

# 21<sup>st</sup> Century Bachelors

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## The Find

1.

Floating chambers of mind  
a kindness in glass aquamarine iris  
liquid lens see thru & into crystal blue.

13,000 years ago a Yucatan cave is dry  
a 16-year-old girl enters looking for water  
her torch goes out, maybe she slips  
drops it, it's black, obsidian black  
black as coal, tar-back, I mean  
the blackness of the human mind  
what will find you in here?

I'm trying to fall  
asleep, concentrate on breathing  
into the cave, out of the cave, above the black  
cavern or below I don't know the difference  
between extra terrestrial and subterranean  
homesick blues, I'm in the mouth  
of a hollow wave, liquid spelunking  
getting spit out, now I'm walking between  
stalagmites and stalactites like a shark's  
open mouth, up and down  
go the fins on my feet fanning out  
propelling me, now I'm floating in air  
that goes from mauve to blue-violet  
to violet-black, my umbilical cord cut  
an astronaut with no up or down  
the mother ship lost.

2.

A girl enters a limestone cave looking  
for water, her skull is found on a rock  
beneath 100 feet of fresh water.

This is called irony.

There's no iron in the water, it's clear  
clear as a blue-eyed tear.

The archaeologists name her Naia, a water nymph.  
Discovered among the skeletons of several  
megafauna in a portion of the Yucatan  
cave system called Hoyo Negro, Black Hole  
the 16-year-old girl's remains are the oldest  
ever found in the New World.

My mother is 16 when she has my brother  
in June of 1969, 1 month before the first moon  
landing, 2 years after the summer of love.  
I'm born in the summer of 1972 – picture Nixon  
double peace-signing to connect  
with the youth of America.

Gaia or Pachamama, Mother Earth is believed  
to be 4.5 billion years old, the black cavern of space  
she moves thru partially illumined in blue  
aqueous humor    black humor    black bile mind scare  
tropical iris shrinks    as black pupil dilates  
what will find you in there?

## Unstoppered

Liquid sun-glaze

like light the ocean doesn't age  
as new now as you, black and solitary  
crow perched on the floating rib of a cypress skeleton  
on a sea-cliff, and you, the blue-eyed boy  
in my memory who stops in a hallway in shock  
choked up, can't cry or talk, a jagged black  
block of coal stuck in your throat – Adam's apple  
knowledge of the split psyche, the ampersand  
between good & evil a double slip-knot in the larynx  
links the exiled child to the lonely man.

A hallway between 2 bedrooms  
blue roses in bloom between 2 white tombs  
black coal, black bile, unwhole, unable  
to smile, to speak thru the black guilt  
if some infinitely gentle hand could remove the coal  
it would transform into a baby crow with sky-blue eyes  
saying *ck-ck-ck-aaaaaw*.  
The skeleton cypress is crowless again  
the realm beneath the blue sea-gleam  
like the space beyond the stratosphere's blue ring  
black as a pupil.

## Poem Beginning with a Line by Taggart

The poem is a sequence from graphs of pitch against time  
pitch as in tree sap

pine tar on a bat swings at a pitch

it's George Brett's bat, it's a homerun

but he's called out at the plate

for having too much pine tar on his bat.

A wad of gum filling his left cheek he screams at the ump

he's apoplectic – I don't know what that means

because it's 1983 and I'm 10.

In 1987 I've never heard of John Taggart

but I'm a tag art rat – my tag name is SMAKER

maker of S's, my friend is LOST

we tag a window of every RTD 439 bus

running from downtown L.A. to Manhattan Beach.

Several oil spills off the coast, we leave the beach

with tar on our feet – we're tar art rats

smearing tar across kitchen floors smeared against time.

No, not against, we aren't isolated subjects over and against

a world of objects tarred, tagged – we aren't in time

says LOST, it's in us.



## Original Thought

Bo Derrick is bodacious  
like a tic nudging toward your anus.  
I mean the interruption of the original thought  
which has nothing to do with sex or  
Freud's patients overdosing on cocaine. Now

I've forgotten the original thought  
something to do with being interrupted  
"excuse me sir" he looks about 10 (reminding me  
of Bo Derrick again) pockets his BlackBerry  
"do you know if it's okay for kids to carry knives?"

A jetty in windy sunlight  
the surf monstrous, chaotic  
"she's kickin' up quite a fuss in't she"  
an old Wiyot fisherman, his voice soothing.  
Waves detonate into cumulus.

Maybe you should ask your parents, I should say  
but I just say no, not knowing if he'll take it  
to mean no, I don't know  
or no, it's not okay  
not knowing myself.

## Conversation

You have a very creatively destructive imagination.

So do you.

Listen, I know you're scared, I recognize and acknowledge your fear, it's okay to feel afraid, I'm here to protect you from the monsters that come out in the dark, but I need you to try to understand that the monsters aren't real, they can't really hurt you whether I'm here or not, and I also need you to understand that we're all grown up now, I mean, I'm a man and I can take care of myself.

But I'm not, I don't wanna be an adult yet, I'm only 7, I'm not ready, it's not fair.

You're right, it's not fair, what happened wasn't fair and it wasn't your fault, but sometimes unfair things happen and we have to accept them and not blame ourselves. Now I can't keep letting your irrational fears push away the one I love, I love you too but...

Are your fears only rational ones?

That's a good question. No, both of us have both rational and irrational fears. Most of them are irrational.

You're going to abandon me again aren't you.

No, I'm trying to get you to understand that I'm you and you're me, abandonment in this case is impossible.

Haven't you ever abandoned yourself?

Yes, I have, but I'm gonna try my best not to do that again, and I need you to try your best to be strong. It's okay to cry, but when we're scared it's not okay to blame ourselves for the irrational fear we're experiencing and it's not okay to blame the one closest to us, the one we lose.

You mean the one we love.

Yes, I mean the one we love and will lose if we keep blaming her and punishing her for our irrational fears because it's not her fault.

Whose fault is it?

It's nobody's fault.

Are we nobody? If I'm you and you're me then who are we? I don't understand.

Neither do I, but we're gonna try to figure this thing out together as we go, okay. Now it's time to go. Can you crawl back down into that black space again and disappear, there you go, atta boy.

## Cul-de-sac

1.

Mrs. McHale's red punch is bitter  
but if I don't drink it all and wash down the whole  
rock-hard biscuit I'll have to stand in the corner for 5 full minutes  
my nose pressed into the crease where the walls intersect.  
When Mr. McHale gets home from work he opens  
a Pabst Blue Ribbon, turns on the news and starts  
yelling at President Carter, the Ayatollah, the Commies  
every fifth word from his mouth a curse.

Around the time we're learning about Hitler  
in elementary school, sitting alone in the backyard  
at night (the other kids all gone, my mom's always  
last because she always has to work late)  
I stare at the McHale's Volkswagen bug  
Herbie the Love Bug's Nazi twin  
opens its eyes, headlights turn on magically  
the engine starts and it tries to run me over.  
The treehouse is my only hiding place

but even there Stormtroopers will come knocking  
or Centaurs shoot fiery arrows thru the window.  
My babysitters live on a cul-de-sac shaped like a teardrop  
there's no way out. Behind a NO TRESPASSING sign  
at the end of the teardrop gnarled shrubs and ivy cover  
a steep slope down to the 210  
I see a concrete footbridge over the freeway  
I imagine jumping from there  
but it wouldn't be fair to the driver who...forget it.

A thin film of dread pervades the McHale house  
a sickly yellow-grey filter over the lens of these memories.

I've been coming here every day after school  
for 3 years but Rita, their small demonic dog  
still growls and bares her fangs at me.

She's possessed by Satan

I wanna crush her little skull to mush.

Maureen McHale, the most morose teenager  
on the planet, doesn't want anything for Christmas

but a Journey button pin (it's 1981 and Journey's  
*Escape* album is huge, one of my favorites too  
the title alone the possibility of sheer bliss).

Maureen gets nothing because Mrs. McHale claims  
she can't find one anywhere, tho I know 3 stores  
in the Glendale Galleria alone that sell them.

Mike McHale is my brother Robby's age, 3 years  
older than me, he starts doing drugs in Jr. High  
to escape, so does Robby, so do I

(liquor, marijuana, cocaine – Glendale  
and other mostly white areas are flooded  
with China white in the 80s, downtown L.A.

and other mostly brown and black areas  
flooded with crack). Mike and Maureen

are mean to all of us for invading their space

I'm no good at Space Invaders but I'm good at Pac Man.

I never look Maureen in the face for fear of turning  
to stone. Mostly she sits alone in her room stewing.

