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## The Sea Comes Back

Lila Taylor Dunlap  
*Bard College*, ld4393@bard.edu

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# **The Sea Comes Back**

**Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College**

**by Lila Taylor Dunlap**

**Annandale-on-Hudson, NY**

**May 2017**

*for Robert  
for teaching me  
that I can have what I've always wanted.*

# *Continentur in Libro*

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## Invocation

Is it better to be watched or not watched?

What if you burn the wrong candles?

The gods find me everywhere I go, are in every thing.

To even a teabag there are two or three gods.

They have already described everything for us.

It would seem as if there's nothing left to do.

So you can feel things more intensely.

When you bring me a word, leave it.

Anything by itself can put you to sleep. And wake you up.

I am tired anywhere else.

I was so comfortable I forgot what I said. Or did I remember?

Go to sleep on a bus made of snow.

My boot burns but I don't notice.

I'm still enjoying your humming.

I looked down and was surprised at what I was eating.

No one starts out without a head.

You have to lose it as you get older.

What difference does it make?

If you can't even see the plant that you're talking about.

If you can't talk without seeing it first.

Is there no hope? Why are you tired? Too much being yourself.

I'm glad the cornbread burned.

Size is a quality, too.

So-called qualities are all we have of the divine.

That's why you can make the clockface turn black, if you know two simple things.

\*

I can see her on the porch being not afraid at all.  
She's not concerned about the order.  
Water pools around my stick.  
She set the table on fire.  
There were hundreds of them stroking in the wrong direction.  
Begin with a small animal.  
You don't have to be like the god to see him.  
You can't call him and expect him to come.  
Something that would be important to a god.  
If anything is at all. If I can know.  
The supply of me is never-ending.  
But we only have so much oil.  
I guess we have to go back out.  
Or go to sleep.  
What will we do with all these meanings?  
Burn them. Until we have only their memory.  
And that's what we have to go out and get.  
Will anybody not be alright?  
Whom do the gods want me helping? Looking at?  
Pleasing the everyday things around us.  
There is a hierarchy but it's not this one.  
There must be another way to get to it. See it.  
Only liars want to teach you something.  
You are already too old to be saying this.  
Surprised at how high the hot air.  
Everything is a fact.  
My contradictions aren't contradictions.  
When you touch me I want you to punch me.

## **In Duke Bluebeard's Castle**

*After writing this first poem, (below), I realized, or was assisted in realizing, that it was in fact many poems, each beginning with one of the original lines. Thus its nickname, "The Table of Contents Poem."*

**I was put in here for you to find me, I cried.  
There is no such thing as a trap-door.  
All doors lead back to your castle  
which you carry behind the breastplate of your armor.  
A different breeze for every room.  
I could keep myself alive by licking your walls.  
Why has this room no floor. Why has this floor no bottom?  
Swim thru the torrent of blood.  
Everyone laughs at me from the banks.  
The voices of the jungle are the voices of my friends.  
A person can only recognize one hundred voices.  
We should have been cut off sooner.  
I need to get back to my room.  
Open your breastplate and let me in.**

**I was put in here for you to find me, I cried.**

This could be true anywhere.

I'm the only thing still alive in your castle.

In the mornings I swing over the sea

when all the evil spirits have gone to bed

and it's not too hot yet.

Since when is it peaceful to be this lonely?

I like hearing the tall grasses rustle on the cliffs.

I like looking out where I can see for miles,

without meeting anyone,

wondering on my dubious swing

how you could ever find me.

\*\*\*

I was put in here for you to find me, I cried.

The rock splits, night caves

in two equal cleaves.

My foot is a wall,

and I feel everywhere the presence of your hand.

The real walls leak.

But what are they?

It's too black to see anything.

Is a wall what feels like a wall?

Nothing feels like it should.

I know you're here.

I hear you upstairs.

I feel you breathing in the next room

thick breaths that reach my shoulders

all the way in here.

Moisture having risen to the ceiling

in a room that's supposed to be cold.

I wish I had a way to expose you,  
a flashlight and a magic map.

I've already come to you.  
Why do you keep me waiting?

Lead me out of these fabled rooms.  
I will look at anything you show me.

You already know me.  
You were in on it with God.

**There is no such thing as a trap-door.**

What goes on in the oubliette  
makes it all the more a room.

As if nothing were supposed to happen.  
He says, staring down into the well.

Many trap-doors are awaiting you every moment,  
lurking on your floorboards, hiding in your shirts,  
invisible, couched in your usual words.

But one can't live like this, the goddess says,  
rubbing herself with oil.

What if you didn't go out at all?  
Learn how to be by yourself first.

Easy for a goddess. In a golden bed  
as warm as a womb. Where I am is wet.

And symphonies of double-talking bugs  
swarm over my head, headed for the river.

Only a prince is surefooted wherever he goes.  
Only he believes in trap-doors.

**All doors lead back to your castle.**

Omnipresent, but never where I can see you.

I'm beginning to believe that you *are* the castle.  
It certainly tastes like you.

But that doesn't explain the salt.  
Victor that I am, life in the clouds.

I can be anyone I want to as long as I'm moving.  
But it won't last forever. Where are you?

Who speaks into my marrow, voice like a tremor  
of sheet metal shaken in a narrow tunnel.

Every door leads from one room into another.  
I'm never anywhere other than in your room.

**I could keep myself alive by licking your walls.**

It's so full here. I'm so hungry.

But you taste milky white. Chalk or ground  
stars finer than flour. Lemon on fish.

Potpourri on the sideboard.  
Every night's a midnight snack.

When I close my eyes I'm reading  
a page that didn't exist. But could have.

That's when I need to wake up.  
With my mouth on the wall of your corridor.

There is no time but the intervals  
between your calls.

I don't know how quick I'm moving.  
I don't know when I am or am not eating.

**Why has this room no floor? Why has this floor no bottom?**

I can see the top of my head.

The sun is shining up through my feet.

Hundreds of unquestioning faces look up at me.

Without fear of burning their eyes.

Below even the undersea kingdoms

a princess clips her nails on a mirror as large as a beach.

And I'm not sure what kind of water that is ebbing towards her.

We don't know where we'll stop moving.

Objects are the speech of the world

of God talking into you.

You have no control over where you are.

**Swim thru the torrent of blood.**

The gates of the terrible city  
are trying to snatch you back.

It's not about relief; it's not about you.

Whose blood do you think this is?

Don't look at anyone else.

It all comes from you, but it's not yours.

Women falling left and right.

Small animals crushed in the earthquake.

And one woman down. Me.

Shouting my name to the people on the banks.

Why don't they remember me?

It changes you to be inside that place for so long.

Things work differently where I'm going.

I'm going to smell like everybody.

**Everyone laughs at me from the banks**  
of the torrent I tumble down, gushing,  
head and arms bobbing in and out of the folds.

Write into the fear. No. Write out of it.

Even now, I'm the one feeling the vortex.  
This is my blood, I realize, looking around.  
I am the only person who's ever lived,  
and all of you are breathless, sound-images,  
watching me carried by my own fluids,  
enough to fertilize a nation's worth  
of geranium bushes  
that line the public walkways...

I go as any other river goes:  
the water reaching the ocean eventually  
but me, the stream, always failing to get there.

**The voices of the jungle are the voices of my friends.**

Overwhelmed in the world of sensations.  
I can't hear them addressing me.  
But they do— call out all at once.  
A sonority loud enough to put you to sleep  
in this world of backwards imagination  
in the thicket of which I've pitched my tent.

The man holds out his hand when he talks about them:  
swamp here, snake there, tiger lily, garnet.  
All laid before us, in this cradle of warmth  
that spawns us out of ourselves.

I want someone to remember me by my deeds.  
A crowd of creatures with wings  
cawing louder than everyone else  
and finding me kind enough to see them.

He enters my clean and illuminated room.  
It is you who are the kind one, I hear myself saying.

**A person can only recognize one hundred voices.**

Like ancient Chinese bells in your living room.

Your eyes flutter underneath my end-table.

I could never sound like he does.

All night long I betray you.

He turns all my furniture into instruments.

Did I know you back then?

I'm trying to forget his voice.

I'm filling myself with your objects.

Float through me on your worktable.

I have a water tunnel at my center

That funnels out of my inner lake.

Where does all this water come from?

I realize that all of it's you.

I am endless, unable to touch myself.

Please let me stand in your wake.

**We should have been cut off sooner,**  
He said, every time we went to the bar.

Cut off— as if we were fingers  
severed from the hand of a god.

Which, incidentally, we are.  
Little toadstools wobbling around the Earth.

Somehow grown smart enough to plunder.  
We should have been cut off sooner.

**I need to get back to my room.**

It looks like there's a lot going on out here  
but no one knows a thing.  
Because there's not a single thing to know,  
on which to focus. But inside  
all there is to look at is you,  
which is all I want,  
warm beyond mere temperature,  
conductive of real heat, which comes through you,  
my only door to the source,  
and I can hear it rushing, humming,  
inside you as your blood, which mirrors it,  
fills me up  
so the sun and moon can bathe  
in *me*, splashing  
in the grotto I've made them.

**Open your breastplate and let me in.**

But you tell me there's no door.

Then how did I ever get out?

I remember a little latch, small steel hinges  
that swung open to the room in your heart.

It's cold on this field. I'm a blade of grass  
wispy and prone to the wind, though so close to you,  
who are protected by the wealth of this country  
and the clear-hearted love of your countrymen.

I want it, too, their hands around *my* torso,  
reaching through you, who are around me, to me,  
protecting me from everyone who wants to transform me  
into the sky, the white air, the shivering grass,  
I can look at, and hear, but am not threatened by.

# Stanzas in Egypt

1.

He has painted all the doors in this town.  
There is no certainty in the clouds.  
You close your blinds on my garden.  
How many more of me are there out here?  
God who picks up my feet.  
The consonants trip along the rocks.  
My phonetic way to find you.  
Who comes to the aid of the garden?  
I put my ear on the side of your wheel.  
People expect you at a certain time.  
How long can I keep it up? Can you?  
You leave for a new neighborhood on your wings.  
These aren't wings.  
For you to think, or pray, or hunt.  
Paint me in the shadow of your afternoon.  
Having brought you these arms full of branches.  
I want you to make the light work for me.

2.

A crowd of people all speaking at once.  
They have never met each other, but come together in your mouth.  
One face, a thousand breaths.  
Who could condemn you for that?  
Not me, I tie my head on in the morning.  
But the wind wants to ruin my game.  
Too much talking under the fence.  
Too many names to my friends.  
I want only one person to talk to. You.  
And I open every other until I find you.  
I put you in people to make them you.  
Whenever I speak to somebody that's what I'm doing.  
The man in me needs you to turn me around,  
bring me back the other way.  
How else could A become B?  
The cathedral imagines itself  
crumbled at your feet.  
Your words that can engineer backwards.  
Your hands that can strangle Merlin.  
I want to be small in your giant's apartment  
and tiptoe around on feet no bigger than pinheads,  
hide behind the door, wait for you to smell me out.  
See me. Make me grow until I fit right in your sternum.  
And can sleep there, take my baths there,  
while you lie in a ray of sun under the window.

3.

The light is waiting for me for a change.  
All the other components are there.  
I am almost about to know something.  
I have to arrive before anything happens.  
And not speak until I need to.  
No matter how long it takes  
to get used to your sense of time.  
Finally I have something to show you.  
It's been in my bag all along.  
I say I forgot it was in there, but that's a lie.  
I wasn't intending on taking it out.  
I didn't know when or where. Here.  
We can barely fit in this corona of light.  
But I love being in it with you,  
watching the city become another city  
and carrying all the holidays we never took part in  
around in our bellies.

4.

I shouldn't have told him my name.  
Even though he doesn't know what it means  
lying in my gold cloth.  
I took it down from the walls.  
When will you sleep somewhere new?  
We touch each other against the panels,  
which turns the eye to that place  
and makes it the new center of the universe.  
But the same old rules apply.  
The same old ghosts live in this new wood.  
We'll have to wear big shoes at first.  
You'll know you're there when the snake uncoils  
and stretches its rusty way up, a little sore at first.  
Who knows if it ever went away, or you just got used to the feeling.

5.

I don't want to shake you off with the rest.  
You can hear them downstairs.  
Why do I have to be up here?  
Mischievous is older than sex, you say.  
But then who would there be to play tricks on?  
Naked in a giant flowerpot.  
Quiet even when it starts to rain.  
Again and again, you tear down a wall I can't see.  
Some people get hooked on it, you say, the lucky ones.  
Nothing began in a dream.  
It was cold when the lights came on.  
Or was that the sun?  
Someone had to take away my steeple.  
Why does that make you sad?  
How alone can you be?  
If you're teaching yourself lessons.  
What do you think teaching is?  
I know it by the feeling.  
I hide underneath your table to listen to you.

6.

The Purple Martins were putting a storm in the sky,  
but no rain — just darkness and heat  
and a glow from over the levee  
that tasted like the end.

Our bright way back into the earth  
when knowledge of other places goes quiet,  
and we are what's under our feet.

This might be the last time I see them return, I thought. It was.

Now I'm banging on the door of the sun  
because nobody's going to carry our messages for us,  
having forgotten my family who lives in the trees  
and my family that stays under the sidewalk.

You might as well talk to me while we're here  
on this hill with no one around,  
not even a house for miles, no smoke,  
just your clear face and these bright hanging apples  
on trees that must have been planted by someone.

7.

