watch the feet of human beings,
not their eyes.

The ears are erogenous zones.

Every body part is a toy.

It's OK to be alone
for long stretches of time.

Take many hours to groom.

One can be soft *and* fierce.

Never bark.

Always keep the toilet bowl clean.

Now whisker my name daily,
quickly, softly:

Mr. E
Mr. E
Mr. E
Mr. E

VISIONS

THE IMAGE LOVER

Open night,
I was your lover.
I follow rivers.
The image hovers.

Open night,
I come upon you.
Upon this sign of you,
I cast my light.

I was your lover.
What do you see?
Time has lapsed.
The image hovers.

I follow rivers.
I was your lover.

FEAR OF EYES

What is the fear of eyes?
Bits of brain stalking the earth
that want your words, your name.
They stun, cause cower.
Infants gape and reach for their blink.

Who is there in the eyes?
Twin moony faces posing as me.

Long stares draw fire.
Drink to me only tastes only of blood.
Is everything looked at
finally something to eat?

STOPPING LOOKING

I have stopped looking.
Will I now be seen?

What does the eye see?
What is *there* to be seen?

The eye as blind as Tiresias'
just drinks in light.

One looks to Venus,
the other Mars.
Otherwise, why two?

You do not see me
who is looking?

You with perfect lucent eyes
who do not look at me,

you who do not see me,
lover of eyes, I know you.

Insight fails this visionary
nothing more to see.

The glare of glance
to staring glance, I say,
soon look away.

The I fails to focus,
nearer than I think.

You who look out
for our sere blindness
made us eyes because we see.

SHADOWS ARE THE SIGNS OF LIGHT
(*in memoriam* James Agee)

The shadows cast by high-flying planes,
fabulously small,
fall across me.

I sit in the heat of a high summer day,
glaring at the sky for signs
and shadows.

Brief dusks of low-flying birds,
asking to be read,
flash by.

CENTAUR, MID-DAY

It comes to be with her,
giving down,
as quiet as late spring wind.

Crazy persistent birds
call it on,
rain releasing the green.

The presencing centaur arrives,
contending
the connective air.

A slight yellow fuss of new
willows pauses
coming out of cloud,
a single, unforgettable
new leaf shudder.

MIDSUMMER

And if I needed
to end midsummer
with someone
and see him again,
it would be Billy Budd
the dancer,
"his welkin eyes expanding,"
who taps his boots on woodsedge,
where Kleist's marionettes
walk round at dawn.

CLOUDS

These clouds are mine,
like the birds we kids called
for "My money! My money!"
The rest is hidden.
Such clouds are hands
passing under one another
in steady folding:
they do not touch,
they do not join.

ECLIPSE

In the starscape
is a face I have known
only once,
but seems to have
the same ironic eyes
of everyone I've ever seen,
and one I've surely not seen.
How simple it must be
to understand the stars.

MILLIONS OF AUREOLES

Millions of aureoles,
sudden moves
felled trees
broken words
done deeds.

Half as many navels,
happy trails,
wishes.

A handful of charms.

November 30, 1999

ON LAUREL SUMMIT

(near Jennerstown, Pennsylvania)

Looking out across the stretch
on Laurel Summit,
where rolling ridges fold together
in dark venous concourse
under a November day's rain-damp breath,
you see the Appalachian head thrown back,
his long Devonian throat open,
exposed like an uprooted tree,
lying half buried by the weight of the souging air.
The blood of deep ground movement
rushes to his face, impending winter,
and explodes his gaze, upward bound.

TREE STANDING

Its trunk conceals a beating heart.
The solid pulse within is firm and strong.
High wind fails to break the shaft
of thought that holds the torso up
to question, roam of reason, talk.

On top, a poem issues out
from fingers, flickering green,
from fussing with the light,
as night wishes in toward the tree
that understands our way.
Someone, you know, is dying now.

(March 8, 2001)

SUMMER'S RESEEDING

So soon summer reseeds,
its light dry powder petals
late summer's bleached-green answer
to early spring blossom drifts.
Handfuls of feather-light dust
are blown back in advance of autumn's flowers falling
like crumbs cornered in a broken bread box
or wedding rice left behind in the cracks,
Too early for hiding, storing, saving;
too late for planting, waiting.