Mrs. McHale's name is Helen  
but I can't call her that. Helen  
I'll never associate the name with beauty.  
I run to the gate after school  
because I really have to pee  
but Mrs. McHale's on the phone  
I see her thru the window, I bang on the gate  
she opens the window and tells me to wait, be quiet  
but I can't wait so I pee my pants and get scolded for it.

When Mom finally arrives  
Mr. and Mrs. McHale smile big and wide  
they treat Mom with sticky sweetness  
as if they're the nicest people in the world.  
I cringe. I hate them mythically.  
Out in public too they put on their happy masks  
but I see right thru.  
*When devils will the blackest sins put on  
They do suggest at first with heavenly shows.*

2.  
That was 35 years ago.  
Helen and Tom McHale probably died.  
I'd be surprised if Maureen didn't suicide  
if Mike didn't overdose. I don't hate them anymore  
I forgive them, and myself.  
Yes, behind those happy masks a bitter meanness  
but behind the bitter meanness  
pain and suffering, and behind my hatred

grief, a forlorn longing to be with my parents  
for my parents to be together.  
After they break up I lose them both  
only see Dad on weekends  
Mom, usually stressed from working so hard  
to support Robby and me, is there  
but not always present.  
Tho their parents stay together, Mike and Maureen  
are deprived of them as well.

Tom doesn't choose to be an alcoholic, no one does.  
He's still at work, the kids still at school  
Helen's alone, a moment of escape (she likes Journey too)  
she's on the phone with a friend laughing (the only time  
I ever hear her laugh genuinely)  
when I arrive banging the gate because I have to pee.  
To return to the drudgery of her responsibilities  
she's not ready, one more moment of bliss  
one more cold beer for Tom, one more white line for Mike

one more long afternoon for Maureen to fall  
deeper in love with her own sadness.  
I do the same. Like most of us Helen and Tom  
don't know how to manage their suffering  
in a healthy way so they hurt themselves, each other  
their children and the children they babysit.  
I wanted someone to teach me the subtle alchemy  
of transmuting pain into beauty  
but there was only me.

## Childhood

Mama, Papa

peepee, poopoo

listen, it's a lovely language

it glistens, stinky, it stings

like a big bumble-bee, ouch

I got a booboo. Boo

        says the ghost.

The booboo will go away

the ghost won't.



## Porous Borders

A cloud's purple shadow on the ocean  
is a prehistoric pisciverous sea-beast  
an example of proportion blowing out of things.

I was a scared child.

I spend most of my adult energy concealing  
the fact that I'm still scared.

When I close my eyes I see it  
thru a dark indigo mesh, a shark cage  
the space between the violet bars  
as black as a shark's eyes.

Because of the chain-link fence between us  
he's not skittish, the young buck

with antlers the same length as his ears  
his soft black eyes fixed on me as he eats  
yellow crowns off long dandelion stems.

Later, driving in the sun I see a deer  
on its side on the side of the road  
black eyes open wide.

## Gauze

It's 1977, I'm 5, after gasping awake  
from a bad dream I stumble into my parents' room  
part the beads draped around the bed  
and hear them softly knock against each other  
like little pebbles when the tide ebbs  
my emotional needs met for the last time.

Shark-grey fog over ocean, sun-punctured  
the blue-white hole is a perfect wound.  
If you're here to burn away all the shame  
take your time, it doesn't have to happen  
all at once, all at once a gauze of fog covers the wound  
protecting me from something I'm not ready to see.

When the tide flows in again I'm still  
adrift between ghost Mom and ghost Dad  
the large creature beneath me the same color  
as the fog above starting to vaporize.  
The flashback flashes forward, a black hole  
filling with blue-white sun-glow.

## Oxalis

The house vanished.

There's only a concrete staircase attached to nothing  
in a field overgrown with blackberry, morning-glory, dandelions  
thistle and oxalis. Before I knew the word *oxalis*  
I'd let my bike fall to the sidewalk and pick a cluster of sour-grass  
for lunch, my only responsibility to be home by dark.

Now, in an overgrown field a concrete staircase leading nowhere beneath a sky  
injected with radiance, infected with sadness, I'm beginning to understand why.  
I didn't know the difference between desirable plants  
and weeds – names I had to wait 40 years to learn  
– an amalgam of shame, guilt, chagrin, anguish indistinguishable  
from anxiety, frustration melded to melancholy.

Poetry too is a vanished house  
you reconstruct with your mind.  
In one room a woman's voice says “No.” “Stop.” “Because I said so.”  
In another room a man's voice says “your mother and I  
are separating. We'll be living in different houses from now on.”  
Part of you will never grow up and become a man.

Which part? Do you beat your own heart or does it beat you?

Yes. No, he never said that.

That's the story I've been telling myself for 40 years.

It's early summer, my garden lit with lithodora, lavender, columbine.

The oxalis that takes over every winter  
is completely dormant now.

## Ungrounded in Song

On a jagged twig jutting from a tangle of manroot vine  
a white-crowned sparrow sings his signature  
pivots around and crafts the same sound  
making the silence between each iteration more silent.  
I don't wanna be seen pretending it's my song  
when the wrong note, jarring, coats  
the next feeling in a plastic gold sheen  
a strip of wrap from a pack of smokes in the grass.

Remember the big tobacco execs lying under oath on TV  
remember the Coastal Clean-Up Day poster featuring the Cig-Egret  
a tawny butt in place of a yellow bill  
remember aunt Ginny smoking all day, lighting each Marlboro  
off the still-smoldering butt of the last, drinking cans of coca cola  
and eating sand-...*the white crown's at it again*  
*his throat pulsating like a little bellows...*-sandwiches made  
with sliced white Wonder bread, French's yellow mustard  
bologna circles and yellow-orange Velveeta squares  
with their perfectly smooth, factory-pressed, plastic wrap.

After Ginny died of lung cancer we poured her ashes  
out of plastic bags into Puget Sound.  
I thought of her life's mountain of ash.  
Remains. I remain partial, partially separate  
from the manroot vine, from the ground  
that holds me up, from the white crown standing  
on the grass now right in front of me  
reiterating his signature.

## Fool Fuel

I'm walking on a beach with the wind at my back  
a strong gust lifts me up, I'm flying above the coast  
now I'm flying low over an emerald river  
a chain-link fence to my right just hovering there  
above the river, unattached to the ground  
I try to fly up over it but the fence is too high  
rising further and further into a blinding sky  
I see a Master padlock affixed to one of the links when I wake.

The dream seems fueled by the tension between freedom and anxiety.

No, anxiety inaugurates freedom, fuels the flight.  
The fence is a projection of a mind you don't own.  
To master or be mastered by anxiety, the Master padlock means *access denied*.

But it's not locking anything, not a safe with a treasure inside.  
I have complete access to the infinite, I can fly across the universe  
if I can only feel safe, make the fence disappear.

Anxiety and freedom co-arise.  
The sky symbolizes the abyss of freedom  
from which anxiety continuously births itself.  
If the fence disappears you'll fall  
into waking life.

## Great Aunt Winifred's Library

The door is locked. I'm peeking thru a skeleton  
keyhole into the library. She's standing there talking  
to a man, a foreign diplomat, a clandestine conversation  
their voices garbled. Somehow I know the man  
is divulging top-secret, classified information  
that will fundamentally alter the momentum of the war.  
I'm a spy. If I'm discovered I'll be shot. I'm peeking harder  
my anxiety is peaking, a floorboard creaks and I wake.

I inherited great aunt Winifred's library.  
Poetry, Philosophy, Fiction, Drama – literary classics  
I believed would reveal the hardest secrets.  
The dream is like a Hollywood film  
profundity fading into cliché.  
Winifred's husband served overseas.  
Was it just the memory of a casual conversation  
between husband and wife in the library?

No, I never knew her husband.  
It's not about World War 2  
but the war going on inside you  
between self-absorption and self-detachment  
ego-consciousness and Emancipation-Mind.  
If the dream contains a genuine message  
the secret to life is right out in the open  
all around all the time.

Solomon

1.

The depleted bay, vessels  
contain the history of the future of blood  
the burnt blood of Icarus  
bloody kings and slaves  
boy blood and girls with bloody knees  
the blood of birds and stones and trees.

...

It wasn't Solomon's lust and greed God abhorred  
but his idolatry –  
building a shrine to Astarte, for instance  
the goddess of fertility.