This October we're celebrating the brick buildings by the river,  
their yards overgrown with medicinal weeds,  
early anesthetics that everybody's long forgotten.  
But not me. Despite my useless hands.  
All they know how to do is touch.  
And sometimes neither of us likes it.  
But I do it. That's the important thing.  
With my six arms.  
A sun thornier than weeds.  
A sky suspiciously empty.  
Who's this singing in my park?  
Where the leaves are a light shade of black,  
and the change is so small it's not worth picking up.  
Heavier than it is valuable.  
So here we are, standers in a long line.  
There's nothing for us to do but what we want.  
What doesn't require a body.  
I'll take whatever body I can get.  
You'll go where the birds tell you.  
Until you realize you can't keep doing what they say.  
You're tired of walking. You want to talk.  
Were they really even birds?

8.

He was smiling everywhere.  
His loud grimace gleamed off into the night.  
In here we're only somewhat human,  
suspended in a world of one sitting.  
Long suppers in late August.  
Perpetually edible. But never quite eaten.  
Poppies in bags by the roadside.  
He looks at me backwards.  
The night has gone on for twelve hours.  
But we're still not ready for the party.  
It only looks like a party.  
Let them think that.  
Around the brim, then into the center.  
Where it's soft and still warm, you can dig a hole.  
The lid of the moon pops off, and a milky substance pours fourth.  
Lighter than water, sharper than air.  
Thicker than steam in color.  
We're not cold anymore.  
Everyone who's going to be here is here.  
There are no other ones.

9.

It's not as difficult as it looks. It's harder.

I want my whispers to be your trees. I couldn't tell you.

Muttering in the evening.

It's more than anything they can give you.

At mass or covered with moss.

Surely God gave us these paths.

I swear like a rabbit

in pursuit of my mistress.

My monster. Alone since dawn

waiting by himself in the foyer.

I am so sorry. I press my head to your ankle.

10.

I've just discovered that I can see without saying.  
What happens if I almost speak?  
I would like to paint a vine on your wall.  
The opposite of a garden— bringing the outside in.  
A day is named by whatever its painting looks like.  
You can always go deeper into a landscape  
because a landscape is something you are not in, by definition.  
Get rid of the story by what grows there.  
Asleep on the arm of an oak-tree, or here in your room.  
It's only something to look at while I'm gone.  
To think of sideways while you're painting.  
Sometimes you've got to work from the top down.  
The snake is glowing on the bricks.  
We paint the gods.  
The only thing you're forbidden from making is a person.

11.

I have to stay in the ground for a while now.  
I'm trying to learn how to live  
buried, to return with the warm rain.  
A man once told me that I don't owe anyone anything.  
I cut him up and put him in the pot.  
But he didn't come back to life.  
Not like the ram, who, after being dismembered  
and boiled with my substances,  
sprang up and out a younger version of himself.  
He has embarked on a new life. He springs  
quick-footed through woods of wet boulders.  
Given a chance at revision. Saved  
by my catalyzing hands  
which work without my instruction, following nature  
who now turns her forces on me, stirs the soil around me  
interred within her, less restless than I could have guessed.  
My job was once to mimic her. Now I have to obey.  
I only get softer and softer.

12.

The day itself is performing miracles.  
There's hardly anything for you to do.  
The only gift you'll ever receive.  
The golden apparition leading itself  
across the grass that you can no longer see.  
You remember that there are songs you don't know.  
Friendly sages, hiding behind the trees.  
You wish you knew what to call them.  
Suddenly you do: red maple, sassafras, black locust  
all over the pavement.  
The forearm of God is leaning on this hill.  
The maple flings balls of fire.  
Girls are more girls than they've ever been.  
Even the boys are girls.  
Squirrels and groundhogs hover a couple of inches  
without fear that they'll ever have to stop running.

13.

Love me for very few things.

The eerie light of an even afternoon,  
fish scales ripped off at the lake,  
mother of pearl glistening in your muddy hand,  
as we're putzing around this organic agora.

A warm holiday at low tide.

Thousands of years of development, only recently exposed. To us.

The culmination of three months' drought.

And our new shoes.

We can almost walk our way into the center of the Earth  
for a small sacrifice.

But of what? we don't know. Or when.

Did I give it up before I was born? Or will it be ripped from me tomorrow?

Will you? Who have followed me all the way to my old woods?

That I can hardly say are mine. That I have almost nothing to do with, yet they're of me.

Pouring out of my face when you smell me.

Love me for what you work out when you touch me.

14.

I have the ability to drink whatever I like— even this.

My mother nursed me on *arche*.

Liquid and solid. Food and drink.

And instilled in me the beginnings of everything.

My veins full of seeds.

Handfuls of uncut semi-precious gems.

On a beach, we can't see what our sand is made of.

My tongue becomes our floor.

With the sea life dead, you have to find a new tomorrow.

Begin digging at the bottom of the ocean.

I'm down there, opening and closing my legs

so I churn up the sand, billowing slowly

into fecund yellow clouds.

15.

Myth brightens our intelligence.

It hones, beginning here,

and makes us as centers of the world insignificant.

Does it?

How do you explain why something is real, just real?

Why should you need to?

I'm saying far more than I should. More than I think I am.

When I speak in this gesturing way

and get my friends and my demons mixed up

so you see us on the bus as one person,

realizing my pockets are empty, and I never paid my fare.

My purse must be on the other side of town, by now,

and I have no way back.

A gracious woman lets me borrow her phone,

but then of course she has to get off.

I can't count any higher than four.

I will never think myself out.

16.

Before any of the lights come on  
or the lamps blow out of the tent  
the performers go home; I pack up my wheel.  
The outskirts of town are only for mangy dogs now  
and girls chewing bubblegum, like me, cautiously  
miniskirted and weaving my way around the rusty fence  
trying to find my bike.  
That's not me— I'm still inside.  
It's windy and vacant, save for me and the dirt  
and my crystal ball that it's too dark to use.  
So whence do these visions come?  
When am I going to go home?  
Isn't *this* home? Where I'm alone? And there's nobody here to watch me?  
A home should be dark and warm,  
with a piece of light coming in where the cloth folds  
or rather hasn't finished folding.  
I can see every woman on Earth from in here.  
Myself a womb-man for all women.

17.

Are you around the way tonight? he asks  
from under the bruised branches  
so busy that he looks like he has nothing to do  
but stand there, shoulder cocked towards me and relaxed,  
making me realize that there's no "other side" of anything  
but that everything we know lies somewhere beneath these oaks,  
walking on a sidewalk, or sitting on a bench,  
mulberries heavy with night, and many mysterious caverns  
carved out by the boughs, dark and low, but sound as a glove underneath  
whence the light emanates, from where, from you?  
Or from under our feet, or the autumn moon,  
or maybe a lantern attached to your scalp by a line  
so it bends and hangs over your head, you anglerfish.  
Why shouldn't I be around?  
I would like to meet you in the park.  
The one your smile carved out of the forest.  
Why shouldn't you be my brother?  
Whom I invite to lay in my bed when I have a headache  
and listen to the sound of rain or large leaves  
hit the awning at unusual intervals.

18.

Near a river, October, and ensconced in shadow,  
vaults of light are raking each other  
across old branches and fallen leaves.  
Uncreated wreaths burnt early  
by leather gloves that never got a chance to manhandle.  
We forget there's such a thing as water  
stuck somewhere between steam and ice.  
But my swift hand moves us along.  
I'm not going to reassure you of anything.  
You're going to have to learn how to paint with it  
or pour it back into the earth.  
You can go to that creepy grove behind the house  
where water chestnuts are strung with twine  
and two old coconuts mounted upright on spears stare at you  
in your hammock that sags to the ground,  
where it's lush with wild onions in the spring.  
Pour it there. Or anywhere. But where no one can see it.  
Here. I will stand and keep watch  
and cover it with leaves when you're done.

19.

Through writing I get to be a boy.

Because *aiodós*, singer, *aiodē*, song, as we all know.

It's not for nothing.

Otherwise I wouldn't have dreamt it.

Last night. Again. I was sitting on the rock by the rushing water  
when they came up and showed me the mirror.

Or rather, showed me myself— never the mirror— and told me what I was.

And I thanked them because otherwise I wouldn't have known,  
would have kept on making a fool of myself.

Forgive me for what I'd done until then, what I've done until now.

I'm beginning here. It's never too late to start  
building some momentum for yourself.

20.

The risk of returning to Paradise  
is always looming over my shoulder.  
And I'm looking for the entrance, the keystone to this wall  
which walking I'm sidled beside  
as if with every step I took it took one too  
changing in color and aspect, mood and height,  
sometimes dripping with top-heavy vines, worked out of stone,  
other times a concrete wall, when the light is coming from nowhere  
and speaks only of machines, never of me,  
or this wet world, of plants and people,  
what a rock looks like before someone gets their hands on it.  
But as long as I'm able to touch it, to see and sit upon it,  
a wide stone, to be my lover's smooth shoulders  
while my husband's out teaching  
and I'm left here alone with no instruction

21.

I can't begin anything with you in here.

Put me to sleep first.

It's been a long time since you gave me somewhere to go.

Who am I to know? Empty-handed.

Break a woman open to the light.

There's always another. On the road.

To move at all is to be in constant uncertainty,

and to speak is to move more than moving.

Only honest when walking in the bike lane.

You're hardly breathing.

I am not a bridge.

I am more a thief than you.

22.

The moon is under your arm.

Honey, come out.

What did I think he said?

That's just what I would expect to hear from Mr. Lila's Cat.

Scratching the night with his long back.

And then it's back out into uncertainty.

The wind is shaking the balcony.

Don't clean it. I'll get it.

Or do you want it left that way?

It's auspicious to let everyone know.

For your skin to rumple a little under its weight.

Like your neighbor forced to carry a boulder  
and other scenes that would make you smile.

I turn off my brain when I come in here.

There are so many other sources of light.

23.

I don't want to hear about your father, I said,  
squeezing his cheeks so his mouth popped out like a fish.  
Icy water ran over the deck  
smelling like the dismembered body parts of every kind of thing.  
Is there any difference between seascape and landscape? Besides the sea?  
The hat knitted by his mother  
has gone overboard, maybe back to her,  
having deemed me unworthy  
of showing the world who's who.  
Omitted from the landscape's register.  
Where all of the land is water.

24.

I know you're talking about it, over it, through it  
to me, where you've been going all along.  
Who has never had to do it alone.  
Held up on your belly by the ocean's tongue,  
better than a boat, by the One Immutable  
re-iterating her multiplicity  
of which pollution is just a broader manifestation.  
Don't be afraid of her crashes.  
Wait here until you can get a good look.  
The fear will never go away, but you still have to look.

25.

You in particular. We know who you are.  
You opened the window out.  
Where panes of night with silver edges  
bit me on the cheek.  
Formed a white spiral  
of shrapnel, burst of a heart,  
of the airbag that's supposed to protect you.  
A limit is whatever you're inside.  
Except when I'm inside you.  
You backwards house of mirrors.  
You room full of trains.  
Clocks keeping time for every part of the world.  
I can hear the rabbit thumping his foot downstairs  
in your coronary artery, signaling  
blood vessels that need to be broken  
or at least cleaned. It's been over a week.  
I hurry in with my broom.  
I will brush out all of the sense  
so you can be brave.

26.

Foregrounded in the oak  
the nymph of tomorrow  
hugs the knight  
who has a different color skin than she,  
but the door opens easily  
when she knows it's him.  
She lowers herself down on a swing  
and leads him into her room  
in the trunk. Don't sneeze.  
Wouldn't want to light a candle either.  
In this nighttime story that never ends.  
We turn and don't know when we've stopped.  
Is the door on the floor?  
Finally a long time ago I see *me*  
younger, at the end of your windtunnel  
walking towards us. Come here! I cried.  
But then I remembered it's both of us.

27.

The Earth embarrassed at having snowed so early  
rains down upon herself. Mouths.

But it's quiet in the woods, which have been robbed of their will  
and ability to retain their own silence.

The pat-pattering takes over, of droplets on snow.

How could this be a good thing?

You laugh at me, but I'm not kidding.

Although it may be funny to see me, hands in the wind, interpreting  
my own good omens out of nowhere.

Or interpolating— putting them where they shouldn't be.

I won't be minding them anyway.

Divination is the show of the events it predicts.

28.

Ill-prepared he walks alongside his own detention.  
The veil slips for a moment, but he doesn't realize he's free.  
He only sees me, the window to his reckoning.  
But I don't recognize him, who looks used to the cold.  
The same as he did in my living room  
cutting someone quickly up.  
It's still dripping. I said,  
Keep yourself hidden, Giton.  
Learn to love the *sciniphes*, the bedbugs,  
that drop and crawl into your orifices.  
Your discomfort is your safety, as usual.  
Keep all of these stalks inside you.  
Eventually the people will come counting.  
What will you do then?  
The vermin will lead you out,  
show you their secret holes they've bored in the house  
and hide you under their wings.

29.

I hadn't been putting anything together.  
The sky was the color of an angry woman  
lost in the Gulf of Mexico  
so far out that Giant Jellyfish sat her on their tops  
and carrying her around on those fleshy caps  
delivered a gift to the world.  
Where does the anger go?  
When you're living in the realm of the dead.  
But never dying yourself. The cargo of spirits.  
On your way to the end of the horizon.  
Your *thumos* sinks to the bottom of the sea.  
I hadn't been expecting anything  
when they called me away that morning.  
Snow was floating in the yard  
and I knew I had to go. I know I went.  
But I'm not sure what of me they left.