A GUEST BETWEEN

I'm well when the weather's mean,
a gray-souled November day
or summer solstice, say,
a strawberry moon impending.
But now that it's nice
it makes me sick to think.
Thoughts that send me roaming
break my slipping stride,
the careful steps now hardly heard,
now still undetected. I pull back,
tramping back down
what brings my life to me.
Where was your roaming?

The joy is there in possibility,
up close to the where and the when
on Hölderlin's distant peaks
and we the abyss between,

not followed, never fair,
the mean distances and angry times,
and we the guests between.

amo ergo sum

The lines of life are various; they diverge and cease
Like footpaths and the mountains' utmost ends.

- Friedrich Hölderlin, "To Zimmer"*

First-life's thoughtless tease
shows less in adding more,
and so stripped we grow,
sprouting flesh, in-filling
a fortune's frame of possibilities,
revelation folding over a girl or boy
who's first the neither one
we all are before.

Like you (since no one's special)
I, too, made fire from a little tinder,
tending to the inner burning,
tenderly tending a swatch of flame
to anyone who would be brightened.

But then the wonder-censors came
and shamed our senses' loud encounters
while little more we asked from them
than loving thunder
and standing in the rain,
if that is what we wanted.
So much we wanted!

Then the lines of life began
their meander along
our crowing eyes and their dis-
tressing brow, cheeks' scowl,
and laughter streaks,
furrows and conduits of tears.
Outcropping, crying laughs
our dry eyes sobbed,
and so seduced they
never really knew what-
ever we wanted.
The mechanism of flutters,
lashes, bats and winks,
tics and stares,
drew a bead on their indecision.
We hid behind our eyes.

Oedipus was right and blind
Tiresias stared out of the proof
that we have eyes
because we see.

[*Ernst Zimmer was an illiterate carpenter who looked after the great poet during his madness in a tiny attic room.]

CREDITS

Rolling up as the film unwinds
its last few hundred turns,
a few of us sit through the credits
waiting for mnemonic epilogue
we went there in the first place
to find in the dark.
Each second memory
enters in the twenty-fifth frame.

CRUSHES

There are the crushes of people
warning their way, unwilling *frotteurs*
with effortful disinterest lurching
in failure to find
another no place,
here against her swollen bag,
his black carry-on,
the gangster's pocketed gun,
the heavy-scented hint of menstrual flow.

And then the crushes for those
who love to tongue
drab sugar-clogged
phantom-colored slop
from infantile margaritaville
till everything tastes of metal.

Do not forget the crush of bone
into flesh and pure feeling
by mangling machinery,
La Mettrie's beautiful cage
in whom we are trapped for life,
now macerated mashed contused,
and smothered by pain
in a growl of release
till the numbing oxytocic damp arrives.
It cuts short all dancing.

And last now
the crush of my dear you
that I welcome.
Like all three:
unwanted, sweet, disabling.

RECIPE: FOOD FOR DREAMS

I cooked up my usual evening scheme
for falling asleep:
Precisely at ten p.m.,
take a handful of oats,
overwhelm with water,
a spot of milk, sixteen raisins,
and nuke it all for as many minutes
as there are raisins.

Somehow tonight, however,
it occurred to me that
putting the hot pyrex bowl
on her monogrammed throws
would be like pressing
the invisibly hot glass
against my mother's skin.
I never had
but only now knew why.

Each folded three times
I moved the first throw on top,
then the other layered under it
and rested my now warm goodnight
on the bedspread underneath,
also folded just so many times.

Not too many, not too few.

RECENT POEMS (2008-2009)

CENTRAL AMERICA

Facing us, he displayed the Americas.
Turning, a bit of New Zealand
peeked out below the North Face pack
strapped to his back.
Washings had dimmed the gray
to a loose fit
and washed away great patches
of a *Geographic* appliqué.
Most of the contiguous States were gone.
Little was left of the heartland,
the continental divide,
Great Lakes, and vast weathery states.
Below the beltline,
the southern hemisphere.

As our train slowed in
to Union Square,
perhaps to steady himself
or comfort the disintegrating earth that covered
his body back and front,
he ran a single finger
along the equator
and the last particles of Central America,
somewhere near his navel,
fell away.