The Holy Forest

whose lumber Solomon's slaves built his temple with  
whose timbers the Phoenicians sculpted into vessels  
“all the vessels of the House of the Forest of Lebanon were of pure gold.”  
Later burned. Slaves and temple  
a body on fire falling thru fog  
Icarus enters the bay with a hiss.  
The fishermen don't notice.  
It was the Humboldt or the San Francisco Bay  
a bay of pigs, eels or cuttlefish  
silver fog swirling above Avalon.  
Solomon has 700 wives, 300 concubines, his throat  
so laden with gold he's unable to speak.

2.

Stick your hand into a sticky hive.

You, one of Solomon's wives

porcupines or columbines

red in the mouth in the myth

and yellow with pollen breath.

...

At the edge of the forest a botanist explains the difference

between Solomon's seal

and false Solomon's seal.

"Set me as a seal upon your heart

for love is strong as death."

One is a function of the other.

"My beloved thrust his hand into the opening."

Body of water. Body on fire.

"I arose to open to my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh,

my fingers with liquid myrrh, upon the handles of the bolt."

The other is a function of one.

"I opened to my beloved,

but my beloved had turned and was gone."



## A Yurok Man

When the forest is something other than a resource

when the opal of consciousness dissolves a Yurok man  
says it's difficult to understand

wind blowing yellow grasses below  
a northern harrier swooping down  
you are blowing on it, blowing  
“north of the north wind.”

...

This is my home.

Suddenly Angel, the Angus calf, is terrified at the sight of the American flag.

Clusters of thin firs patch the open body of the forest.

The sun turns the barren hills gold.

When the Yurok man blinks it photographs a hawk.

United Indian Health Services

The words are here to weave around  
a wound, history mute as stone  
the sound of a bone flute  
as pale-faced failure lures you  
to a corpse so small  
it takes up no space  
yet it's there, like a spruce  
looming over translucent  
blue water, a word  
somewhere below  
beckons you  
who have no resistance  
to begin  
but you have no beginning  
no birth and no death  
only the earth and its breath  
spruce trees mirrored on a lagoon  
melding and unmelding  
a surface beneath which words  
sink and drown  
so drink up, drink it down  
the glassy flow, a flashing lure a cut-  
throat approaches  
the blood cleansed as it cools  
pools of insects for swallows to discover  
a shell mound, nakedness  
ancient new sounds  
the words are here to uncover.

Writing

1.

Writing is an attempt to stop time and still go on living.  
It fails every time, but sometimes it fails so beautifully  
you can't resist it.

Writing is an attempt to stop time and still go on living.  
It fails every time, but sometimes it fails so beautifully  
you can't revise it.

Writing is an attempt to stop time and still go on living.  
It fails every time

Writing is an attempt to stop time

Writing is an attempt to stop

Writing

2.

The pen isn't mightier, not machete  
or scalpel widening a fissure born thru, born with  
playpen, pluma, feather slowly tear-stitch-scrawling across  
page, fundament, flesh – every line a reenactment of the original  
rift, slit – opening/sealing, revealing/concealing – inscribing a moving  
incision a simultaneous ripping open and zipping shut, everything engraved  
in spacetime sewing and sewn, cut, flyer being flown thrown and falling  
toward sounds, writer being written, replaced by furrows of word-crops  
vivisections – tattoo as musical call, drum-heart-beat, laceration  
decoration, dressing wound round a clean wound  
healing and being healed

3.

Every writer's a ghost.

Whoever wrote whatever you're reading

– pink-orange afterglow above ocean-blue horizon line

eternal metamorphoses of coastlines

tidelines, timelines

– is always already gone.

Afraid of time I transmute

into written lines

in my hands, face

twilight of orange-rouge, tawny-ruby

too late, smoldering dusk

burning out, turning black

the first star Capella, a she-goat

in the constellation Auriga, a charioteer

Aurigation the action or art of driving a chariot

that won't stop

## Descenders

Sitting on a sea-cliff facing south  
a swath ablaze, vibrating radiance.  
East of the swath, an archipelago's rocks shaped  
like individual letters of an alien alphabet  
as intimately familiar as the bones beneath your skin.

In your alphabet these lower-case letters are called descenders  
g,j,p,q, and y  
their tails descending below the surface like rock-  
doves on a wire.

Tho the tails of the rock letters are invisible underwater  
you know they're there  
like you know your heart is there  
carrying out its life sentence in a cage of ribs.

One archipelago with many rocks  
pieces of land in the sea  
and you thought land and sea were separate  
you, one land animal with an ocean inside  
you taste it in your sweat

and you taste it in your tears which, like waves  
well up and fall, becoming indistinguishable  
from the whole ocean of language  
including the land it's intruding upon, island  
after island.

## Morphology

Translucent flow below which an oblong  
opalescent rock talks to a thin red chunk of chert  
their flirting rises to the surface where white speech bubbles pop.  
Separate sounds coalesce, river of now, river of yes  
the one that runs thru you and me, an electric current  
flowing now thru clouds that will soon fill their lavender  
bellies and spill rain over forested hills, refilling the river.

All the lies you tell to assuage your fear  
of isolation, intimacy, death  
they too morph into each other and flow  
– we are each other's flow, they say  
but the voice is one voice, the words a single word, *ocean*  
dissolving into it, solving for a minute the whole  
problem of separation and loss.

## Belly Song for a Jellyfish

Insouciant, free of the desperate  
obsession with attainment  
not waiting or hurrying after  
not lured by the laughter of birds  
or skewered over a fire  
    consciousness in the silence  
        at the center of words  
safe from desire, the history  
of cosmic evolution in a single pebble  
stuck to a jellyfish, no, I'm not getting carried away  
by the tide, or am I   a conscious creature  
thru which an actual world perceives itself?

What carries the principle of the actual  
carries it like a hermit her shell, being actual itself  
is difficult to speak of, difficult to hear.  
Listen, not to its manifestation in the body of fear  
but a calmness in the navel  
    becalmed on a wet beach  
        belly-lovely, translucent  
absorbing sunlight thru a yellowing gelatinous  
blob with a purple swirl in the middle.  
Ancient life-form, invertebrate  
all spirit, hear it sing  
its utterly silent song.



## Blue Touch Lamp

A surface breathing

sunlight on the Eel

River seen from Fernbridge

made of concrete, not ferns

coho and chinook mostly

consigned to a book dictated

by the dead to appease

sedimentary rocks, hot

pink pea blossoms and bees.

A blue language slithers as it shimmers

above swimming lamprey

my lamp prays, its rays illuminate a page

of sod, root-hairs entangled

in a network extending to the sea

origin and end of prayer echoing

*sod*, in Hebrew, a mystical vision

words of light on a page of water

I'm below it, underwater looking up

at a white-gold glowing orb

smearing wavering thru the surface

a cosmic jellyfish. I touch

the circular blue base of the lamp

its bulb goes out

the page goes dark, words

morph into curling fluorescent

threads of mind, a place of first

permission, memorized.

Eel River, Weott, CA

Trees and trail streaked and dappled with sun  
this apple is crunchy and sweet, I wanna feed that horse the rest  
but she'd rather play than eat. Black and grey and persnickety  
she lifts a front then a back hoof, shakes her mane  
snuffles and makes a muffled whinny.

Rooted in the body  
the unconscious mind's need  
to speak thru play, poetry

gleams and vanishes  
so fast it  
appears a continuous  
jazz of sunlight  
across green water.

Underwater – look up and see them piercing  
the surface, sun-shafts like spun glass.

Imagine, when the sun-shafts enter my eyes' black holes  
what it looks like from deep inside my body.

The rivers inside and out are continuous  
as diamonds on the Eel  
beside which I kneel and stare at little fish  
pursing and dispersing  
while a neon-blue damselfly perches on the light  
brown hair of my right forearm and vibrates.

Colors of Dolor (Sequoia Park, Eureka, CA)

All I ever see is light  
and the pain that falls from it  
every drop, don't stop  
filling me with grief  
and longing. The smallest piece  
of the smallest piece of anything

– that crow  
jabbing and flinging  
and jabbing and flinging and jabbing  
a crumpled neon-green paper soup cup –  
is an infinitesimal squiggle  
of electro-magnetic radiation. The crow

flies up to an old redwood behind a young  
girl in a pink leg cast dropping  
croutons into a brown pond  
little feathered boats approaching  
pain's consolation, a wood duck's long  
razor-thin squeal falling on the pond.

## Awaiting Line

In poetry there's some confusion  
about where the line is a woman  
cuts in front of me but I don't say anything.  
If poetry is having nothing to say  
and saying it then a man cuts in front of me.

Wind blew the sky blue  
from forget-me-not to ice  
melting an obtuse angel  
a window askew like a portrait  
it's me, but my eyes are glass

and the glass is sand.  
On a beach grateful for words  
like whimbrels and godwits  
a ladybug on a dead crab-leg  
beside a blue shard no longer sharp.