30.

This place is very comfortable

I say about your apartment.

The woman is in the window.

She thought she saw Mary coming out of the bath.

Imagine— to have a vision that strong

and scoff at it later.

To have never seen a mirror.

31.

They towed the numbers all the way up the river.

You had to know at least some basic arithmetic.

Others worked the oars.

*It's all pretty simple, Euclidian*, he said.

Folding his hands into each other.

And then you get there and they've already built the pyramids.

The girls are turning into cats in the street.

Men are falling to their knees.

A woman keeps her wrists close to the corners of her bed  
to make sure that everyone can get at her.

The tails of the flower blow in unexpected directions.

All the leading men have already come and gone.

The threes break loose in your head.

Born to be great.

Nothing is black but figures and mud.

The thesis is a footprint.

The message is the spirit-beast  
you thought you came to worship.

32.

Close your mouth or you'll let all your power escape.  
The life of the mind is not wider than your tightest orifice.  
Any longer than your shortest arm.  
Any louder than your loneliest hour.  
The gesture of my wings tells you what you're going to dream.  
The way my ankles shine.  
I am the prominent vision above your building.  
I've already woken up. I never slept.  
Look at all the knots I've tied around this city.  
My good friend the white of the sky lets you see me  
and I hide underneath his eyelid at night  
in the microscope of God. Look at me.

33.

The wind ends at my skin.  
Take off your shirt in the museum  
of my thighs. Begin there  
and you'll never have a problem with seeing.  
I am fluted all the way to my center,  
and when it rains my ridges gleam  
with all the whispers spoken between them.  
Who did *you* used to be?  
Tell me about the knife. Again.  
Why don't I ever tell you to stop?  
I want to go down every alleyway,  
until all the galleries are mine  
and there's nothing I'm afraid to talk about.

34.

Her name cannot be spoken.  
She doesn't need your poems.  
Doesn't even listen to what you're saying  
when you're crying into her corners.  
She just rubs your shoulders and gives you a big wet kiss.  
Nobody knows what I know.  
O mommy. She knows.  
Otherwise I wouldn't be able to stand it.  
Just her and me. And she will keep knowing,  
having sunk fathoms into the ocean,  
wise and smiling with her secrets  
I divulge in speeches  
to the crowds waiting on the levee.

35.

The fish never stops flying up there, does he?

Down here at my desk which is a door

I see who I used to be.

The wolf in the house of mirrors

which have all been painted white.

So it's just a maze. Bumping around.

How could anyone be afraid?

I am, of the hexes they put on me. My own guts. My hands.

But never my hair. Life-force

unafraid to spread.

The strands on my table cannot be grasped.

You pull them out of your ears.

The fish turns. This time I don't look up.

But I hear him.

36.

He always has something to say, she says.

Her voice in the kitchen lifts up through the grate.

I have no suggestions for you.

My lower right abdomen hurts.

Choose wisely, she said, her face lit from beneath.

She chose the card that *was* her, he said.

The windows were so hot that they fell off the house.

The wood melted. My heart sank.

I thought it would be larger than that.

Maggie was up in the air again, waving her arms  
and smiling down from the blue.

I can barely sit up.

Take her onto the porch, he said.

I think it's my heart. Dropped down to be near my intestines.

It's as if my appendix were going to burst again.

Gym class. Hapax legomenon.

No one knows what kind of friends we are.

She cooked the fish she brought home in the bag.

It hung out of her pocket. I left in her car.

But I wasn't gone for long.

37.

Today's Halloween.

Sit alone by yourself in the cold, he said.

You've been getting too lofty up there.

I didn't notice that my turnip was turning soft.

It will rot soon. What then?

We the Earth will keep it for thousands of years  
like the ancient Irish preserved their lanterns— in the cold

peat moss, face masks, feathers

still clinging with the original dirt they fell into,

hardly changed, when you press it against your cheek.

You couldn't just go out and buy them.

You had to work really hard.

The light dims. Her face is his face.

And neither of them is mine, across the table.

Where did I go? And how did these two come to be speaking?

They jabber on with hundreds of voices.

I am the candle leaking onto the wood.

My only purpose is to light up your hands.

38.

Where's my scepter? You asked.  
Pouring over the black  
pool, while hundreds of hands  
groped upwards to try to reach you.  
What else do you have to do tonight?  
I see an island of flat-topped trees.  
And droplets of paint bead underneath  
for us to rub in. My foot  
on the hem of your robe halts you  
striding down your court.  
Robes, horses, dark wood.  
November of the first new batch of dark thoughts.  
The music floats out of the trees that are still adjusting,  
like black hairs dappling a woman's skin.  
How close can you get?  
In here you can tell right away.  
We put our noses against it, then backed off.  
Here's the name of our conquest.  
I lay it all on our communal table.  
I am the man herself, in person, presiding.

39.

You will get along so well with her, I said.  
I can see you now, turning your big blue key.  
The many shades of shadow we move in  
like unconcerned ghosts, knocking about  
and never making any sound.  
How did you do it to her?  
You told me to wait an hour.  
And I did, under the stairs  
where the household beggar sleeps,  
who is little do you know your own son  
waiting for you to bring him some scraps of bread.  
But isn't that how it always goes.  
Now we call him St. Alexius.  
Just one touch and the fluid pours forth.  
Nighttime during the day.  
Dusk of low intensity.  
Nothing burning. Everything floatingly under.  
As if dust from a volcano were blocking the sky,  
forty years of ash and dark. Even the butterflies'  
babies are born with grey tears on their wings  
so they can hide when clinging to chimneys.

40.

When the rabbit chews you can see his rolls make him stately.

Voluminous flesh and fur.

Prominent aspect of the corner.

Voiced earlobe. Curved sides.

He claims independence

several times throughout the night.

With his face he rustles the pellets in his bowl

as if searching for the jewel he desires.

My words are flies

evading his hallowed apertures.

41.

It's so simple you don't even have to speak.

Lay the rose by the white god's head.

The bust of my marble ancestor  
yearning for golden tones.

But it won't work. She never did,  
and she isn't working now. Look up.

There's a war in that beam of sun.

The motes blaze their assault.

The black cat doesn't notice as she lies in the circle  
the carcasses settling on her fur.

42.

No direct outlet for the sun.

I had been running for about three hours  
in a circle around the bayou.

My violinist had moved to another step  
the second time I came around,  
and on my third circuit he was gone  
from the grey stone footbridge altogether.

The bugs and palmettoes had gotten so wild  
he couldn't hear.

43.

I saw all kinds of whales, I said,  
having just returned from my trip to the Arctic.  
My fishing rod broke almost instantly.  
But we were well stocked with Saltines.  
My stomach growled at the ice moon  
who loved it when we spat at him.  
I hallucinated that I was peeling oranges  
in the morning but it was just my guide  
breathing out hoarfrost in clouds  
that smelled like the orchards of home.  
The stinky black waves were crashing into our floes.  
We must have evolved from a different kind of ocean.  
It couldn't have been this one.

44.

Which means going out of our way,  
exploring new holes in the hall,  
not the bathroom but a hovel of ghosts,  
not the stairs but a star-way of light.  
All evenings feel the same  
even when it's morning  
several times throughout the night.  
I hear her returning, then changing her mind.  
Our world of uncertain limits  
blurred for the duration of her ventures.

45.

Something's changed.

As if the vampire revealed himself to be a tree.

Why then all this studying?

The car speeds off of the roadway.

Fallen from the uphill slope.

Former vampires leering and sleeveless.

Don't worry about last night.

This is one of the best highways out here.

You found the room; it's yours.

But we're not mermaids;

we live in the mountains;

our coats are cleaned by the elements,

rushing downhill through the evergreens,

waking everyone into sleep.

# November

1.

The girl has the same hands as me.  
She's a warrior, too.  
But smaller-palmed, pushing her way  
through throngs of Nordic fighters  
to get to the front of the line.  
No one sees her  
even as she's slipping out the back door  
of the enemy's tavern,  
potions in her purse,  
silent, but smiling just in case.  
Thinking more than this room, yes?  
More than this village  
or the crude fountain in the center of town  
bubbling over with mead  
that she's never paid any attention to.  
She wanders long paths in the dark  
even in the middle of the day.

2.

I came home and a man was sleeping on my porch.  
That's the second one in two months.  
This one had a raggedy blanket wrapped around him.  
I invited him in for cereal.  
I told him about my problem.  
I said I don't think it can be true.  
He said I'm sorry but it probably is.  
I said I think I have to be dreaming.  
I know the state of the world, and this isn't it.  
Despite these sparkling lawns  
I've just come rolling out of,  
boys sleeping on one's porch  
but not the ones that one wants to have sex with.  
A world where the right one, the one who's mine,  
tells me he doesn't want me anymore,  
and I can't speak any languages.

3.

Is that salt or snow on the ground?  
I walk comfortably knowing who I am.  
A man. Salt.  
I kiss the ground.  
And say Thank you great great granddaddy  
for sending me to school.  
My friend walks by  
the corner store where I'm standing  
wearing the same jacket as I am.  
It belonged to his granddad  
who wore it when he went fishing.  
I went fishing once  
when I was nine years old  
with a purple plastic net  
in the Orleans Avenue Canal.  
I caught a netful of minnows  
but threw them out  
when I saw their eyes.

4.

I am the Page of Swords.  
My foot is as big as a ship.  
My sky is a blade of thought.  
It's exactly as she said.  
Don't *clear* your mind  
but let it become something else  
roomy and rippled with breezes  
that mingle with warm and cool.  
I wobble a little under its emptiness.  
How full it is.  
Anything could pass through here.  
And suddenly a kite  
flown by the Page of Wands  
leers into me, as cresting and taut  
as the elbow of a hard-working arm.  
I lean into its seductions  
and we break. The wind dies.  
My forehead hits the rug.  
The aperture closes.

5.

When will I learn to keep my secrets secret?  
I think, after being exposed.  
But they're no fun if nobody knows them.  
I pull the crystal out of its box to show you.  
And I want to tell everyone that I showed you.  
I am a monk. Our secrets are public.  
There's no shame in the life of God.  
You stick to one theme  
and perform slight variations  
gradually coming closer  
and further away from the woods  
while everyone or nobody watches.  
Because you're always being watched.  
By yourself. And you are God.  
And so am I. So I'm watching you  
do your quick tricks alone at night,  
Pour your cereal in the morning.  
But I still want to have secrets.  
What can we keep?  
Everything. Because out in the open  
is the best place to hide.  
Keep this in your pocket. It's my song  
played on an unnamed instrument. Underwater.  
When all the animals lived in the sea  
and I still didn't know what I was  
except when I thought of you.

6.

I'm still in the field where you left me.

My skin is turning silver  
and it's almost Thanksgiving.

Winter is finally beginning  
to make its musical sound  
now that there are no plants  
or animals left to inhibit it.

So where are you? Snowshoe rabbit  
leaping across the expanses of fluff  
without ever actually touching it?

You whom they write songs about,  
always going somewhere,  
ship on your ethereal sea.

7.

After a while I understand  
how her bare feet rest on the pebbly shore  
on the edge of a deserted world.  
Except for the cherubs that rise from the waves,  
the jewel-toned creations  
which grope their way towards her,  
there's nobody left but her and her fountain  
which is her stomach— not her womb—  
and everything she fondles in her hands  
is a body part of you.  
We can't evade it.  
I don't want to be self-sufficient.  
There's no such thing.  
The swirls make love to the sand  
and I don't even notice that it's day all day,  
entangled within the banana plants.  
Be careful. The maroon velvet bud  
that hangs at the tip— That's not you.  
Stay still. I'm coming.  
I have just begun to listen  
to the only advice I will ever be given.

8.

I wait all night for her or him to come.

I suppose I'm her.

See me draw myself on the mantle  
of your body, your chest

where your breaths buck forward  
into whatever you're touching.

I wake up. I get my stuff  
out of the back of the truck.

Black as the night I need it to be  
to begin digging for you,  
for me, otherwise I might see me  
uninvited and rifling through myself.

I take you in my hand and blow you  
until you become full-sized, tree-sized  
loping through the swamp,  
several hundreds of years old, rougarou,  
whom nobody knows about  
but everybody knows about.

9.

I still don't trust him.

Nobody that comes in a flying machine.

That holy blue between you  
that keeps you from being each other.

Who otherwise looks the same  
and does everything he can to touch me.

His wise and helpful arm  
reaching across our table or our gulf,  
ignoring the other, who under the table  
is stroking my knee.

The grip of a hand that finally feels what it knows.

10.

Afraid of the reproductive capabilities of the sky,  
the men and women of Earth  
amused themselves by making more.  
And I highly trained speak of them  
hoarding water for only themselves.  
And not enough. Locked in blocks of ice  
salt oceans— undrinkable worlds  
of dark liquid. We cringe  
at the thought of touching themselves  
and each other in our houses made of ice.  
The man I just met unbuttons himself in front of my face.  
Headache in the center of our union.

11.

Sleepy with fishermen  
throwing their nets around me  
—Not on me; near me  
not minding my slumped  
slumbering figure in the middle  
dreaming of being a sailor  
of any kind, on these waters  
I smell even in my dreams.  
And navigating the map, me,  
who knows only one thing:  
the difference between the river and the sea.

13.

I wake up and don't remember going to sleep.

Those witches lured me

to lie down in their grasses

as if it were Springtime,

a sunny house, just past noon,

and not late November, the woods

rickety and full of cold fog.