COMING TO MY SENSES

Your thin limning gestures,
past touching,
bound off my inner ear,
which hears nothing
of your voice waving
back to me.

COMING TOGETHER

Coming days without gender
grow under the blacklight of boys.
Puer rises at night
like the ever undead
dark side of the scaling moon.
An end to twinning
brings us together.
Nature heads to a stranger new union.
We two unwind history
back to the mind of God,
as Hegel thought it was
before there was time.

DESERT LANDSCAPE

Settled contours
stretch out before me
against desire's horizon,

pressured by weather-shaped winds,
by burning weeks
to yield its inner shape.

A hidden bloodforce sea
holds me firm, mimicking
Phidian form, unyielding.

MEN IN TEARS

To Rip Torn
Striven de-
livered
riven
cut loose
bentborn
straightened
shapeshifted
drawn and
singled . . .
mohelwounded
un-
in-formed . . .
reformed
fired upon
by bodysavors
sawsought
suddenly sexed
for facescraping delight . . .
woman-handled
pumped
for spurtseed . . .
benchchained desknailed
hapless . . .
or, soldierly, scalped
to deliver Promethean
firepower
or mere fodder,
snipered
cut open
pieced
together . . .
soldered
till death
breaketh him
from his other --
or do they part,
passing on
arid land
hands cracked . . .
the wildness
gone to bewildered
dying
in a wildness
of tears
shredded
from him . . .
then covered or kilned.

THE GREAT WALL

Beauty is the monumental wall,
the edifice of every story

built of eyes passing judgment
on we who see,

of hands that wary off, dismiss,
who wave away,

And closing in on being—
just this close—

beauty's split-second absence,
a transparency so keen to delight,

so clear to love, it stares back at us
who never wished to look.

NEMO LEAVES UTOPIA

for mo'r(e)

Caution departs Penn Station
at 4 a.m. The bars close in on time,
on prisoners donning chic, wrinkled boredom,
and pale, dry, paper-thin caps.
He reaches for his lower east side.
Everything is as it was!
Nemo leaves Utopia.

THE HALF-LIFE OF DYING

What really kills us, it seems,
what does us in
is others' dyings,
not their death,
or the getting there
we see for them
in our waiting,
wondering how we will feel.
Like radioactivity,
which finds its way
into our bones to while away
its half-life until
the osseous glass is full
and cannot take any more light,
dyings halve us again and again
until having enough,
we are emptied
of wondering and waiting,
whethering and whying,
but always with one more to go.

TO THE RAGAZZI

who show us how to leave a room without a trace
owing it nothing

modestly forgotten
gaunt-shy

who know how to turn with the opening door
releasing joy

first-light flat
translucently thin

who leave it to us to find the way to sorrow
humoring us

shadowly indifferent
sec

who find everyone alone
filling us magically

much of nothing
void's fullness

who give nothing to airs' heaviness
pressing us back

head-tossing
love's smirk

who run their own way
drawing lightning

messaging all night
bare hints

who make up moments of solitary finds
abounding

one-time-only seen
first-person singulars.

THE LADS' PRAYERS

- I -

Fathers art in heaven.
They are not here.
Where the hallowed are they, then,
who wordless merely
came and went, and left
in moistrous royal chambers
and millions' kingdoms come
but a single son behind?
Why will be anything done,
when none on earth
is ever man enough or,
better, bigger than a prayer?
No, let me start again. Amen.

- II -

Our father's art and name
are nothing if he a faceless donor be
to milky sopor frothed
and spent for a lady's later buying in
or saying: "Let me pat it, pet,
to pleasure's end.
You've done so well,
you willowy, willoughby son.
Thy willy be won, the little one,
on earth as if it were so heavenly.
Ah, what a good small boy you've been!
Stand up, little man."
No, let me surely start again. Amen.

- III -

Give us a way, you daily dread,
to save us this May
from deathly beds
of luscious daffodils.
And sing, for you suffer.
I hear it in your groans,
In the little death.
Give it like a man and all will be forgiven,
as we forgive the dead,
who said they'd make us better,
their lads, without a prayer,
forever. Amen.
No, I will not start again.

THE MUSE AT THE TABLE

The muse arrived at dinnertime
and found a place at table.
I offered it meat,
but it was all green.
I offered legume,
but it was full
of itself already.
It stayed for dessert.
I ate chocolate.