If poetry is waiting for it  
jeweled dewdrops streaming down  
a tall curvy glass of ginger ale  
with crushed ice, then the poem takes you  
to its lips and drinks.

## Pronouns

A single black W on the white signboard beside Rainbow Self Storage  
a white man in all black holds up a long stick  
– affixed to the magnet at the end is a black E  
about to be placed beside the W.

The white signboard outside the 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventist says  
JESUS LOVES YOU  
AND SO DO WE

First person plural. We, the church staff? We, the People?

My inner teenager prefers the bumper sticker  
JESUS LOVES YOU  
EVERYONE ELSE THINKS YOU'RE AN ASSHOLE

It's funny because everyone identifies with YOU, the object of divine affection  
while no one identifies with YOU, the asshole  
but who's speaking in the first place, whoever's driving the car?

No.

Let's talk about Roland Barthes, the death of the author.

Booring.

## An Old Dog

From here the ocean's a widening bowl  
of blue-green fluid sparkling and spilling over.  
Cropping up above the rim, one rock in a sea-stack  
resembles the hat of a jester. It points up  
to a jet contrail arrowing south  
like a little white meteorite in the mouth of an aqua sky.  
My youthful ambition has passed me by.  
The jester who frightened me at first  
befriended me, taught me a few tricks  
before I ran away, unwilling to commit.  
She lives in the sea now beckoning me  
to come learn a new trick.  
Aren't I too old for that now?  
No, she says with her sage voice, where we're going  
there's neither youth nor age.

Staring at the Pacific Ocean on a Summer Day

Does it glitter, glimmer, sparkle, or shimmer?

It depends on what sounds are around it.

If there's a fish, then it shimmers.

If the fish is a him, then it glimmers.

If the fish has a defining mark, then it sparkles.

If the fish has been caught and slit, then it glitters.

No, but what does it actually do?

I mean, which of the 4 verbs is the right one?

Then, as if she's been anticipating this question all along she looks down at me and smiles gracefully, knowingly and says, None of the above, my love.

## Where on Earth

A topless man with a hairy chest on a motorcycle  
between the back of his black helmet and hot  
pink shorts, small white angel wings flutter  
wildly in the wind. 2 buzzed Native guys  
pause in a crosswalk and point, stopping traffic  
at the sun, but no one turns to look.

Denise calls the sun a portal

to nowhere in particular  
which is to say, everywhere.

Thru the 5 portals of the senses  
fingers feel the fuzzy down of angel feathers  
nostrils taste a little whiff of fossil fuel  
eyes hear the throttle's smooth rev  
lips around a bottle, the bittersweet sting of liquor

young tongue licks the rim and likes it.

Suddenly a divine street puddle  
splashes sunlight across an old man's Birkenstocks.

What talks we could've had if he wasn't so mad  
madder than Lear, the kingdom  
irretrievably lost or smoldering  
under a green sign under the sun.



Caw

A naked tulip tree lets go of its crow.

What would it take to awaken enough to let go of yours?

3 weeks pass without an answer.

Now the tulip tree is full of leaves.

Your instinct to lie about it short-circuits

something you've been repressing for 3 weeks.

Time doesn't finish the poem

it fills it with absence beyond redemption.

Because he thought it was a force

pulling us all into the grave, Newton called it gravity.

What would it mean to walk upon the earth

that holds you up without the self

that weighs you down?

A crow does a double barrel roll

then banks hard right, grazing his mate

their dance-fighting dazzles in zig-zags over a sagging wire.

Denise texts me an image of a crow with the caption:

I just cawed to say I love you.

I love her too. The next day

I fly away.

## Crows After Rain

The lost object around which the subject is structured  
is a hole  
I'm terrified of falling into  
solitary confinement in infinite blackness  
blacker than those crows pecking holes in the grass.

Don't worry, you can't fall into the hole.  
Why not?  
Because you are the hole.

A crow on the grass outside my car window  
just sneezed, I didn't know  
they did that, there must be a hundred or so  
hunting worms, now quick now slow  
now all once they lift off, there they go.

Again I'm separate from the crows, the flowing now.  
Tell that to the lone crow outside my car window  
she must've ditched the whole murder. Wise black eyes  
*caw, caw, caw.*

Clearly you want some of my sandwich.  
I guess neither of us exist without the rest of the world  
*caw.*

What's the Catch?

Thru steamy fog creamy white cloud-dunes  
above a navy-blue sea of wavy glimmers  
a lone kayaker disappears behind a fin-shaped monolith.  
Your mood transforms the words  
as the birds transform their brood.  
Trust them. Trust the words  
to take the measure of things  
to map out the treasure, inject you with pleasure –  
maybe the kayaker is a beautiful woman with large breasts.

Dude, your attitude is crude, rude, lewd, and needs must be subdued.

The poem doesn't speak for me, she says  
it speaks to and thru me.

Nice to meet you, I say, as a flock of pelicans scans  
every rock in an archipelago.  
Trust them. Trust the sounds they make  
– porous and opaque, brittle and unbreak-  
able, words mean too much and too little. Whether or not  
rhyme creates a false sense of security, the plot  
thins, begins to twist wistfully and the kayaker  
(actually a middle-aged man with a thick white goatee)  
returns to shore, where the poem would say more  
but the words, all sea-wet and glistening before  
are dry and salt-dusted now.

## Green Fire

On their bums behind a dumpster  
two bums, waste-products  
of capitalism discarded, forgotten  
their humanness and mine  
is indistinguishable. Over here

emerging from dark soil, green light  
brought to a boil, you can touch it  
without burning your finger  
without cutting it on this green blade  
speckled with diamond dew luminescing.

Sticky red leaflets slowly open into green  
intricately lined with veins, these lines  
on my fingers and palm, green rivers  
on the back of my hand made  
of the same green fire I'm sitting in

across the street from the dumpster  
where the bums, laughing  
at what sounded like a clean joke  
clinking cans, vanish now  
in a cloud of pot smoke.

## Poetry, My Dead Friend

When I think about it, who's speaking  
and what's being said, this ghostly voice  
is neither inside nor outside my head.

No, I'm not talking to you.  
None of you out there who don't think  
a poet is a ghost that breathes on you  
                        when you don't want it to  
and all of you in here who think  
a poet is a flesh & blood victim  
                        of the vampire of poetry  
don't expect me to take sides.

Negative capability, negative theology  
and nonduality point to the same lack  
of direction, neither west nor'easter  
the same resurrection – put your face down  
close to the ground and see between grass-blades  
an ant    then a pill bug    then  
tail-to-tail facing opposite directions  
2 mayflies mating – the male's tail like a long  
thin proboscis jiggling its injections  
into the tip of the female's tail-opening –  
  
so opens the tale of spring, my dead friend  
your beginning inscribed, inserted in my end.

## Thing O

1.

You're right Jack, it doesn't mean to be listened to  
this glistening, it doesn't mean to be seen  
and yet it's here, making sounds our  
ears hear or don't hear, without meaning. Apparently  
the genes responsible for the development of a fish's gills  
are the same genes responsible for the development of a human  
being's inner ear  
which, let's face it, doesn't make it any easier  
the eavesdroppers out there  
and the grasshoppers in here, whose relevance was clearly suspect  
but I can hear them, I can hear my ex sitting in the grass saying  
“I feel like poets want *me* to figure out what *they're* trying to say.”

What are we trying to say?

Poetry is having nothing to say and saying it.  
Since this proposition is no longer satisfying  
put out your cigarette, pour your brandy in the sand  
stand here on the shore of the poem, take my hand and see  
the liberating glimmer of a meaningfree sea  
which explains consciousness, dependent  
on depths it can't fathom because it's a manifestation of them.

One seagull stands, squeals and screams  
while another one lands, picks up a beached sea-snail (cochlea)  
and shakes it back and forth.

2.

The inner ear is a labyrinth you knew too  
much and not enough about.

The inner ear, in addition to making us hear  
maintains equilibrium – balance  
claims placed upon you by bosses, students, friends, lovers, ghosts, poetry. Balance  
work and play, pleasure and pain, night and day  
while getting enough sleep, nutrition, exercise and water.

I know hearing this only makes you bored  
but listen, just because you're dead  
and can no longer sabotage your own life

I won't let you sabotage mine.

You must've let go, suddenly I felt empty-handed, wet, breathless.

Remember to forget yourself  
you said or I said as the water  
rising above our head.

Cage

Words are tools to think with, but the tool metaphor limits our thinking.