I don't know how much is true

or how much I should tell you.

When did the dream begin?

Or end? When did you leave?

You wouldn't— You carried me out

as I nestled between the paps

of that lovely spell lowered onto me.

They only wanted to make sure

you were strong enough, willing,

and that it tasted good to me.

14.

Feel me becoming your seascape  
my legs your castles  
my stomach your sunlight  
my toes the tips of your wave  
Folded. And unfolded.  
Broken near the hip  
to let you in.  
I want the sky to always be grey  
so we can be algae  
licking up the rocks.

15.

You said it was a stranger  
but I hold it as if it were mine  
all night long in the train compartment.  
I call him Name, and kiss him  
with the end of my finger  
as if it were burnt  
and I were pressing it into a stick of butter,  
or soaking it overnight in rose water.  
Only one among many  
songs you could sing  
about that place that you're in.

16.

Do you remember what you'd been saying?

Along the side of the road  
where all fortunes are told.

You don't predict me—  
we have been prefigured  
and preceded— hear them  
alluding to something else  
with their instruments.

We don't really have a choice.

So where are we, again?

Somewhere we can't hear the house,  
harmless and never alone  
with our thumb deep in the sun.

17.

The mouth has trouble knowing what to say.  
I find my speech on the sidewalk  
that paves its way into the dark of my sleep,  
the forest, where a woman is presiding—  
A ghost? White all over her gown, as if powdered,  
who makes the space around her glow  
not with goodness, just light.  
All the leaves turn over for her,  
show their most interesting sides  
to be rings on her fingers.  
She is the dry flame, hidden in the lamp,  
sodium-vapor that permits others color.  
All the animals join into one, and supplicate  
themselves at her knee  
their chin to her leaves  
thanking her for their words,  
for giving them themselves.

18.

The rain outside determines a structure  
that gives us carpeting and overhead lights,  
a noisy printer, and a girl bending over,  
a big boy reading a tiny book, mouthing in French.

The lights go on and off.

She gets angry with me  
but I have no language, just this sweater,  
hardly enough for winter.

But a shepherd doesn't need to speak.

Just pipe on his aulos  
and pick his feet up off of the ground,  
move his herd through waves of mist.

I'm the one that needs language.

19.

I saw another girl writing my book in the rain.  
The sky was playing my song.  
I got into the car  
and they were playing it in there, too.  
It was in a different language  
but I still wanted to sing.  
This one is about me— just me—  
carried by your caravan.  
Look at all your cars, sloshing  
wooden wheels down watery streets.  
I want to be those, too.  
I want them to smell like me  
so when you're coming this way you will know  
this is where she is.

20.

Under the Earth where we live in abundance

I grew up in a cornucopia.

Down where we're close to the sun,

where our lips touch her forehead,

and are sunburned already by noon.

The real chosen ones are those who are punished.

What did you think a blessing looked like?

There are no contradictions.

21.

*When the moon falls out of the sky...*

Don't talk to me like that.

Oh my boyfriend is lost at sea.

He's gone. We've ruined him.

Caught in the net of ourselves.

And now there is nothing left.

Who will help me speak?

Who will listen?

While I work things out.

The girls from my village run down to the water

to look where they might find him,

but there is only a new mineral taste to the wind

and nothing to show them

their own reflections.

22.

You put my name back where it belongs

I said, and then assented.

How could I argue with a face like that?

Like *what*? She said, disapprovingly.

The thick ringlets of his ancestors

fall behind his ears,

and up from his shirt collar comes

the smell of living in the trees

by day, sneaking into cities at night.

I help him steal the milk

from my daddy's goats.

23.

My stomach gives meaning to the dance

I do in front of the mirror

on top of your dresser

piled up with clothes

while you're in the shower

or in front of the window

that looks out onto the street

hoping someone will see

my new belly dance.

I am a pearl

and I move through these rooms

looking for the rest of my strand.

24.

The town bell sounds  
from beyond where either of us are.  
In the corner of my bedroom  
with the light red walls, in bed  
just lying here.  
There's nothing I want to do  
but touch you. Build  
a new foundation for our minds,  
stomach to stomach, leg to leg...  
My calves hurt  
from walking these medieval streets  
on the brink of revelation,  
held up to it, constantly.  
No one out here but me and the sun.  
The world is old.  
The tired giants retreat to the hills.  
I stay close to you to remain myself.  
The me least likely to float away.  
Or not *fly*, but deliberately drift  
up and above our little town,  
the houses, the bar, the gas station,  
Hoffman's, with the rusted wheels  
sleeping in the yard.

25.

Three months, and I'm still pussyfooting around  
like a nobleman with nowhere to go.

But I have everywhere to go.

And I thank God for these magical shoes  
that carry me through my ancestral halls  
and into your endless forests.

No people here now,

but here and there an old campsite,

a cairn by a stream, ripped nets

flowing downhill, caught on a rock.

Everything that has ever been written

lurks in these woods.

And I travel safely under your riding-cloak

while you're busy somewhere else,

standing at the top of a treeless hill

conversing with envoys of winds

that blow over you, coming from the pale sun.

I go deeper, until it gets so thick I can't see

and the woody chambers echo with voices,

the few of which who *do* see me wondering

who I am and what do I have to say.

26.

The two hands come all the way around  
to touch each other,  
and hold one heart in the center.

The claddagh ring should be gold.

Because gold and silver  
are not two parts of a whole.

No anima and animus—  
gold looks down  
onto everything else.

God is the sun;  
everything else is lesser.

Heart, lion, flame, name.

What looks down on you  
is what's up there.

I don't believe in two.

There is One  
and then there is Three.

27.

A pinhead of light flies away from my face.

Don't blame any of this on me—

I'm just another schoolboy

doing what they tell me

and writing my poems on the side.

A real witch should never say she's a witch.

Why should she?

I'm too busy building a room

in which my fairies can winter,

recalling my memories

and cleaning them.

It's been a long day but luckily

someone's waiting at home

drinking my wine for me.

28.

I've come to take you away with me.  
Out to dance with milk-white waters  
until they fall asleep.  
I take myself by the hand  
and out the front door of my cottage  
lead me, into the woods and the fields  
to befuddle our heads with pale lights.  
Who am I but those reeds?  
Rustling against each others' stalks  
until my ears rub off and my feet burn up  
in the cold waters of the lake.  
This cottage belongs to no one  
as much as it belongs to me  
who burst in here on you, unexpectedly.  
I mean to scare you.  
To tell you to be careful with your leaping.  
The volatile principle is no friend to the hearth  
and will steal you while you're awake.

29.

Sometimes running to the things that change us  
he comes, addicted to it,  
or so he said. I doubted  
but took him into my bed.  
Never the other way around.  
The globe hangs,  
a marble from the larger orb;  
we're getting better  
but farther apart.  
I want to be *us* again  
inside the yellow lamp,  
curled above milk-glass,  
not sure what's making the light.

30.

Give me the strength to take what I need  
and throw away what I don't.

I push through the miracle waters  
until I find some miracles.

Not everything glistens  
like the one I remember.

Something of a still life  
is always in motion.

The rest of us sit, so here I wait  
for our edges to be blurred away.

31.

I stared at the mirror until I saw  
all the people I'd ever been.  
But I know from a feeling, an internal vision,  
that I used to be an archaebacterium  
living on the side of a frozen mountain.  
But I felt no sensation of cold  
and there was nothing I didn't know.  
Thank goodness I'm human now.  
There are days where he lifts my hair  
from the back of my neck...

32.

If only I would stop trying to name you.

What do you want me to do?

It's not about that; it's about me,

and that you are riding your bright orange horse  
through the desert into battle.

*What battle?* You wake up

and have lost everything you'd been carrying.

Feet shifted out of the stirrups

my dreams are made of.

I've never heard you and never will.

I can only speak into myself

and look at what I call you.

33.

You tie a green scarf around your head  
and say you'll be someone else for the night.

But aren't you already?

Before you've even finished your sentence  
you've changed your clothes.

I'm sorry but it's too long of a walk  
and too late at night.

I'm tired of talking about myself  
and I'm tired of you  
too eager to listen.

Would that I could be someone else  
mouthing out of a different orifice  
around different words, fingers, teeth.

34.

A hill-dwelling giant had tiny men  
planted standing upright in his back.  
I thought I'd found a thought  
on my way to school  
and thought Isn't it a shame  
that I keep finding what I look for.  
The wave pushes away  
but I keep my arm steady, in up to the shoulder.  
The god doesn't understand my discomfort.  
He's holding all the jewels, as we can see,  
and seems to be having no trouble.

35.

The light of the center scatters.

Every home for itself.

The letters blend into one another  
and overwhelm the frozen alleyways.

We walked barefoot through a tunnel paved with ice.

I called it a land of unfulfilled miracles  
as if it didn't matter

That I could no longer see the planets  
swirling around their clogged sink.

The wind down here will still roar through the grass,  
the mice still hide under the door,  
the witches still be pouncing in the fields.

## **Eye in the Room: Poems from Balthus**

*The Mediterranean Cat (1949)*

How do they know what kind of beast I am?  
All you need is one look at my legs  
to know what I'm capable of  
as you're moving through our kingdom.

There's another boat below this one—  
It's watery counterpart, and upside-down,  
just like you have yours and I have mine,  
and another one up in the air.

Bright, fixed stripes of sunlight  
have never shown themselves until now.  
Everybody wants to come to our party  
now that we're aware that we're having one.

An alchemical wedding fit for all  
at an inconspicuous restaurant.  
Him. Her. For once nothing is uncertain  
even in this suspicious room.

All can see on the sea.  
Kept awake on our spindly legs  
and these breezes that come from being up so high  
while also so far below

the "real" world, where people live in houses  
and talk to each other and look at their mouths.  
You've got to eat your way out, to get in.  
I should have known this by now.

There was never a doubt in my mind it was good.  
He looks up, jaws damp with lemon juice.  
Everyone is on the move except us.  
All our moving is being done for us.

*The King of the Cats (1935)*

What? Old Tom dead?  
The man doesn't know what he's saying.  
Bullrider you have been out too late at night  
to come proclaiming into this holy morning.

Only a small mirror is left  
to these poor humans for fortune-telling.  
And some wisps of hair in their ears  
for befuddling the real news.

It's morning yet it's still midnight.  
Morning for *me*. My dawn.  
I am the specimen of the world.  
Always the babe, but now the father, too.

I suppose I have always known what I wanted.  
Stone tablets in grass, a heavy night,  
and then the dim room after the procession  
to dry my gloves by the fire.

But it doesn't matter. Open the grate  
to the fireplace of this peasant cottage.  
I am never again going to have to wait,  
never going to have to shut my mouth.

*Larchant (1939)*

It's good for me to not get what I want.  
Time and time again. The pen pushes back  
to where I never thought I'd be.  
A beginning, but not *of* anything.

A beginning is that from which  
other things naturally follow, say the *Poetics*.  
The cows nibble the sky. I call my mother.  
I see it all but can't hear a single thing.

The black east settles— Is it morning?  
One hundred years ago?— That was a beginning.  
I was ripe in every farmer's field.  
I was a harvest for the mind.

Now the sky is more diverse than the town.  
A chaos of minerals, hectic deliberations  
God has left to their own devices, without voices,  
angelic motes without an epoch to cling to.

I look at a landscape and see myself.  
Houses too poor to pillage.  
My hill is the largest thing in the world,  
oppressive in its singularity.

But when I look at you I see you.  
Who is going to save me?  
I'm not going anywhere. I carry  
my times of day with me wherever I go.

*The Cat in the Mirror (1978)*

To finally see the person you've been writing about  
—but not *as* a person— for all these years.  
The soft features, the raggedy nightgown—  
Me. Getting out of bed.

It's morning, but still night in my room.  
The fresco flakes off.  
Surely something is evolving.

*The Cat in the Mirror (1988)*

I leave my real legs behind  
and take my fake legs with me.  
O Mahitabel I've hardly learned how to type  
and my hands are already ruined.

Who can give me the shadows I want?  
Not you, and that's why I'm leaving.  
Maybe someone in this little red book  
will wrap their larger arms around me.

Where does such energy come from?  
My questions are too big for my bed.  
You're laughing at me. How do I know  
that you haven't always been?

Why do you think the mirror is black?  
I can name at least five reasons.  
It's black because I'm not looking at it.  
Is that it? Who am I looking for?

*The Cat in the Mirror (1990)*

I never got my legs back, but I don't care.  
I'm the squire I always wanted to be.  
That I always was, and knew it,  
as long as I stayed on my horse.

They tell me I can't mix present and past.  
I say there is no past. Just my hair  
longer some days than others.  
And there are days when I don't see you.

But everybody's still with me,  
still under me, in fact.  
The shapes my arms form in the world  
move their wings with no distinction.

What is land? What is reluctance?  
How do I get to anywhere?  
I have complete faith in your circus,  
I've fallen into, to take me there.

There are no more me's for me to find.  
There are thousands worth running through  
and dissolving one after another. I call me  
Pheidippides of myself.

So where is there to return to?  
The next question  
holds my hand  
while I do what I need to do.

*The Drawing Room (1942)*

Afternoon is still asleep.  
But the feelings of the room are quickened  
even with everyone focused  
on their involuntary pursuits.

But one among us is free.  
He, having come up from his sightless kingdom,  
as if having walked through powdered milk,  
has gotten by on narrow knuckles.

S still stands for snake.  
But wood is not a tree.  
I'd recognize you anywhere.  
I know you're following me.