THE PAST

(for WJ)

There is no past, young friend.
Whatever it is impassioned to be, I'm sure,
no one has ever known of it.
We see only
The present perfect,
tense, perfectly present,
sliding along the blue road.
We leave nothing behind –
the country house,
a heavy, woman's table,
the biker in Trieste at 4 a.m.,
heavy rain in Colombi Park,
the road to Meßkirch.

Nothing is endless.
Nothing is over or lost
to return to. Nostalgia?
The ache of what is coming,
your precious prescience.

I imagine some messianic shivery blade
to cut the not of words
and talk of such a thing as the past
and set it free
to drift through doings
and things not done,
making you leave for the future
on the next train.
It's already in the station.

Never fear,
we never were here.
We are merely turning corners
from nowhere
like the pages of an unfinished term paper
on madness and memory.
Without history and before
there is no commitment,
precedent or promise,
no note left for later.

What remains, then, if nothing *is*?
Isn't all willing a happy end
to dead lines and universals,
creation *from* and making *for*?
Relative sleep conspires.

THE PROMISE

Words make no promises after all.
No more does
 a first red leaf make us its fall.
Ahead, it's autumn.

A man who follows the rain
Invariably heads east.
 But is going back on his promise
 such an untoward, forward thing
 all the same?

THEME FOR 206 VARIATIONS

I imagine from poem of your body.
The bones gone missing
hide with the boy in you.
I see what draws you
into its deeps.
Its passing we speak of,
we speak of discreetly.
Growth is a hardening,
and first beauty is lost
in the body's first coming together.
Whenever touched, it dies
and you go with it, slowly.
Saved from the seeing touch,
you survive. Never seen,
you outlive the liquid eye.

TO NO END

The marbled vein that runs
from the corner of your eye
into a dark, trimmed temple
pauses just long enough to reach out to me
as I strain to meet you there
at the squint. Both ways wander,
those guides to your intimacy
dangerously approaching affinity.

Like two lines often repeated
that famously, barely, just barely never meet,
anatomy and I close in.

The swollen line came of smiling, you know,
since you, like all of us,
first existed thanks to a smile
by returning it and passing it back
till passing on.

Eye, vein, wrinkle
form an unholy trinity
in the singular expression of your face.
They have nothing to say

Stay, sender of light-hearted speeches
and touching words not much spoken out
these days of unwinding spaces,
spincast Escher optics
and unshuttering sidelong glances
into the Where, with all its pressures,
postures, and mending promises.

Not a lot is much too tender,
so no more friendly feeling, please.
I pass on the gesture
(thank you very much),
the wink and the smile.

TOPOLOGY

There is a young place
where the slouching body
folds not quite in half,
so lean that air smiles at its lightness,
bends to its slightness,
so lean against the wall
it is for the wall its advocate and speech.
What holds it up?
The spare wish of hollow space?
A small loan past due
of green rectitude?
Empty like the ever-albino furrow
above the calf of someone kneeling,
long after childhood on the beach molding wet sand,
it wants to close
like a thick new book
opened in the middle
by a careless reader's incision.
It holds open, barely.
Some would call the crease
a trope of weakness.
I would say that
in this miracle of all-color ease
the universe arches back
onto itself
to where time begins when,
and a place for it is wanting.

DOMA HAIKU

Dry white April snow:
petals on gray Waverly
slate, heading on home.

-- 19 April 2009

MORE

Yet one more in the queue
With a crush on your soul,
First gospel boy.
Spun of limerence,
you bare the wait and show, too,
your own longing.
You matter,
Madness-maker,
Who makes my reaching
Reach full stop. This time,
I want more.

THE MANY WAYS THE FACE

faces us
hadn't fazed me,
till today.
Now I face the music,
and in and about
a light *volte-face*

I see him from his other side,
the side that leaves me alone
after decades.

That *facies*—
deceptive, decisive—
its spell has ended.
The smiling palindrome
looks away,
and I am free
to see him as he was.

A slight turn (imagine!),
and what once unmade me
makes me now,
not his echo-
praxia, but a glance
(let's face it!)
down my way.

-- September 13, 2008
Doma

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