There's room for innovation within the metaphor – a monkey wrench can be  
a musical instrument

(remember John Cage's found instruments: car brake drums, broken typewriters, discarded sheets of tin) – but the limitations are built into the structure  
of the metaphor.

Language isn't just a tool, it's whatever the tool is being used to put together,  
take apart or repair. Language isn't just a tool metaphor, it's every metaphor  
it's metaphoricity itself.

When someone is behaving irrationally we say they're out of their mind  
or they've lost their mind, which amounts to the same, but the mind has no edge  
no borders or boundaries.

Because it isn't a container, one is neither inside nor outside the mind.

Because it isn't a container, the mind is neither empty nor full.

The container metaphor

(a master metaphor, like private property) doesn't just limit our thinking,  
it incarcerates us: solitary confinement, excluded engagement in the self  
in the mind.

Rilke studies a panther in a Paris zoo. Passing back and forth behind the bars  
it sees thousands of bars, and outside the bars  
no world.



## Cage's Last

Cages last too long.

The maker of this music broke out of every one  
the maker of this music has only 2 months left.

If you can hold a single tone for a full minute  
if you can hold a slightly higher one for 47 seconds  
then a flourish of strings, a deferred nerve pain  
a nervous system communicating with itself  
luminosity cooling and warming across a wall.

Fuzzy blobs of light emerge and fade  
another long drone, then a sudden rattling of glass lenses.  
Moaning drones rise, fuse and part, strings string you along  
now 2 percussive clicks, now, blaring thru the drone  
a horn-honk makes you laugh for no reason.

Now it looks like an X-ray of John Cage's rib-cage  
now the ghost of a flower, tulip-bulb, light-bulb.  
Tune down a magnified body part, a bottom-fish or a celestial body.  
Sometimes it looks like outer space right here in this little room.  
Rumi says we're all jackasses with angels' wings.

The drones create anxiety  
not that something is about to happen  
nothing is about to happen, the mercy of nothingness.

Blink

Against a foglit summer shore little

grey-green swells somersault into white  
and brown blending between sand-  
pipers and gulls.

When the fog clears

a guano-covered sea-stack appears  
brightening behind 2 crows perched  
on an eyeless sea-lion carcass.

To the young couple on the beach

for whom death ought to be cordoned off  
a private affair, this exhibit  
right out in the open seems obscene

and the smell makes them squeamish.

As the shore where beginning and end blend  
ebbs and flows, two girls squeal  
and a middle-aged man examines

clean shards of clam and crab shells

among gleaming pebbles like artifacts  
a crumpled styrofoam container stained  
with fish and bean mush.

The beach strewn with dead kelp

exoskeletons, crab legs, bird and  
mammal bones, shell-fish corpses  
cemented into limestone, the dead

outnumber the living a trillion to one.

We walk on the beach in the sun without  
realizing how extraordinarily unlikely it is  
to be alive.

## Leaving Eden

On a black abdomen a tiny white glint, it's hard  
not to imagine that the ants in the grass feel  
the warmth of the sun and experience a form of joy.

    This hardness  
makes me human, makes a kind of music  
anxious at times like the frantic fan  
of a yellow butterfly zig-zagging between  
    bees hovering  
above pale purple blooms of sea-rocket  
patching the beach as ocean's hiss  
and roar continuously echoes

### *Paradise*

a walled garden with armed guards at the gates  
the first couple imprisoned in bliss until  
they became self-conscious, ashamed

    anxious

I can't stay here, I have a body  
a city to return to, a walled-in city where  
we scoff at each other and wall ourselves off.

## Pacifica Regresa

It breathes hisses crashes

and drips rises and dips

it whispers and it roars.

Waves hello and goodbye simultaneously

making you hesitate, entranced, not knowing

if you're coming or going, the tide

always coming in on one side

and going out on the other – in formal patterns

of patterned forms morphing in sync

with the tides of your blood, sinking vessels.

It doesn't stop and start, heart rhythm

it's not old or young, lung rhythm

the ebb and flow of circulation and respiration.

An ocean reveals its emotions unwaveringly

weaving currents in rips and ripples

sparks and splashes of light.

Traversing under the surface – arrays

of magnificent creatures, a nuclear sub

above a dead coral reef

– it bores thru your subconscious.

Ignore it all day, at night it alights, puncturing sleep.

Out of the sea's murderous innocence we emerged

amphibious at first, then feathery, then furry

then purely mechanical, divorced, bereft.

When the sea comes to reclaim us

something inside, something that never left

will stop fighting.

## When the Water Breaks

making a hollow cylinder    crystalline, aquamarine  
    the liquid Earth's birth canal  
and you emerge headfirst    from the collap-  
    sing cave into the open    and know the place  
for the first time    the smile on your face    is contagious.

Every morning when you alight from the black tunnel  
    the shadow you call night    try  
remembering everything alive right now dying  
    remembering the lines *thou know'st*  
*the first time that we smell the air we wawl and cry.*

Remembering every newborn screaming in confusion  
    and pain, a feeling that often lasts    muted, occluded  
for a lifetime    try    with whatever it takes  
    when you awake, to awaken.    Broken as you are  
when dawn breaks    and the water    try    to smile.

## Hope the Wire

If I say *an ear pressed to the floor*  
you picture the rest of the head  
but what do you fear?

When the floor disappears  
the noise of a thousand insect wings  
against a turquoise sky, an electrical buzz

below rising starlings.  
You hope the wire connects every word  
to whatever fuels the continual transformation

the infinite reduced to a sand-grain  
or the pain of being pushed into the open.  
No, I hope to stop thinking of starlings electrocuted.

## I Am You

At a stop light, peering to my right  
between the back of a van and the front of a sedan  
it appears – yellow chalk on a flat-faced grey rock

I AM YOU.

Who's speaking, and who's being spoken to?

If the speaker's a ghost, then I'm a ghost too.

Paul Simon's voice thru the speakers, *I am a rock*.

Is the rock itself speaking, reminding me that we're made of the same minerals  
the energies of our atoms share the same cosmic history, the same consciousness?

You're driving thru town now so you better pay attention, I say to myself.

*I* isn't just some *other*, animate or in-, it's you, intimately, within, whoever you are

*and a rock feels no pain.*

I'm a stoic, I refuse to be moved, I am me and you are you and that's a rock  
and that's a car and that's a telephone pole and *watch out! that's a pedestrian.*

## A Mother's Love

To be present is to experience coming-into-being  
at its own pace, without being  
either ahead of it or behind it  
as the sea eats the sea-cliff.

A pace which is no pace  
(as Earth turns, tilts, revolves)  
something immobile, immutable because of which  
everything moves and mutates at different rates

– crazy velocities, the atoms of this pencil  
traversing this piece of stationery –  
not fast like the wings of that hummingbird hovering  
at the opening of a fuchsia blossom

not slow like this banana slug half-  
way across a rotting alder leaf *Damn*  
*slow down buddy, it's not a race* sorry  
a loud silver Camaro just passed.

I'm not being ironic  
I'm talking about a pace not relative  
to anything, unconditional, a mother's love  
but I keep getting interrupted.



## Fishing

The unmistakeable flutterings of an auburn and burgundy butterfly  
no, it's the last leaf of a plum tree strung from a pumpkin  
spider's smashed web, one strong silk hinge attached to a branch  
one strong silk hinge affixed to this leaf dangling  
flying in zig-zags caught in a draft of afternoon autumn wind.  
The first draft was written from the pumpkin spider's perspective  
smashed and thrown in the trash – only a single line remains.

It's not a pick-up line, I don't want you  
to dance on the end of my line like a flashing lure.  
Wait, what are we fishing for?  
Whatever's down there I guess  
and while we're waiting for a bite let's reminisce  
about the summer night we drank burgundy and ate plums  
beside a campfire on a beach.

## Dew Drops Do Drop

Their fluorescence dots the wet green spot  
                                atop a sea-scarp – tiny suns  
star-spores poured across a greensward  
                                luminescent seeds  
beads of light strung from grass-blades  
                                a few sunlit dewdrops on each leaflet  
like beam-struck crystals.

No, they look  
more like stars that look back at you.  
                        The eye with which I see  
God, writes the meister, is the same eye  
with which God sees me.

Do the stars stare outward or in?

Out    across the borderless  
          luminous mind    in    thru an opening  
                                wider than the un-  
          known    an opening that turns the earth  
into a tiny dot    lost in the glitter.