Strike. Six. Six o'clock.  
*The new bell works, I'm glad to see.*  
Says a voice trailing in with the subtle wind  
not un- invited.

But only one kind of light at a time.  
That's why I'll wait. So I can taste it.  
I know it's coming because the windows turn green  
and the boy is losing feeling in his leg.

*The Drawing Room (1943)*

We've been cleaned up.  
The new ghost says much  
but we don't listen. To anyone.  
Trains of imprecise density.

Like heat rising from a candle.  
We too are taken care of.  
Who placed the new bowl on the table  
or purchased its peaches? Not me.

Inaction is best enacted together.  
It feels a little better.  
It's only me again, shimmering  
differently on the rug.

Something licks my arm— but isn't there.  
Eventually I wake up and there's no one around.  
Never a fire. But now a huge snake  
slithers under my heavy legs.

*Still Life (1937)*

Everything's struggling to remain still.  
Avoiding a sense of shame underneath  
the icy lines of posture  
present among these objects.

But is it really shame? Or guilt.  
That's not a real dichotomy, he said.  
Clutching his cheeks, trying to find  
his real body. Shame.

To touch so often it doesn't go numb.  
To wake up so often I don't have a chance.  
The kitchen's grinding its teeth.  
And the dining room? The office?

You have to rely on something.  
Here we have both bread and blood.  
And cut glass has begun to teeter  
on the brink of domestic collapse.

Sights are beginning to close themselves.  
So I guess you're coming back.  
No one has ever seen a bird  
except the one you will have brought.

*Still Life (1940)*

I champion what I've never seen.  
But this exceeds all expectation.  
The edges of the tablecloth and of our world  
ripple with newfound color.

By which I mean to suggest that hubris  
could extend to the natural world, too.  
You can tell when something's about to step out of line,  
a grass blade, a blue jay, an apple.

Who ruins our hopeful imagery?  
Jovial beyond his own brim.  
Not paying attention to the other atrocities  
quietly committed next door.

It wasn't even hot.  
It was still enough to collect dust.  
St. Martin hanging his head in the corner  
dries his eyes on the neutered velvet.

We recognize a common decency  
to which we can peel ourselves down.  
Knowing that it's rinsed of that fine  
fire when we finally see it.

*Fear of Ghosts (1933)*

Who is afraid?  
Now that I try  
even the sun  
capsizes me.

Pulls off all my tight  
adornments, no tricks  
of the night here,  
nothing concealed.

From the side he  
makes himself known.  
Herself? What is it?  
The door is closed.

Is there anything  
in the middle of the room?  
Is this fear?  
Or some other emotion?

I am supposed to be afraid.  
But the sounds of the city,  
buses, yelling in the street,  
mock me into forgetfulness.

But he's no more a ghost  
than factory smoke.  
So what is it that moves me  
to where I am?

*Stepping out from the Bath (1957)*

Careful never to break anything,  
my city Melusine  
every Saturday alone  
wets the entire bath.

Happy to wash the work  
and days of her new dependents  
off in the tub, the water darkening  
under her flapping tail.

Her towel gets wet  
before she even steps out.  
Hearing only her own singing,  
and me thinking only of her.

I'd surrender all of my furniture  
to be warped by her temporary sea.  
To see the steam floating out those windows.  
When are we really alive?

*Young Girl Preparing for the Bath (1958)*

You turned the bathroom into a cradle.  
Graciousness is present here best.  
Where the patterns made by the day.  
In my deep mind a towel so ready.

Faithful geometry of a man's hand  
gives me my presents.  
My new fir tree, slippers, tiles,  
buttery windowsill for teething.

A low sensation as I put on my stockings.  
For once the world shapes to me  
spreading outward, showing you  
where it is best to be.

Who am I being now?  
Nurse or Saint, Mary,  
somebody who needs a good powder,  
fleshly in herself.

Fresh from the bath.  
Pink. Near naked.  
And only you knowing  
how safe you've made me.

By evening everything out,  
making it easy,  
dough under your rolling pin,  
us in your lukewarm kitchen.

*The Cherry-Picker (1942)*

Aborting the skull  
at the bottom of the tree  
she rises one way or another  
into the upper throng of branches.

That elusive room  
built where the air is different,  
a berry riper than yours.  
“Feed me ‘til I want no more.”

I fell upwards into the warm wind.  
And I could see the other world  
I couldn’t from the sidewalk  
inside your head.

The tree in front of grandma’s house  
with the gardenias growing in front  
and the white stream they pour forth  
that rolls into the countrysides

I wrote my mother’s name  
on a piece of notebook paper  
to try to show her the immense light  
in the new breath I had found.

As if I could govern  
anyone other than myself  
or by staring make them ascend,  
or by saying their name.

But no love note could remind even *me*  
later, looking over my papers  
where I had been or what switch  
I needed to flip to return.

*Nude in Front of a Mantel (1955)*

Come inside the warm to get cold.  
They all came, carrying their instruments with them.  
I drew a star on the mirror above the mantel  
which reached all the way to the ceiling.

They played all the songs I requested.  
The saxophonist coaxed my mother down  
and kissed her. I kissed his horn  
and my boyfriend stepped outside.

So young for having worn so many necklaces.  
But I'm wearing none of them now.  
I don't have to learn to play  
if I can sing songs with my thighs.

Time stretches across my stomach and splinters  
until my hands are what's telling the stories.  
The water in my glass has appeared out of nowhere  
and my hair can change length at a moment's notice.

Quicker, quicker. Snap of hot water.  
I wake in the bottom of a blue flower pot,  
painted even on the inside  
trying to mimic the sky.

You can't speak when you're dreaming.  
You can't step out of the sea  
if you don't have feet.  
I seek the good inside all fish.

*Nu Allonge (1950)*

After a long day I lie on the bed  
backwards, so the other end  
of the room can look at me.  
Who else is looking at me?

And from in between her thighs  
pours the white substance, from the rose  
bush underneath the oak tree  
to give men something to worry about.

I'm not sneaking up on you.  
I am in the realest sense you.  
Whatever "real" foundation we lie on,  
dreaming in the corners of nobody's castle.

Sleeping in a room under the city,  
or below the ocean, where it gets warm again,  
and girls work hard morning shifts  
sweeping the tiled terraces of pavilions.

I found you where the fabric crinkled  
kind of blushed, and noise muffled  
around the walls of your thoughts,  
and your grey mind dreams of a tower.

Even the silver parts of your body  
are quiet under the warmth of this thumb.  
Or the only person who's ever existed  
letting her foot droop onto the floor.

*Les beaux jours (1944-49)*

Do I have to wait  
until he leaves the room  
to peek at the parts of me  
that I really want to see?

He's not going to leave.  
I don't want to be a marine biologist  
like everyone wants me to.  
I'm already the Queen of the Sea.

And Mister will push a wheel barrow  
behind me everywhere I go  
so at any moment, if either of us doubts,  
he can jump inside the cart.

Test of faith. Logs on the fire.  
Would you stick your arm in for me?  
Or merely your clothes, and the clothes  
of the last girl you made love to?

But I don't want that, stupid.  
I just want to feel how the rest of your body  
is perpetually reaching towards your head  
and your head is stretching outward to God

and spilling out into the universe.  
And me, who hangs downward,  
loops you. How do we move it  
to maintain the perfect ratio?

We can't go wrong.  
That's why I have to be careful  
every day, when putting on myself,  
to make sure I'm still mostly me.

Why can't we always be naked?  
That's what I'm trying to do with this mirror—  
To try to see that part of me  
that you feel when you touch me.

# Winter Play

*A man and a woman are sitting in armchairs in front of a fire. A window shows that it has been snowing for a long time.*

- B. This *is* our church—  
the frost on the windows our stained glass  
arranged in the shape of the virgin.
- A. It makes it look like it when you say it.
- B. Of course, and now... It's a real Nativity,  
better than the one outside the Catholic Church  
on Broadway, better than the silly houses  
they erect every year in the park.
- A. You almost sound like you know what you're talking about.  
—What should we have for lunch?
- B. In Bethlehem, that night, they didn't eat or drink.  
Except maybe Jesus from Mary's breast,  
once he was born, if he needed even that.
- A. Of course he did. That's what this holiday's about—  
celebrating His becoming human,  
the incarnation of the divine,  
our acceptance of the shit and piss  
—If I am permitted to say that.
- B. I don't want you to feel like you can't.  
I'm sorry if I drowned you out earlier.  
I love being here with you.  
It makes it hard to speak  
because the words I want to say  
aren't human words—  
it would come out better as song  
or dance, gestures  
a shepherd makes in the field  
in the blue light of dawn's open arms,  
he guides his sheep through the dew,  
the droplets on his nose  
kissing one another, then breaking.  
The sounds he pipes on his aulos,  
sometimes the familiar songs,  
sometimes finding his way  
through the mass of all possible sound,

and the vacancy he has to confront  
to say anything.

A. Yes, I can almost hear  
him picking now  
his way along  
the tone-holes.

B. Really? I hear his feet  
slushing through the grass  
and if they're stiff  
from a night below zero  
crushing their stalks  
as he walks.

A. Do you imagine this occurring in winter?

B. No— I'm picturing this in the Spring.

A. Yes. Christ a grown man,  
well into his prime,  
period of using his hands  
in accordance with God's will,  
making a loud and holy noise.

B. I imagine Him making  
hardly any noise at all.

A. Yes, it's His followers  
baa-ing about Him,  
raising a ruckus in the street

B. — But you couldn't say  
He didn't want it.  
He *is* the one  
who flipped the tables...

A. Are you sure? Remember:  
you haven't even read the Bible.  
Be careful about what you say.

B. I know my stories. But I guess you're right.  
But why are we turning our shepherd into Christ?  
I see a *simple* shepherd—

A. Are you saying Christ wasn't?

B. That's right. The Son of Man  
was not any lowly herd.  
I see an old man, fifty-five,  
with six children, and a wife,  
meandering his way through the clover,  
thinking of women...  
Or a twelve year old boy  
floating his way through the fields  
up to the forest  
he has to push his herd through  
to get to the higher, greener  
grazing on top of the mountain.  
It's a long ascent  
and spooky, the second half  
he has no choice but to traverse at night,  
but his ears pop the minute  
he exits the gloom,  
and the sun rising over that side  
makes the grass look almost pink,  
and the sheep's wool  
feels at once unearthly  
and new to his tired hands,  
excited, and relieved, he is  
to see the vast stretch  
cresting over and beyond his vision.

A. This is not our Good Shepherd.

B. No. But he is good  
at being a shepherd.

A. You can tell he loves them.  
Even though he doesn't talk  
about them off-duty, usually,  
with his friends, but when he *does*,  
he speaks frankly, caringly,  
but in such a manner  
you can tell that if one died  
he wouldn't mourn it; he'd try  
to find the best way to bury it,  
and move on as quickly as possible.

B. The only shepherd  
I ever knew was a woman,

and she said that they leave them  
out in the wild, for sure,  
for the wolves and foxes to get.  
And that there would be an...  
obvious shiftiness...  
among the rest of the herd,  
but no mourning.  
Unless the deceased was a lamb.  
Then, she said, the mom might cry.

- A. I knew a lady-shepherd too, once.  
But she was mainly known for rabbits.
- B. Did she raise them for meat?
- A. Yes. And she taught other women how to kill them.
- B. What do you mean?
- A. Like how to do it quickly and cleanly.  
She taught all the ladies in her neighborhood  
and advertised in the paper too.  
She lived way out in the country  
but they'd drive for miles  
to watch and listen to her.
- B. What was her name?
- A. Ruby.
- B. Last name?
- A. Mc. Something.  
I think. I don't remember.
- B. Look— it's stopped snowing.
- A. So it has. If we push our way out  
we could go for a walk.
- B. And freeze?  
I think I'll stay in, stay warm by this fire—  
no need to make ourselves cold to appreciate heat.
- A. I disagree. That's the only reason  
we enjoy any earthly thing at all:

this romance of opposites  
that plays with us every day.  
—and night. Bright makes dark  
a welcome haven from the light.  
Or maybe I just love the night.  
So I think I'll go out—  
it looks like another world out there—  
but I'll walk quickly because  
it seems to have started snowing again.

B. Are you sure?

It looks like several feet  
piled up in front of the door  
and lining the street.  
I don't know how you'll get anywhere.

A. I'll make it.

B. Why do you want to go?

A. Why does anyone want to go anywhere?

I want to move, to make-believe  
I have a task to complete.  
Who knows? Maybe I'll see  
if Hoffman's around. He often  
has people over this time of the year  
when no reasonable person would think of going outside.  
I can handle this weather. My people don't come  
from the steppes of Russia for nothing.

B. Now you're really making me worry.  
And we've been talking blasphemously.  
Maybe I'll say a prayer when you leave,  
and you keep Him in mind all the way—

A. Since when have you thought  
in no uncertain terms about Christ?  
I've read the Bible  
and I'm not worried.  
You shouldn't be either.  
But maybe instead of saying a prayer  
you could take a look at our Good Book.

B. We'll argue about our Savior later.  
I don't think I need to read it  
to know my God. There are other ways.

A. I'm leaving.

B. Fine. Just don't stay out all night  
or try to come back too late.  
The coldest time of night is early morning.

A. I'm not a god. Don't worry.  
Read your book until I return.  
Rest in your chair and think about *simple* shepherds—  
I'll see you in forty-five minutes.

*Exit A.*

## ACT II

- B. I wish that someone would come to call  
on *me* during a snowstorm.

*(Sits down and reads a book, then puts it down.)*

I've always wanted to read the Bible,  
but whenever I actually pick it up,  
where do I start? The beginning?  
In Church no one ever alluded to  
the importance of a chronological reading.  
The stories are presented individually,  
as if everything is always happening at once.  
What's the use if I know the calendar,  
the movement from one important event  
to another, Birth, Death, Ascension?  
What do I need to know of lists  
about what to not eat where and when  
when I already have a personal connection with Him?

*(Goes to shelf and takes Bible, sits back down, begins to read starting at the beginning.  
Reads for forty five seconds and then a thump thumps the window or side of the house).*

Who's that? Snow?  
*(goes to the window)*  
Anyone there?  
It must have been an icicle  
falling from the roof.  
The snow is piled up so thick out there  
I can't even see the footprints  
he made when he left.  
And it's coming down faster than ever.  
I hope the animals will be all right.  
But they know how to deal with winter, like we do;  
they love it, as much as they love summer,  
because it couldn't be any other way.  
...  
I'm so worried. It's getting dark.  
Not like it ever was light.  
It's about... three o'clock? And we didn't eat.  
So he's hungry and tromping through snow.

I should never leave the cupboard empty  
so he never has a reason to leave.

*(Sits down, begins to read, but then turns head to look out window).*

I can't tell what color the sky is.  
A minute ago it looked blue as slate,  
but now it's saying green  
as if something were happening  
out there, but I know that nothing's changed.

...

What do we think, is it worth going out?  
I can't tell if it's been thirty minutes  
or three, my sense of time is skewed  
by my fear, and there's no sun to talk to me.  
Just this godforsaken grey blizzard  
hurling itself upon itself,  
like the people we try not to be.  
I don't know anything.

...

What's it like to not know anything  
about the world you're in the middle of? This.  
Unable to move or make anything change.  
I can only squirm in my shell,  
while the truth occurs not five miles away.  
Suddenly my connections don't matter.  
I might have never known him at all.

...

Let me think... Hoffman  
or no Hoffman, he wouldn't keep me waiting.  
But how long was he intending on taking?  
An hour? Could it have been an hour already?  
It takes me ten minutes to say a sentence  
so we only get closer from here.  
This useless arm, that couldn't keep him from leaving.  
This useless hand, writing letters to no one.  
What good is a person who doesn't talk to other people?  
If I had to live like this I would kill myself.  
Yet here I am, managing,  
as if I could go on forever.

ACT III

B. I hear him!

*(B stands up. A stumbles into the room covered with snow; a mass of it surrounds each boot, as if he's been out in a storm.)*

B. Honey! What happened?

Come in. Let me help. *(Tries to help remove boots, but he won't let her).*

A. What time is it?

B. I don't know.

A. Please tell me what happened.

*(A slumps into chair, boots still on, maybe.)*

A. Okay. I arrived  
at Hoffman's house,  
there were friends all around  
and he had more than enough  
of everything for everyone.  
But as soon as I'd stepped inside  
he enlisted me to go on an errand.  
*Would you mind? He asked. It's not far at all.  
And you're the only one with boots on.*  
I was already frozen as it was  
so I figured it didn't make a difference.  
I'd help out my friend.  
Peter and Donald and Sue Ellen were there,  
pink as peaches and drinking like kings.

B. Was there anyone else?

A. Sue Ellen's little girl, Beatrice.  
Maurice and his brother from out of town.  
They had lights in the windows,  
Sue Ellen was playing a song,  
and Beatrice was dancing with Maurice.  
But I said I wouldn't mind  
a refreshing hike. Where did he want me to go?

To Jacobson's, not quite half a mile  
up the hill, and to the left,  
the brick house, you've seen it,  
behind a stately cedar.  
Hoffman said he was sick, and he owed him some money,  
and he wouldn't trust anyone else of the company  
to bring him a bottle, and a boule, and a bundle of cash  
to aid him in his infirmary.  
It seemed like a task that could be postponed,  
but Hoffman was getting anxious.  
I don't know about what, if he thought  
the old man would send someone to beat him up.  
Seemed unlikely, though I never met the man myself.  
And I didn't understand why *he* couldn't go,  
or Jacobson couldn't come here, but no matter,  
I'd oblige him; let Hoffman revel  
in the warmth of recent sales. Let him stay.  
So I walked out as quickly as I'd walked in,  
and at that moment I had no worries.  
Life was coming smoothly, I thought as I walked,  
I felt a part of it, for once, one simple component of a seamless whole,  
and neither cold nor Hoffman's discourteousness  
could deter me. Though the wind seemed black  
swirling around me, as if it were swarming from a sooty sky,  
the snow spewing out of God's shameful chimney.  
I trudged until I arrived at the house,  
a sizeable old home built of bricks.  
The door was open,  
not ajar, but cracked.  
I was holding the money in my hand  
and the booze in my coat,  
not in a pocket, just close at my side.  
I crept in. It was black as night,  
and I didn't see any lights to put on.  
I left the door open, wet as it was,  
so I could see my way inside,  
calling, "Jacobson? Hoffman  
has sent me to bring you some wine  
and money. It's Johnson. Sir?  
Are you there?" Nothing.  
Into the foyer I went, then into the parlor,  
searching for the man, and a little afraid  
I would find him cold, sprawled out on the floor,  
dead, and me the first to find him.  
And I also wondered what the man did for money,  
what salt mine his grandfather must have discovered

to earn such a spacious, well-furnished home.  
But no sound. No Jacobson.  
No Christmas decorations.  
Silence. Until  
I heard a smile, emanating  
from behind the kitchen door.  
It was open a little  
so I pushed, and I saw,  
a woman, voluptuous and golden,  
see-through but as if woven of wheat,  
sitting on the counter in the middle of the room.  
Her whole body was the color of her hair,  
but I think that her arms in life might be tinted  
pink, a rosy pearl of a girl, taller than I,  
and as she was sitting above me, just like a statue,  
the most stately thing in that manse,  
and certainly the only thing alive,  
holding the weight of her glory.  
But she could have been blushing; she wasn't mean.  
And when she looked at me her pink freckles glowed,  
and she lifted her arm, showed me her hand,  
and beckoned me to approach her.  
What a friend! I thought.  
Who on Earth has a better friend than I?  
I placed what I'd brought on the countertop,  
God knows how I found the courage.  
The bottle glistened beneath her  
because she had no shadow to consume it.  
I kissed my hands and gestured to her, then left.  
I sensed that she didn't want to keep me  
any longer than my allotted time.

Back at the house I asked Hoffman in private  
if Jacobson had a wife.  
But he said no. Daughters? None.  
And no maid. He asked, Did you see someone?  
And looked at me with considerable directiveness.  
I answered No. There was no one there.  
But he had some nerve sending me out  
on an errand on the coldest night in December  
without even making sure the man's home.  
I talked to conceal what I really felt,  
though I don't know myself what that was,  
is, something akin to being the walls  
enclosing a private courtyard,  
a garden that grows all year round.

And as I warmed myself in that crowded room,  
letting the voices and laughter wash over me,  
which a more fearful man would have used to stifle  
the tremors of his shaken heart,  
I knew that I could never tell anyone,  
that my secret would remain just that,  
protected by my memory's silk cushions,  
and I would bring her mysterious colors,  
smiling, to my grave.

B. Then why are you telling me?

A. Well, because I want to.

Because you're a part of me, and in a sense,  
you saw her —*are* her, too.  
And I knew that you'd be the only one  
who wouldn't ask me stupid questions.

B. That's what you think.

If I were you I wouldn't have told anyone.  
No one can respond correctly but you;  
that's why you saw her, not Hoffman,  
none of those idiots down at his tavern.  
I'm not stupid but I didn't see her,  
so I won't ask or tell you anything.  
She's for you to interpret. Even me  
telling you that she's for you to interpret  
is too much. I won't say any more.  
I don't think that I'm enough *you*  
that you should feel comfortable telling *me*  
about your religious encounters.  
I need to stop talking. She is what she is.  
Don't search elsewhere for meaning.

A. Why don't you think you're good enough to discuss her?

B. That's not what I said. It's just my opinion

that one should keep... such encounters... to oneself.  
Write it down. But don't go asking around for thoughts.  
My thoughts aren't as good as those  
that her manifestation heralds,  
or not as important. Just wait. Or don't.  
Don't ask me to tell you what to think.

A. Well maybe I wasn't going to ask you.

B. Good.

A. Fine.

B. I'm not arguing with you.

A. Neither am I.

B. I'm just being careful.

A. Careful of what?

B. Of what can happen if you speak too openly  
about... things... that appear to you.

A. I just thought I should proclaim my encounter.  
I'm excited, and I thought you'd want to know.  
Why shouldn't I go around telling everyone?  
Because they're not ready. But you?  
You can handle it. And you're not the only one.  
I think I'll tell the others.

B. You don't want to keep it for yourself?

A. Why should I?

B. In case someone makes you feel ashamed?  
In case someone says something that ruins it?

A. What could they say that would ruin it?

B. Anything at all; it doesn't matter.  
But it could happen. And what then?  
I feel like you should deal with the consequences  
of the event that you've been given.  
And not go around inviting pollutants.

A. You really think it's best for me to keep my mouth shut?

B. Yes. You don't understand why?

A. I do. I'm just not afraid.

B. I think that's very worrisome.

A. Why should I be afraid?

B. Because you're dealing with forces  
that might be more powerful than you.  
Almost certainly are. Are definitely.

A. Then nothing I can do will affect them.

B. No, but you can affect their effect on you.

A. Can I?

B. I think so.

A. I don't

B. I do. That's all I ever do.

*The end.*

## **Love Poems and Others**

## The Sea Comes Back

The sentence eventually loses meaning  
and you have to find a new one  
pretty quickly. The form fades  
and you want to start talking *as* the ocean.

Or a man walking past the docks,  
his whole being, his arms and his memory,  
his shoelaces and his teeth, his whistle,  
his lover in her white-paneled house.

A singularity needs all of its parts  
and a few external but related ones.  
And then the set *as* a set.  
My hand against the glass.

\*

You can only go forward  
if you go *that* way.  
The seashells rise into the air  
and part for you to walk through them.

The best way to find thought is through touch.  
A hairy body beneath yours.  
Air through Earth, long hours  
of rummaging in up to the elbow.

But why am I trying to tell it like this?  
Why don't I just write a love poem?  
Reclining in our chair, against the wall,  
looking out at the brick warehouses.

## Having Woken Up

I'm holding myself  
at the foot of the levee  
protracted on the grass  
next to a breeze, and a sunbeam,  
and a bug, the only friends I have  
in the world but who will make  
friends out of everyone else  
for me. The tomato man  
also. I buy a fruit from him  
and eat it sitting on the train tracks.  
Salt-less, as this day will be,  
as life is, as my friends will tell you.  
An old woman walks a black dog  
beside the levee in my mind  
and I have nothing to answer for.

## Evening Dream

*for Tamas*

You the only ink on the whole island.  
You must have come out of the sea  
fully clothed, smelling like yourself,  
rich in fish and minerals.

We're always naked, under our clothes.  
Tell everyone, so they'll stop getting naked  
around people they don't like.

But I'm talking to my desk, my curtains,  
when I should be talking to... not *you*,  
but someone near you, whom you can hear,  
an angel flying over your house.

## Theoxenia

The deities outside of my window  
are circling and stuttering.  
And I'll wait as long as I need to  
for them to make up their minds.

By which I mean that the palm trees  
are dancing in the indigo heat.  
I can barely see them, waving  
a storm up into the sky.

I've just woken up.  
It's half past six in the afternoon,  
and the clouds are dark yellow.

There's no resolution; it's not a fable.  
The dog enters the house and no one sees.  
The mother doesn't answer.

What now? Come back,  
well-travelled friends whom I left  
alone in the shadows of this expired house.

## Changeling

In your bed I am misplaced  
and find myself confused and caressing you  
as if we were two fairies in a log  
or on a hill, with no one near  
or far who could know about us.  
You told me to stop but I didn't  
talking, weaving our touches with words  
which I'd never have thought I could do  
but here we are, my magic breast in your mouth,  
on sheets that hold together  
for only as long as we're touching each other.

## The Dark House

We never had one night alone;  
we've had two hundred years,  
but you're still there, and I'm still here  
across the room, drinking Herbsaint  
while Melissa upstairs,  
the sweetest moans, is making  
roam up from her body that tree  
that bristles its leaves in the wind, the thrill  
she conjures for herself on command.

## The Seaman

What can we do to make men less boring?  
The sea-wife plainly asked me  
one night when her husband was gone and we  
sat by the fire drinking poteen.

Have you freed yourself such to speak that way?  
I asked in reply. I for one  
am still in love with the man,  
*a* man, your man, some men, one man,  
and am all the more woman— I make myself woman—  
by lying in my bed and dreaming of him.

But she disagreed. Women, she said,  
are more womanly when they love women,  
as Aristophanes might agree, maybe,  
and women, as archetypical as I might sing them,  
are better for having been composed by me.

I don't understand how that doesn't make you a man,  
I said, and she turned me out  
as I deserved, onto the hillsides, in the August dusk  
and I stumbled my way back to the sea  
where the rocks still smelled like him,  
the sand still gave me his footprints.

## The Good Sleep

What time is it? Noon? Where?  
Have I been listening to someone else  
tell me goodnight through the window?