## Nowhere in Particular

Shredded clots of clouds sailing south over a brownish-blue sea  
whose white-caps vanish and reappear continuously  
I keep looking around to see where you're coming from  
what you're disappearing into, but it's everywhere  
which is to say, nowhere in particular – as present in this ant  
speed-walking across my left wrist as that oil-stained scrap  
of red plastic in the grass, which is to say, as much solid as liquid  
liquid as gas – bioluminescent squid caught in a net

lighting up the deck of a night trawler  
whose invisible crew members' breath is visible in the flashing.  
From the underside of a bare salmonberry branchlet  
a sunlit droplet hangs suspended, a radiant orb, ornament  
a small blue-white ball of liquid-light – perfectly still  
perfectly luminous – I think of a disco ball  
a high-school dance, fresh young flesh lit with sweat.  
Now I think of William Blake, whose spirit seems to emanate

from this little glowing sphere that belongs, like everything  
else growing and dying here, to the sun.  
Over fallen limbs and rocks, creek-water talks and back-talks  
spills and back-fills, eddies and flows on.  
Most of my suffering emanates from the belief  
(a sunlit droplet just fell from an elderberry leaf)  
that I'm separate from the flow, separate from you  
but I'm scared to let go.

Trishna

Between stands of evergreens a thin  
gauzy haze slowly twists at dawn  
like the mists of Avalon. Earth's breath is visible  
and look, you can see yours too, Earthling.  
Over a conifer-covered ridge morning's first cold rays turn  
these steamy exhalations gold. Spruces and redwoods above  
the Klamath River stand, their impermanence perfectly stilled.  
The chilled air and pale light they inhale is more white than blue  
the pale blue light inside you deepening  
the desire to savor this anticipatory bliss  
this delicious sense of suspense – you want to halt the whole thing  
in mid-flight and keep breathing, to preserve Aurora's natality  
– if only this sublime incipience would never cease.

Like the beginning of an intimate relationship  
you want it to stay in this stage forever  
but gradually it dawns on you – to make something  
permanent is to eliminate everything else.  
If you freeze it now, there'll be nothing for it  
to revolve upon – no day bleeding  
into twilight, no night dissolving into dawn.  
A craving tinged with selfishness  
the tenaciously persistent tendency to cling  
and clasp – empty self of yourself trying desperately  
to grasp this beautiful phantom – see it disappear  
in your rearview, blue-gold steam above the dark  
still dreaming river.

## Consummation

Pine and fir lining this windy road cut up the sun  
sharp as shards of shade – street dappled with light.

Repetition patterns movement

merging with a blurry red flash, the head  
of a downy woodpecker over my white hood  
toward the trunk of a Monterey pine  
something taken as a meaningfree sign  
making me question the whole process:

what breaks the mind's

light into measureless blindness?

Coastal fog blunts the sun, dimming yellow splotches  
into a uniform grey for several dull miles until  
the mist disappears, Pacific Ocean widening  
radiant blue, sharpening the horizon's blade.

With invisible tines north wind rakes  
the surface into comet-shaped white-caps.

Tonight miniature orange meteorites  
in black space above the campfire disappear.

Flames swirl and dart

flick, lick and suck narcotic oxygen.

The fire wants to escape, to be pure energy  
completely unattached to matter  
no smoke, nothing burning  
nothing *on* fire, just *fire*.

As if it's already contained  
in the wood, heat coaxes it into bloom.  
Ocean-blue light flickers between crumbling wood-coals  
glowing brighter than a California poppy  
on a Santa Lucia scarp on a blazing August afternoon.  
Stare into orange coals, there, where wood and fire are one  
– symbiotic, erotic, wood consumes fire as fire  
devours wood, a consummation devoutly to be wished.

You thought rock, then spray, then sky  
stillness distinct from motion  
the mind's blue waters separate from light  
but each word, infused with the traces of every other  
plays in a symphony without a soloist.  
You thought the fire in you separate from everything else.  
What's the ocean sound like now?  
A thousand cellos, on fire.

No Cell Phone

Ice-plant & sea-lettuce wedged  
in crevices of sun-  
sculpted scarp – rock  
morphed into fluid fire & flowed, cooled  
hardened into jagged serpentine patterns  
rows of quartz like teeth –  
a basalt stalactite covers a cave like a stone fang.

A hiss a roar a persistent whisper  
of wavelets kissing the shore.  
Suck & swirl, the hollow thud  
of curled blue-green liquid hurled  
the frothy scud.

A single poem out of the ocean of language forms  
keep walking on the beach – starfish, marbled  
godwits – til you can't distinguish your consciousness  
from its.

## Events With No One In Them

A singed cloud tinged with lavender morphing  
into a strange angel no better  
than the human it circumfuses  
when a silver jet emerges from it unscathed  
bathed in buttered light, the whole process  
doesn't process itself but continues unfolding  
in a seamless procession of indeterminate sites  
locations pregnant with other locations  
in flight from the thought of death  
a cold breath of fog spreading coastal  
marinating redwoods, events with no one in them  
as inseparable from each other as words:  
mineral, vegetable, animal – I was brought up  
to believe in a world composed  
of separate things, innumerable, impenetrable.  
Now I'm being brought down  
to realize the illusion of separateness  
my ego in a fight to the death to prove  
(tho it's never alive in the first place)  
its uniqueness.



## Subtraction

While 2 men on a beach drive remote control  
trucks over rocks, a twisting cloud-wisp  
above a tree-lined ridge turns cerulean and pink  
before vanishing, reminding you  
that the present creates the past  
that boat out there creating a wake  
*Finnegan's Wake*, an Irish man-boy playing  
with his unconscious like a shape-shifting toy.

Children of fire come looking for fire.  
In the driveway of a lovely renovated Victorian  
a woman dressed like a flapper is chopping wood  
a big naked sycamore in the yard holding six crows  
now three now one now none.  
The soul, a process of subtraction  
unfolds the shape of a dream it can't hold.  
Children of the skull go looking for skulls.

Children of the fire in the skull go looking for water.  
To die of thirst.  
The cruelest month tastes like vinegar  
sour wine on her lips.  
The flapper has finished stacking the wood  
her 2 boys on their knees beside a darkling hearth  
playing Hot Wheels, the track passing thru  
the open mouth of a skull.

## Coming in to View

At different rates on different scales  
everything's dis-

appearing:

a dead surf perch on a beach  
squawking gulls fighting over it  
the sounds of every language  
your dog Suzie, this stick in my hand  
A LOVES Z scrawled in the sand  
a small child still unable to distinguish  
between Mama and Pachamama  
all your shadows, the aesthetics of pain  
every real or imaginary border  
the phrase *neither created nor destroyed*  
each joy, iris, virus, ocean  
an eye of blinding white sunlight staring  
from the black hood of my Focus  
the book in the backseat, every copy  
of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

## Transformations

The past is a heap of compost, charred and pungent  
the past is scarred, barred from further competition  
decision and action, radioactive, melting our backyards  
my past has a hole in it here filled with shadows  
a hole in it here too filling with blue light  
your past is a futuristic present under a tree  
the difference between your past and mine is spreading  
the past spreads its distance in thistle and clover, trails overgrown  
the past is thrown and falling, a moonbow, a bow-tie party  
red wine and white trees on Mars  
the past is a heart that pumps blue stars  
the past is everything never recorded, it's empty and mute  
then suddenly emergent, vibrant, its lungs fill with air  
the past is an astronaut whose umbilical cord snaps  
it taps you on the shoulder, don't turn around, it's facing you  
the past is a baby crying til she laughs, a man laughing til he cries  
it's a golden cornucopia full of thorns, the past is the words  
you never looked up, birds who only look down  
the past is truth or dare, it hunts and pecks  
it stares at you from the top of the stairs  
the past infiltrates, inhales and exhumes  
it surrounds and penetrates, renovates rooms in the mind, tombs  
the past is an accelerating defeat, the past repeats  
incorporated into every context, persistent as dust  
it grows in us, continuous as a sphere the miracle of flux  
its content fills frames, useful illusions  
its content is beginningless endless metamorphosis  
its content is the present

## Preservatives

Six black ducks, scaups  
drift-bobbing across the bay's glimmering sparks

I park and walk, a varied  
thrush rushing between coyote brush and twinberry

a woman with long black hair and sunglasses saying  
to a woman with long red hair and sunglasses

“my mechanic says it's inevitable  
a head gasket will eventually blow.”

Days like this, all aglow, are the first to end.  
*Optima dies prima fugit.*

A poem was a place you didn't forget  
til it slowly filled with still water

the birds having vanished in the shimmer  
erased while being written across a surface.