What is morning without the face  
my hands have forgotten? I want  
to appear as the leaf that I am,  
dry as the wing of a moth on an old porch,  
glad of nothing but to be picked up.

For life's asleep in a little boat.  
All that's awake is the waves  
hitting your cheek with the backs of their hands  
gently, to keep you there.  
Around and around  
and somehow out of the center of the world.

## After Rain Apparitions

The sky is yellow; the palms are grey.  
Gods from different religions are flocking around me.  
And I wish I had a red dress to wear  
out into the rainy sunlight,  
and a drum, and a song I knew the words to.

But instead I'll stay inside  
with only a view of the window  
trying to find the origins of my apparitions  
in books. Though I know  
that other people's dreams are not mine,  
and there is not a *way* to do anything,  
but what comes comes of its own accord.

## Trying at Love

*for Tamas*

*“make thee another self, for love of me”  
Shakespeare, Sonnet 19*

1.

Or is it less of a feeling and more an expression  
that I wear on my face, and in how I carry my arms  
as I walk through the snowstorm towards you

who are everywhere, since you can be anywhere.  
A different part of town in another city.  
Like the women I’ve read about, Let me not notice the difference.

But I don’t think I know what I’m talking about.  
There are myriad feelings every day  
that could all call themselves Love.

2.

How to invoke these now?  
Leafy shapes in a dark room.  
Confusedly moving towards you.

And I think: How is this about *you*?  
Once in love, what does it ever have to do with the you?  
Stay still, just there, where I need you.

Medium of light, maker of three.  
I’m still not saying your words.  
I’m still only thinking of myself.

3.

It was you whom I discovered I could touch  
wherever I wanted to, in any company,  
and not have any of them know.

Robert says it shows on my face when I'm somewhere else  
but no one's ever guessed where— not even me.  
Lancelot tripping in the woods.

The queen folding her arms by the window,  
Not looking out, not looking in— Love as place.  
Only open to certain nobility.

4.

What is nobility? Haven't I always been noble  
in that I grow from the ground up  
and know the name of my lover by heart?

In the castle a princess doesn't know what she is,  
nor does she learn from her years in the woods.  
It's unexpected, and it has to break your heart.

And that's when virtue fails, when she becomes responsible.  
For the health of the kingdom, her father, her priest,  
the hungry dogs devouring scraps in the kitchen.

5.

Furthermore when did I begin listening to anyone else?  
You are the only one who knows anything  
and I am insufficient, supplicant, necessarily,

which now manifests in a new way.  
For doubting, or for thinking  
that I know what it means to doubt.

The dogs run through the woods,  
and that's you leading them.  
What are they after? You too?

6.

The rabbits still knock  
the heads off of their subjects.  
The timeless musics still play

in these whiskery chambers  
that keep me searching  
every corner for water or warmth.

Don't you know that's why people like shiny objects,  
in the hopes that it might be a stream or a berry,  
somebody else's open mouth.

## Elizabeth

Elizabeth, the name of everyone's grandmother  
except mine. Your sister's mother's mother.  
From in here I can see the pale yellow petals, wooden panels  
on the house next door. In the rain. And I think  
of how Elizabeth left me for you,  
and now she's left you, too.

I'm friendly enough to the man  
when I have to be. I smiled at him  
on New Years Eve, and told him to have a Blessed One.  
I don't cry more than I need to.

But when he's in the other room  
dancing with the band,  
Elizabeth and I slip behind the coat rack,  
and for a moment it seems like she's still crazy over me.

The old faces of the houses  
won't say anything about us newcomers.  
I'm deeply worried, but I give it to the shutters,  
the chifferobes, the hinges, and the rain gutters.

**Postcard of “The Old Dueling Grounds, City Park, Showing the De Lissue – Le Bouisque  
Duel in 1841 (From an Old Photo) New Orleans, La.”**

Like wool hanging out to dry  
the mass of Spanish moss  
was the only place to fight under.

Is this a successful new Europe?  
What is success? What is Europe  
but two young men wielding swords?

But these were Creoles  
holding to a blade Creole honor  
insulted in the ballroom

the next morning under the oaks.  
It was said, Scarcely a day in ten years has passed  
without duels being fought at the oaks.

The bystanders are wearing long blue coats  
and hats, while our fighters in white shirts  
with their sleeves rolled up, lunge

in initiated battle, but there’s no blood yet.  
We know the day was not breezy  
because the moss points downwards in the picture.

Bug-infested, we know, but here softer,  
like a heavy heaven  
hanging just above their heads.

And then every once and a while  
the song would stop.  
The sword would drop.

Young Jacques squints  
at the forest at its boldest,  
the swamp before it was cleared for a park.

He can’t see them, just the still green  
miasma humming, and things of other colors  
drifting around...

Down your torso. Smirking?  
No. He touches his ear.  
And then he drops to his knees.

Sunspots or golden  
places where the color has faded  
on the boughs or on the paper.

The leaves. Too late  
to cling to the branches like they do.  
What is there left to touch?

## Badger

Welcome mats. Welcome home.  
I say to the animals lost in the snow  
from safe inside my burrow, my sett,  
and they feel my intentions purring below them,  
thinking their warm thoughts for them.

Until one of them, deranged from cold,  
unearths with his claws my chimney, my window,  
my step, and shouts out: This is someone's home!  
And at last unveils my sleeping name  
fixed in ceramic on the siding.

Let me be the first to extol the quiet virtues,  
shuffling down the hall with my lamp.  
I wrote my book by living  
in this river valley, and by letting them in  
in January earning my name.

**Poem on the Painting in Room 237 of the La Quinta Inn, Hershey, Pennsylvania**

White lemon, the center of attention.  
Leaving the city in blood  
behind you. I see the other yous  
you left behind, toeing forward  
into a grey-green morning.

But what is this broken pottery chip  
you've forgotten in your train of wreckage?  
Winking in the sky, a reminder  
of grandma's vase? The beaten bowl  
in which she as a child made butter?

The orange almost overrules.  
The red crescents, as if flowers  
outlining you, outliving you,  
boat with thick hull sliding  
into someone else's painting.

## Ven Dinero

Money has always been important to magic, he said.  
And now that I've begun, where to go?  
The ability to do what and go where I please.  
To make my story around me, inside me, bodily  
a brown candle burns, alongside the green,  
but when does the thought come in?  
But all is thought. And all is body.  
The mind doesn't wait for itself to change.  
The light is another part of it.  
We try to be clear, I said to him.  
You can get mad, but we all need money.  
Us trilobites scuttling along on our shells,  
brandishing our tails like jets behind us.  
Everything is as it always was.

## Romance

The songs of the castle  
are peasant songs sung of the court.

The peasant songs are courtly  
songs about the peasantry.

Are they? As if anyone ever knows  
what anyone else is talking about.

I draw my heart backwards  
as if I wasn't supposed to see it.

But the person behind this paper,  
this two-way mirror, sees it.

It's the same voice, you should know,  
there are only two people in a world.

\*

Everyone bathes in the fountain  
and eventually it dries up.

The fruit dies out  
from having been looked at so much.

You have to know exactly what you mean.  
I say, gripping your shoulders.

The water ends but the shore continues  
The woman cries and her hair falls out.

Sago palms tremble  
until they turn into maples.

The world only widens as it widens  
and things become harder to find.

## January Tableaux

Who is that chopping wood  
out back, in the middle of this rain?  
I can't see his face but I see his hands  
meaning he is more of a *type* than a person.

Dark wind. Light wood  
falling from the stump without sound.  
Pitiful slippage of waterlogged work.  
And yet he goes on.

It's almost night. He changes  
and yet he stays the same.  
Father, lover, brother, friend,  
preparing for cold nights to come

as it's nice to imagine men do.  
I won't talk to him. Won't call him inside.  
One can't spend all of her time  
imagining that people aren't doing what they want.

## The Borderlands

The train breathes your warm hand  
sings between my thighs.  
The silver mammal is winter  
draped above us  
restless soldiers of the hunt.

It's twelve o'clock. The fingers of the heart  
are warm and curled around my side.  
The beast smells even in death  
sweet and leaf-like, a wet forest  
hunched in this tundra  
as far as the eye can see.

The mouth sleeps. Everyone has to  
make themselves flat for a third of a day  
while their soul sprinkles into the cosmos,  
waging moral planetary war.

We mammals  
tuned our Earth to hold us,  
and us to it, so we wouldn't forget each other  
and our purely material bond which is our bond.

## Death and the Nine of Cups

Fertility, abundance. For the small price  
of killing something in me, or allowing it to die  
so my good fortune could manifest for me.  
For nine cups, who wouldn't be willing to die?

But he's not me. He's not even you.  
And I'm no longer sure what it is that has died.  
But the gateway closes; the grail is removed  
from the sermon and the people are thirsty.

Meaning that the inhabitants of my body,  
mind, spirit, are cut off from the flow.  
The gargantuan frog at the font of the stream  
is drinking up all of the water.

One needs a brazen hero with a knife  
to hike up-stream through barren towns  
and famished fields, to slice his belly,  
and form the second-largest river in the world.

So do I pull another card? It's late.  
But difficult to go to bed knowing one's cups  
are barred from her, while the Nine-Man,  
frog-faced himself, sits up smirking all night.

## The Entrance of the Birds

Woodpecker, Junco, I see outside my window.  
Birds, what are your names?  
I move quickly into the rooms of my emotions  
as you enter crevices parted by limbs  
of the members of our marginal forest.

The effect is motion.  
Town, borderline, treeline, me.  
Downhill slope and invisible fences.  
Teach me how to sing.

Black feathers. Black like the realization of sleep.  
Black curtains in front of the sky.  
The cat on the fence, only passing through.

Black too full. The meaning of meaning.  
Black candles are burned, by some, the book says,  
to repel evil enchantments  
(the black is the evil, dispelling as the smoke),  
but if you are one of those for whom  
black is a color of luck,  
it would be better to burn a white.

Is that what it said?  
I don't think I know what white means.  
The sky above our house.  
But even then, it's only the absence of black. Night.  
White is aloft and alone.

The birds bring me back.  
This new one has feathers of blue  
and a long nose that I later describe to you  
by holding my arm in front of my face.

A white clarinet  
with which he summons the air.  
A fluted column in a museum.

A toothpick made of steel  
set out from his face.  
But it's not unwieldy to him  
who knows how to use it,

to point it where he wants to go,  
viewfinder, rifle, finger,

or, like the whiskers of a cat,  
he feels the breezes with it  
and knows when it's going to rain.

Alive. In the miracle of light.  
See my fir trees, bluegreengreen,  
drooping downwards all throughout town.

You say you know this place will be lovely  
in June, because it looks so nice right now.  
But January might be Catskill's finest month  
because of how much room there is for light  
to rain in silent waterfalls  
onto the quiet streets.

## Boreal Carnival

We must deepen our thoughts in an appropriate way  
for this age, says Steiner, in respect of the Christmas Mysteries.

Is it too late? January seventeenth  
and darker outside than it was last month.  
But no snow. And the ground  
is sticky and frozen, and a slow rain is coming down.

The birds I saw yesterday,  
Blue Finch and Junco, are gone from the yard,  
though I hear frantic twittering  
from all directions  
when I walk to the car  
to look for my slippers.

The light inside awakens Christ in each of us.  
Underneath this headache I picked up last night  
in some unrespectable part of the astral world.

The rain full of filth runs down the slope  
and into the street, as if this was ancient Rome again.  
The neighbors track down Christ with their dogs.  
I've never met any of them,  
just the trash bags they've left stacked on their porch  
as ambassadors, or offerings to the king.

I am the King. I feel it here  
between my breasts  
below the range of my headache,  
in this part of me that I thank my hardy ancestors  
never gives me any trouble.

And so it's Christmas.  
Tasting like the coffee  
Robert brought back from Turkey  
that I burned and sent  
spilling over the edges  
of its shiny golden pot.

It's morning all night, and it's night all day.  
Birds fall from one branch to another  
to keep themselves warm— strange species  
who do their introspecting in the summer.

## The Female Child

If anyone were to catch you in here...  
You square in my spherical chambers

underwater, lights glowing bubbles  
Atlantis, where we are still slow

moving, broad-finned and thin  
skinned beneath our colors

texture and taste, which are the same  
to our half-open mouths,

tongue, a goldfish in an opera,  
the first landing on the moon.

After one dies, it begins again.  
Each time in the boudoir.

Bedposts bright allowing  
girls to inhabit the border.

## Orchid

And the part that receives the act  
gives, as the sacrificial altar  
heeds and crumbles before its master,  
or rather, the lamb. The structure  
remains, saturated with blood  
sighs, and unfurls its other wings,  
as I do, because of what has been released.  
I am god or idol or temple itself  
smattered with abundance,  
immortal rose of Jericho  
waking out of dormancy.  
Look at me: cupped hands, curled trees,  
Man cuts the bough  
of the neck of the ram  
and suddenly I have the strength  
to lift myself up, muscles glowing, thighs golden,  
tongue hot pink having drunk  
from the cup of the rest of me.

## Book XXII

A teacher once told me that the more softly a person speaks,  
the closer the audience pays attention.

I would have killed the suitors too.  
They were loud and wouldn't listen.

Blood needs to be spilt over food.  
Flesh for flesh, on wooden tables.

I imagine a hall with only one window  
plugging its ears to the sound

and preferring instead to look out at the night.  
When one has a choice, and the stars are bright...

But this slaughter is also a song.  
Look at it. I'm holding it in my hands.

Having not been sung in thousands of years,  
not listened to, but looked at.

Let us not forget that the good man himself  
wailed. Homer *was* Odysseus.

In that great hall full of wastrels  
and none of them listening.

And afterwards no one to listen *to*, either.  
He shouts, Bring me the brimstone!

But no amount of incense  
will re-open the passageways.

The room fills with smoke.  
Everything's incense.

\*

Do you hear him?  
The maids whisper to one another.

Ignorant that their hours too  
are numbered. Just a couple more.

Once master has had us clean  
the dining room of blood

we'll hang like birds  
in the palace yard.

Isn't there anyone who will hear them out?  
Slander is slander in his world.

Who said what  
out of the mouth of whom?

\*

The moon looks off to the sea.  
But the fish are in here.

Eyes gouged out  
and glittering.

Our hero is wet with dark brown.  
He looks like everyone else.

He grabs Eurykleia, Rejoice!  
Inwardly, woman. Get out of the way.

Keep a close eye on your girls.  
Those sluts. Nothing more

to think about at a time like this  
than other people's pleasure.

(But it's not theirs.)  
He can't move fast enough to their throats.

Raving. He just might force  
his own blood through his skin.

Only Telemachus spared, but in debt  
to become the next Father.

Whom everyone wants to hear.

What happens

when your words are in such high demand?

Looking down from your throne

or around at your children  
and your children's friends

moving between one event and the next,  
sure that they won't turn away.

So you can speak softly.

The king's body is your body. *Yours.*

But more importantly, perhaps,  
your body is the king's.

He has yours and his own.

You have only his.

## Night Scenes

There are no rats here. There is no river.  
There is only the sound of the faucet  
you run into the kettle for tea.

\*

The velvet couch hides a rat.  
Rudolf Steiner's spider-like beings  
that flock around the bodies of geniuses.  
Husband sculpting in the rain.

\*

Of course you can't pick the unseen card.  
You need an object. Start with "R."  
Rat, romance, rhododendron, rain  
in the garden makes all the plants freeze  
and the animals turn into different animals.

\*

Don't forget that it's night.  
Not the light black of your T-shirt,  
of his hair, of the sky in the city,  
but the growling scrub-woods of Mississippi,  
the beast-hole under the neighbor's fence.

\*

The still water behind the warehouses  
on the river. Sock in a toilet.  
The teakettle burned for fuel.  
Your hair on fire in my bedroom  
and lizards sitting in your lap.

\*

Salamanders come out of your mouth.  
Who lives in the forest where I used to go  
alone with the spear-points and yellow soil.  
You're with me when I crouch behind a fallen tree,

and your cigarette burns down the wood.

\*

I love you. I make this picture book  
and give it to you. I've still never talked to you.  
But sometimes our glances are quicker than others.  
I run up the chilly hill in the dark  
looking for your eyes.

\*

Leaf-monster. Owl-house. First name.  
The shapes issue from you, you person of people.  
The city appears where you are.  
And I hide in its desolate corners  
planting a garden within myself.

\*

I can't be seen in those lights.  
You can't be seen in these.  
Hair left behind when a body leaves.  
Sunlight enters for the first time.  
You are present in every ritual.

\*

The unclean animal not fit for sacrifice  
emerges from the book. Railroad vine  
wild on the wrists. Catsclaw in the ears.  
The fence in front of your broken toilet.  
Ants burn in the sun.

\*

But the vessels sleep in the poem,  
in the books that mice read,  
in the original soil, your necklaces swing,  
your beads evoking avarice.  
You human made out of mineral matter.

## Fairy Tale

*My two eyes are closed  
so my third must be open— wide*

*enough for saturated night  
to rain inside me*

*ice or deep eyelashes  
of snow. Or merely droplets*

*clean as if I were a prince  
in the sky of my mother's garden*

*I am many knights in gleaming armor  
motionless in this grove.*

The spring draws forth  
his dormant thoughts.

There's always a light  
prepared to whisper into him.

To come near his bathing stature.  
Peaceful rock in a pool.

Only a branch from overhead  
kisses his bluish shoulders,

rubs him into the new month.  
It's time to wake up,

Captain. But no one's calling.  
No one comes out of the dream.

## River Water

They asked me, Had you eaten or drunk  
anything unusual? Only a little river-water  
I thought it would be right to take  
as a daily communion (Kenneth Anger says  
we should all do something of the kind, every day),  
but I didn't boil it, no,  
because I didn't want to alter it.  
It's my home, after all, my home.

I felt I could trust it; still do.  
I say, mending the maul-stick you've broken.  
I want to go home. Don't you?  
I keep my studio window open  
and wait for the landscape to come inside.  
Because it always does eventually.  
Though sometimes a little late.  
Bird colliding with the glass.  
Which is our shared fear, I guess. I hope.

To wake up on the other side  
of this Yangtze, Mississippi, Nile,  
Hudson, where I have hidden all my treasures.

I wait for the words to open their mouths  
to guide me to that surface, or depth,  
far longing on the other shore—

And sometimes I wonder if the desire  
*is* the other shore, asking me  
to *make* my other shore,  
but then I'm back where I began,  
asking, waiting, fearing, preparing  
to nestle in the comfort of its music.

## Chambre de Malade

Being's better now than it ever was.  
I don't have to speak— my words are here.  
Iron butterflies resting on my shoulder.

The same as those that drove Ponce de Leon insane,  
sent him to Florida in search of the Fountain of Youth.  
The Fountain is made out of air, and it's here.

I know because I've never been alive.  
So there's nothing I want to preserve.  
I have never been more than a thought, hovering above the azaleas.

And I remember the room at the Beauregard-Keyes house  
where sick children and adults would be laid up  
for their own good, and to keep them from infecting anyone else.

## Height

The eagle is his own tower. I have to build mine, day after day. Everything is confused except what's not. I see it as the vista in the sugar-egg. It's almost time. There are two words: the one I hold in my hand, and the one I have to reach for. The tall bird on the empty country road. One rushed glimpse reveals what I must do. Kill the old woman selling cake mix. I jump into the sun-ship, struck by the hand of Man until I am him, and stuck with feathers, and am the only one in the sky. The mind is a crystal, almost blue until you are *in* it.

## Films for Filmmakers

Art. Thou art  
made by the hand  
or maybe many hands  
with veins pulsing  
full of blue sky

which is violet when leaked  
straight onto the film  
so you can see the life-force running  
vital dances, illusory boxes,  
manifested in your artificial night.

Space of dream. They love it.  
Talking about it. They drool  
when they hear the whirring rearward,  
premonition for sight,  
—but don't you know  
the best part of a film is getting lost,  
living another one inside your head.

## Idea for a Film Called “Springtime”

The wet black earth quivers into life.  
The bed of our home planet rocks.  
Men in windy Italian cars  
roll their windows down  
beckoning you in the six o’clock light  
to sail with them  
around their European city.

And imagery: there is no Spring imagery.  
Only the combined images of both winter and summer.

Animals emaciated emerging from burrows.  
Naked lady in a field. High detail.  
Freedom of leaving the aristocracy.  
Sunrise having been up all night.  
No weeping. Let’s go.  
Who needs to eat? When you can fuck.  
Sickness sinks into the Earth.  
Your face is free. We will find out!  
My ancient feet are ready to walk  
wherever whatever voice commands.

I want to be cold for once,  
for it’s not *so* cold...

Lay your finger on my cheek.  
I am alive in this magnified light,  
magnifying glass beaming life  
into my frozen hovel.

Groups of friends disembarking the ferry.  
And me in love alone  
in the barbarous chilly hour  
like a woman who gets up early to sell newspapers.

Help me I am so out of breath  
and I can’t remember where I’ve been.  
Can’t speak can’t light a candle,  
don’t have money to buy a candle,  
But look two hands that are damp  
and exude music...

Ice-creams make lovers  
with perilous eyes.  
—Then a pine branch fallen  
on the side of the road,  
spring-colored, new needles,  
but still a symbol of winter,  
bristles like a caterpillar  
your sensitive features.

**From *Wheatfield with Crows* by Vincent Van Gogh**

When in August the wheat is harvested  
who brings the harvesters home?  
Their wives? In a wagon? Or do they walk  
miles back home to their hearths?

It is impossible to be historically accurate,  
but somehow everyone is,  
ends up being, as time has shown.

Who brings the painter home?  
Again no one. You know him well.  
And you think that he could have lived in any century,  
the ways his crows move,  
and would have been just as unpopular, just as *moving*.

Moving. Cresting through the wheat  
the path completed by its shadow  
and the grain casting final-sounding  
colors onto the gravel—  
This road has been face-painted  
for no particular ceremony  
while the stalks ripen  
and finish their honorable course  
of life upon this earth.

The road plays  
make-believe in this  
ambiguous time of day.

Two moons. And a sky too blue to host a sun.  
The moons produce the birds,  
and the grain receives them.  
Or the other way around.

(Paintings that make everyone feel  
like they could be a painter)

(like they could be— are—  
the painter of this picture)

Yes, that was me.  
I painted it for you

to feel like you did it for me.

Take it; I don't want it, any more  
than the shit I take in the morning  
to hang on my wall,  
to keep it out of sight and mind  
once it has been completed.

All of them packed  
in dusty stacks in the attic.

“Listen to your breath.”  
Yes but then what? To obey?

(I hear the pen writing  
on the other side of the page).

## Altar Work

“My gold ring isn’t really gold.”

“Oh it isn’t now? I’ll fix it.”

You push your goggles to the top of your head  
and extend your hand for the ring.

I’m nervous. I’m not sure  
what kind of work it is that you do,  
but I suppose that’s why I like being around you:  
I never know when you’re working,  
never see you hovering over the flame...

How come? What are you going to do to my ring?  
Ding dong, hammer in the bell six o’clock.  
Thank God I live in a town  
that reminds me of itself every evening  
on the dot, give or take  
how long it takes the man to ascend  
the tower— is that how it works?  
No, he probably pulls a rope, so he doesn’t have to leave  
the flat ground the world of sense  
that treasures your feet, your sanity  
as if they were its own.  
The flat Earth is Law, the closest thing we have to it.  
Only on it can sins be committed.

## Breakthrough Dinner

All I know is a cat  
when I see a cat. The man slurps spaghetti  
across the table from me  
and his forehead looks like a piece of meat.  
I wish our waiter would come eat with us.  
I feel like I can talk to anyone  
tonight. Two big happy breasts  
laughing unleashed. My heart and my tongue,  
the rock and the waterfall.

Where did the image come from  
that makes the story “fiction”?  
There’s not much to learn, not really,  
but you can never stop reading.  
I can tell a sleepwalker when I see one,  
even if she looks exactly like  
the huldra standing next to her,  
I can see it.

## Sonnet Tiara

### *The Hike*

The rain is warm but still smells like ice.  
Pools in the lakes of the forest  
form under fir trees and pines  
which grow in secret reservoirs in the woods.  
Two knights hustle by, clearly  
more directed than us, I think,  
but you saw something different.  
Are you who I thought you were?  
Too late now: the singular planetary entity  
is setting behind the mountain.  
We've got to get home, but I'm growing weak.  
Gawain after noon. Good thing here, look,  
is the lemonade puddle, sacred to St. Cecelia, we pass  
the markers you made that I can't see.

### *Potatoes*

You made the markers but I can't see them.  
I guess it doesn't matter since they're working.  
For you. And for me crossways through you.  
Dining table gleaming in the kitchen  
awaits us every morning. I float down  
a happy sack of potatoes, Van Gogh  
turned every one of them into a golden egg  
so the wooden bowl they were sitting in smiled  
to be cradling such a vast wealth.  
It's really no trouble at all.  
I'm just glad to be talking to you.  
Touching you. You. Your chest, your legs  
which I knew would embarrass you when I touch,  
your silent supplicant deaf-mute.

### *Perspective*

Your silent supplicant deaf-mute  
waits on the other side of the door  
confidant she's knocked. Until you don't come.  
But you will. Eventually. Right?  
The face is the heart in the sunlight.  
I've spent my whole life weaving simple tapestries,  
glorified insignias, massive symbols, and vast  
passages of blocked color. No shadows.  
Flat. Van Gogh's *The Courtesan* was Japanese  
in theme, but his flatness came from somewhere else  
harder to find on the map. So we had  
to make a new one. That's what I do.  
And I embroider your name at the bottom of each  
in the same color as the cloth, so no one can see.

### *Ritual*

In the same color as the cloth so no one can see  
I weave your veves. Having just been persecuted  
for falling in love, I sit here in my chair  
in the top floor of my tower, waiting...  
*Only girls who want to be rescued sit in towers,*  
you said as we passed the old abandoned  
three story brick structure by the shipyard.  
Of course I want to be rescued, I said.  
That's all I do every day: Try to find  
new ways of affecting the unaffected,  
to be active while in the submissive position,  
skipping over cracks in the sidewalk,  
waiting for the actor to come down from heaven  
or up from the bottom of the sea to reward me.

*Carpe Osseum*

Up from the bottom of the sea to reward me  
*you* come. We make love. I'm still not sure who you are.  
You said you weren't a god and laughed  
and then you said you *were*. Are you  
the one I called for? Whom *did* I call for?  
Maybe no one exists whom I think exists.  
I kneel in front of the filthy window smudged  
now with scarlet ribs of sun,  
the first since September that have looked like this,  
or anything like it, so close, I reach out  
and pluck off a smallish one.  
It will be good for something, I know  
a powerful object when I see one  
but that's as far as I've gotten.