Briefly

When the deadness with which custom invests  
the familiar vanishes  
ocean water swirls in a shallow pool.  
As it drains, a reflected sunbeam focuses itself sharper.

Maybe you exist in order to see this, to smell the sea  
and taste the salt-grains of each syllable.

The word *chalcedony* has been known to create  
a miniature mystical experience.

From this distance, children on either side  
of the tide's crumbling edge sound  
like hungry shorebirds – shrieks and squeals for words.  
You're alive here, briefly, to hear this.

## A Foggy Proposal

It hangs around for so long  
this mist must want something from me.

Saffrons and scarlets of November vanish  
in fog, every vivid color you remember.

It replaces green spaces with a white-grey ghost  
growing ominous-enormous over the coast.

Disappearing cars and starling-lined wires  
brown road-houses and fire escapes, a tsunami of fog

erases glass faces of buildings and rock doves  
places in the mind reserved for you, love.

Fog whispers in my ear, *here's the deal*  
*I conceal the outer world but reveal an inner one.*

Fog wants my "I"  
and my eyes.

In return it offers me a mystical experience  
but I missed it, all there is is mist.

## Etch-a-sketch

Out of the blue above Rainbow Self Storage  
a huge flock of Aleutian geese forms  
evanescent letters – a wavering checkmark turns  
into a steady V, now an aerodynamic A  
the apex breaking, anarchically, apart  
a brief chaos transforms into an E  
eccentric, erratic – the 3 horizontal lines, tho different lengths  
are straight for 3 seconds – another brief chaos before  
a jagged, wobbly W  
Cassiopeia in the middle of the day.

With childlike penmanship the whole flock stretching south  
playing Etch-a-sketch in the aqua-blue mouth of heaven.

V-A-E-W, a jumble  
rearrange the letters into the word WAVE  
waves of geese surfing thermal waves of air over the North Coast  
waves of ocean, like us, even  
while they're forming  
vanish.

## Rootless

Above the Northern California coast a blue  
gas-flame around a smoke-black nimbus  
like a cloud of ink, you think of a frightened octopus  
ocean and sky a medium like language.

Because I believe it's sayable  
what it feels and thinks like to be alive on this planet  
I'm writing to you from behind the Redwood Curtain  
a diagonal shaft of sunlight between spruce boughs  
mottled red alder branches patched with moss and lichen  
a few orange-tinged bug-eaten leaves  
not yet fallen.

At light-speed neurons alight  
branching throughout the body along branches called dendrites

Latin for *tree-like*

like a river with forks and tributaries  
the veins and capillaries of a leaf  
the dark energies of consciousness swirling around  
inside the crown, up and down the trunk, limbs  
the body a walking tree

rootless

alive on a planet whose biodiversity diminishes  
at a rate inversely proportional to the acceleration  
of development.



Virus

No pupil, no iris  
a luminous conjunctiva  
the full moon is blind  
to the light it reflects.

Unlike me, who see  
my reflection and mistake it  
for myself, making me more  
barren than the moon

an American colony since 1969  
yet to gain independence.  
Sundry machines on the surface  
of Mars send messages to Earth

where I can't figure out how  
to live without counting, species  
counting down without decimals  
one. biosphere. decimating.

## Creatures

Sunlight and creek water braided together  
into a single creature twisting and purling  
over schist, pearlescent bubbles spin  
above pebbles and silt. You too are a creature  
– watery, wordy – a fully embodied feature of this  
landscape shaping what it's shaped by.

A yellow alder leaf just sank in a spiral.  
Thank you, Dr. Skye, for the anti-virals.  
On the muddy creek bank a few shoe-prints  
and a used diaper, pale-pink, a faded  
cartoon image of Barbie beside  
fudge-colored smudges of hardened feces.

Someone discovered a new marine species today  
some kind of shrimp, but the ocean  
will soon contain too much carbonic acid  
for this colorful little guy to handle.  
One English translation of *nirvana*  
is to extinguish, to blow out the candle.

## Mayfly

Spreading above the peninsula's smokestack  
    striated cirrus like tractor tracks  
my window's cracked just wide enough for a mayfly  
to crash thru, hit me in the face and land  
    on my lap on its back squirming  
right foreleg grasping at air. Blue, gold  
black and teal, a beautiful creature with a broken wing  
    a broken leg and a mammoth headache  
when I'm able to stop the car I place her  
on a fallen sycamore leaf beyond the hospital parking lot.

Noticing bug bloodstains on my front  
    license plate, I remember a woman  
        on the radio talking about the loss  
        of pollinators, crops we rely on.  
There goes a cop's siren, my car's hood still warm.

## Dunlight

Five flies on a dry  
patch of coffee-brown feces  
each one is two  
tiny gleaming emeralds  
ten gems quickly switching  
places slowly the meta-  
morphosis from egg to  
maggot to fly miraculous as  
caterpillar chrysalis butterfly  
*as if the earth under our feet*  
*were the excrement of some sky*  
guano-covered archipelago  
sunlit Pacific  
shimmerglows like flies.

## Hanging

over a chain-link fence hundreds of angel's  
trumpets in a silent symphony to a sidewalk  
several pale-yellow horns flattened against  
grey square slabs, a faint perfume in the nostrils  
of a female mail-carrier pausing before placing  
a single white letter in a black box

if I imagine her imagining it's a love letter  
then my voyeurism mirrors yours – sitting in that car  
with the dream-catcher hung from the rearview.  
Or yours – a young Irishman watching  
a middle-aged black woman carefully remove  
3 black ghosts from a crimson maple tree  
(it's November 1<sup>st</sup>, the day after Halloween).

## Day in the Lives

Steam rising from your coffee mug reminds you of the word *balustrade*.  
Descend the stairs, stare thru the window at Mary's cherry tree  
open the front door and enter cool swirls of early spring air.

After a good run you're walking back to your car and there they are  
5 wide-eyed daffodils staring at you saying *yes, we smell your grief but  
we're alive, as lovely as we are brief*.

Clouds above a clock tower are fat bright cotton-balls approaching  
torn shrouds of lavender smoke with milk-blue holes.  
The sky is multiple shades of grey above the silver bay, your windshield

wipers' squeaky farts growing fainter as the rain comes on  
to your left a boxer in the back of a black pickup, his flabby jowls wiggling  
in wet strings of wind to your right, standing side-by-side facing

opposite directions, a blond mare and a chocolate-brown stud.  
After parking beside a maple sapling, plastic trash  
and discarded masks, you enter Safeway and there she is

standing between a stack of Bartlett pears and a stack  
of Honeycrisp apples with an unnatural glare  
like they've been polished with Pledge, a 77-year-old

courtesy clerk with perfectly coiffed grey-white hair.  
She closes her eyes and gently places her hands  
(as an ambulance siren blares outside) together in prayer.

## A Love Story

1.

When Hozzy DiFazio meets Connie Crapple it's  
lust at first scent. At 8:24 that morning Connie  
weighs in at 379 pounds and 8 ounces, but Hozzy  
doesn't care because Hozzy is completely blind.  
He isn't born blind – it happens 5 years  
ago in a fishing accident involving 2 fuchsia lures  
called buzz bombs and a severely autistic teenager  
named Bonaparte – and Connie  
isn't always obese, tho she's  
never exactly fetching, not even remotely.  
But looks couldn't possibly matter less to Hozzy  
who saunters stumblingly  
in an air of insouciance regarding the whole  
visual world, his goal  
to experience as many smells  
as his seeing-eye dog Giuseppi  
Peperonchini, Pepper for short, and Connie  
Crapple is the motherlode.  
From Connie's every fat-fold  
from each flab of flesh pheromones ooze  
a veritable smorgasbord of smells  
swiftly greedily vacuumed  
by Hozzy's nose, and because  
she sees in Hozzy everything he can't see  
for himself their relationship blooms.  
Connie can't pick up a stick, let alone throw it  
but Pepper's glad to have someone  
he can at least make eye-contact with.

2.

Things change.

Since his olfactory sense is approaching that of a canine Hozzy becomes acutely aware that there are fewer and fewer fragrances emanating from Connie's great being, and they're cleaner more sterile. Connie is taking better care of herself, bathing regularly, losing weight and her smells are beginning to resemble more and more all the others Hozzy and Pepper encounter on their walks, others who are just as prejudiced against the obese as they are against the blind, and Hozzy worries Connie might come to feel superior to him.

He hasn't yet fallen out of love with her, but Hozzy is beginning to miss the old Connie – Pepper can sense it. How cruel it will be once Connie can bend all the way down pick up a stick and throw it once Pepper can play fetch properly, Hozzy will be done with Connie forever.



## American Portrait

Shelby, an American girl  
in army camo, calls the back  
of her red truck the ass end  
her own ass wide and shapeless.  
She has 3 bunless gas station hotdogs  
and half a cylinder of Barbecue Pringles for brunch  
sharing with her cross-eyed son.  
The strabismic 2-year-old is named Moon  
after his father – an American name  
the moon being part of America, a colony of sorts  
since the flag was planted there in '69.  
It's waning gibbous now  
squashed and wobbly  
but it's white  
in a bright blue sky  
above a red truck.

Dear Diary (1)

Farted in yoga class again tonight  
pretty loud too since I really tried to hold it in  
but everyone's so good at pretending  
like they don't notice  
like they're in some kind of trance  
even if the building's on fire they won't budge  
they'll stay in Shavasana  
the corpse pose  
forever.

Dear Diary (2)

The Mind is empty  
formless, pure and luminous  
but I'm thinking again  
about your beautiful ass with its little reversed pucker  
in the middle, how I love to lick your little  
reversed pucker open and fuck it.  
It's true, How the Zen Masters Taught Sex to Their Disciples  
would be the most useful book a person could publish.  
Teach us to accept everything that happens  
with simplicity and grace, all the grace  
of a spasm of the bowels during sex.  
I'm sorry, you say.  
It's OK, I say  
and love you even more.

## Cursive

Dear O, that's why I like cursive  
each character connected to the preceding  
and following, it all flows together.

Not like this house.

If you look closely you'll see a little space between each roof tile  
between the roof and crown molding  
space at the dovetail joints between each strip of siding  
windows ever so slightly separated from their jambs  
space in the trim around the gable  
the space between door and door-frame growing as it opens...

No one's home.

On a piece of stationery on a table the words *Thank darling, I love you.*

Tho the house looks stable, stationary, it levitates.

## Clues

Just because her message is indecipherable  
doesn't mean she's not a messenger perched  
atop a Best Western sign, a western gull, a brief  
manifestation of boundlessness, this smoke-grey

and white sea-bird with a red spot on her yellow bill  
repeating a one-syllable word louder each time while  
an elderly man in a pink shirt behind the wheel  
of a silver Audi casually brushes his teeth at 30 mph.

They look like they're going 100 mph, a flock of cormorants  
in a gale-force tail-wind, one bird turns and flies backwards  
wobbles then turns again, completing a 360. A few grey-white  
mew gulls windborne between torn curtains of light

now the nonchalant melancholy of a California gull glides  
speechless over poles and wires toward the beach. Listen  
to the glistening sea, see swirls of skirling wind, a spindrift  
above which a Heermann's gull hears a splash and shrieks.

A female ring-billed gull with a torn shoulder  
she can't retract and fold in her left wing  
so she drags it over the sand like an awkward  
slab of luggage, making her seem almost human.

## Coasting Toward the Coast

“No one/ to witness/ and adjust, no one to drive the car”

and yet here you are, that same no one  
gently maneuvering this machine.

Reopening its omni-

directional eye between 2 contrails the sun turns  
the steamy edge of cottony blue.

To your left standing side-by-side facing opposite directions

2 chocolate-brown horses simultaneously licking  
the tops of each other's rumps.

To your right a heavy-set, middle-aged man

a native of the Bear River Band walking away from his past  
his exquisitely-braided, jet-black ponytail down past his ass.

Your past, on the other hand, seems to unfold in fragments

in front of you rather than behind  
each person you see reminding you of your anxiety.

Yes, in public you're a quaking mess, but in private, in here

you're at peace so much so you begin  
to hear the difference between outside and in disappear.

Because you lack fluency in the act of being between

you exist in chaos you exist in order  
to see sunlight vibrate on the surface of the sea.

## The Crack

Now a radiant jagged pattern, cracks  
of white window-light across a black  
ceiling crack. Now the bright crooked  
white grid disappears but the black crack  
remains. It remains even after you leave  
the house, and you don't need to prove  
it's still there because you feel it here.

You carry it wherever you go, it echoes  
in those straight black cracks in the sidewalk  
in these lightning-bolt cracks in the street  
where a hit sparrow, face down, convulses  
in the right lane, a necropastoral scene  
on your way to the beach. Go around  
a brown dumpster and there, a ruby-crowned

kinglet on a parking block flees.

Across the sea white, sunlit fog filling  
a valley, spilling over trees beneath  
a hall of heavy cloud hauled by light air  
the feeling of its being there is here  
as if the crack, instead of separating  
two sides, attracts them.

For Joie

Remembering an article about the discovery of a decapitated body  
someone I knew  
twelve pelicans swerve above a wave about to break over me.

The swerve of a car avoiding a pheasant by skidding into a ditch  
she said she'd do it again, even tho the cop told her to hit it next time.  
You could've died. Next time it's either you or it.

A ring-necked pheasant – red face, white beak  
bulbous speckled tawny and auburn chest, and long tan tail-feathers.

*Gurney* (like most of my college friends she called me by my last name)  
*I didn't learn my lesson.*  
*If I see a big beautiful bird like that in the middle of the road again*  
*there's no way I'll be able to run over it, no way.*

Her Seleca had to be towed out of the ditch. She wasn't hurt.  
3 years later her body was found in a ditch  
her head was found 40 feet away.

I'm in the passenger seat of her little old silver Seleca, she's dance-driving  
long strawberry-blond hair and gypsy hipster attire swaying as she sings along to the song  
*you gotta be bad, you gotta be bold, you gotta be wiser*  
*you gotta be hard, you gotta be tough, you gotta be stronger*  
as her torso sways left her head sways right, as her torso sways right her head sways left  
*you gotta be cool, you gotta be calm, you gotta stay together*  
*all I know, all I know*  
*love will save the day*

but it didn't save the day, she couldn't get away  
– with her mouth duct-taped and her hands bound  
she managed to get out of the truck and run, she ran 150 yards before he caught her.

I see a woman I don't recognize at first, then I realize it's Joie Armstrong.  
We hug, I start crying, I thought you were...*no, I survived.*  
*He almost cut all the way thru but not quite. The doctors sewed me back up.*  
I'm looking into her brown eyes when I wake.

I don't believe ghosts have any agency. I don't think Joie's ghost could enter  
just anyone's dream, someone who didn't know her, for instance.  
When I dream about someone still living, it feels like their double, a surrogate, a symbol.  
But when I dream about someone who's dead, her dream-figure/figment has no analogue  
in waking life, so it seems and feels like a ghost.  
In both cases it's my subconscious projection of that person  
but somehow when that person is dead it's like she's projecting herself  
into the dream in order to tell me something.  
I mean it feels like a *real* ghost.

When someone dies, she can't do anything anymore, so you have to do something for her.

Here's what I do. Whenever I hear that song I picture Joie Armstrong  
dance-driving, singing along, *you gotta be wiser...you gotta be stronger.*  
Whatever wisdom and strength I possess are fickle companions.  
Foolishness and weakness are more constant.  
I'm trying, Joie.

Usually the cause of death – an illness, an accident, even suicide –  
can be assimilated into the rest of the grieving process.  
In Joie's case, I'm faced with the brute absolute impossible.  
What's utterly incomprehensible is thoroughly unassimilable.



It remains separated, completely cut off from the rest of the process.

A horrifying pun is proof – the blackest humor can't accomplish the tiniest bit of assimilation.

One time R. Carlos Nakai, a Native American flutist, came to the auditorium on campus.

During intermission I went outside to smoke, I saw someone pointing up at a tree and whispering, I looked up and saw a great-horned owl on a branch.

The next day I told Joie about the beautifully sacred flute concert.

When I told her about the owl up in that big digger pine tree, she told me not to call it that.

Call it a grey pine, a foothill pine or a ghost pine, she said, *digger* is derogatory a racial slur aimed at the Paiute and other Native California tribes.

For Halloween that year she was Mrs. Robinson, the seductive older woman.

I'd just seen *The Graduate* in my film class, so I applauded her choice.

Here's a picture of her looking back over her shoulder that night – an umber wig dark red lipstick and mischievous eyes. She's young and vibrant.

She never got to be an older woman.

Here's another picture of her sitting on my lap with her arm around my shoulder, consoling me.

I'd just had a bad argument with my girlfriend, I was distraught.

She came to comfort me, cheer me up.

It worked, I'm smiling in the shot.

After college she got a job in Yosemite as a naturalist

taking kids on guided walks thru meadows

teaching them the names of flowering plants, trees, birds, insects, mammals...

*I could hear the wilderness listen.*

She spent her last year near the Merced River's glistening flow and all that granite, its powerful stillness.