

8-1995

**augC1995**

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When is the tide? When the work begins  
the wind calls great. People from a boat  
idle up the hill, *Liebestod* on the radio,  
the world we choose is portable,  
but this stays where this is, this is an island.

This is island. A woman's voice  
explores the death in love. I stare  
at red petunias, the invariant  
actuality of thingliness, where can we go  
to be free of being? A woman's voice

blooms across the sky. We are responsible.  
The great work is beginning, a life is ending,  
a composer hidden in the shadows  
hears the empty opera house applaud his play  
and music muscles past us, sudden gust

and it is gone in the dark with all its meanings,  
leaves us here unsatisfied with light.  
Lust. The creamy afterglow. A light spirit  
interrogates her hair. What is the tide  
that wends so blue among our broken barges?

It reaches sand and touches what we are  
then runs away. Too many non-sequiturs  
do not make profundity.  
When the work begins  
the bird flies in.  
You feel it in  
the meridians,  
the channels of heartsease  
it occupies,  
it knows the skies  
you hide  
and soars  
where you are rarest,  
a leaf it seems  
discharged from a busy tree  
but its tumult

is no wind's raffling,  
it is a door  
swinging on its hinges  
banging liudly on  
successive states of possible,  
impossible,  
till a Stranger beckons  
and the bird settles down  
to sleep all day with open mind,

we stagger towards the dividends of rose.  
People walk by pointing here and there.  
Green between me and the sea a furlong's garden.  
A plane's engine far away, a ship's bell near at hand.  
Decipher me, I have been musical too long.  
Now understand where all my ladders went,  
my rooms and balusters and eloping prose.  
Even now among the cracked shellfish of the world  
their gleet and rot and iodine, I ask  
some foggy miracle of comprehension  
the way a man who woke too early  
come midafternoon can fall on sleep.  
Bell roar. Power saw. Helicopter over Nashawena  
where Highland cattle amble through the surf  
and lie there basking. Bee to my, flower.  
So broad this ancestor before me,  
all-womb, sole-sexed, ever-ample, fertile yielding,  
ocean. Unharvested, says Homer surely,  
not barren. Not like the music  
locked inside the stone.

You are my luck,  
do you know that?  
You and the crows  
and the wind and so  
I am in luck in love  
with you who are  
and are and are the  
the hope past hope,  
do you know that?

After so many ages, only a word  
has any right to come out.  
(Today I heard a woman say 'word'  
to rhyme with cord. The great  
work is beginning, the aspiration  
to a perfect love is weary  
but unbroken. *Incessantly I care for this.*

Juxta ruinas Cambeloti, a man  
smites a brazen shield hung on an ash tree,  
why, to dry it from what false weather,  
to catch the glance of sun? I hear the harsh  
re-echo, metal of attention gong'd  
and who will hear?

Comes then a perfect knight  
on winded gelding, to graze the sun's path  
lost smooth among the mortal grasses.  
One eats, the woman looks away.  
Nothing natural is here. (The great work  
works against nature, works with nature).

You will not hear them when they come.  
The work is uniform, molecular, wet.  
Among the Roman traces a song is built  
arches like aqueduct over dry valleys  
and comes to you. You also ache  
for this ancient water, oldest  
of all moonlight, city and language  
made it, stone forgot it, the night  
is full of reminders, touch.  
But you will not hear them  
when they come to themselves inside you,  
cell constancy, auburn haired and vague,  
small flowers in small rocks — a phantom page,  
dog hackles, stroll up the hill.

A gull,  
a miracle.

In little carts they prowl the hill.  
Who are you who are talking in me?

And sure enough at five o'clock a man is whistling.

All this I heard when Pellam smote his shield,  
long song of bronze and willow. And in that echo  
all the pain men had ever sought  
and all the comfort that they found were joined,  
a bookish music but straight from the sky  
simple as thunder. He struck the shield again  
to summon seen and unseen enemies, whereof  
was only I, who walk invisible,  
my spear bacterial and vague, and where I go  
you see the shadow of a dog passing on the grass  
but no dog. My spear grows conscious of his flesh.  
A crushed tennis ball, a robin's egg, and this  
time I did not strike. A third time  
King Pellam sounded, beat his shield and no one came.  
Unenemied he grieved in willow shade.

The great work is beginning, of course  
it's made of answering,

cries a gull's cold laughter  
in the hot afternoon.

And then I know the wind is cold—  
smell of naphtha — danger — people eating —  
the fatal picnics of the middle class — the gulls'  
shadows partake the roof. Part of laughter.  
What will we eat tonight? All round the houses of the island  
bluest hydrangeas like my mother's garden  
lost fifty years. They come back to us, cloud-constant,  
the harbor fills up with pleasure craft, yachts  
nuzzle into the south wind. Evening soon,  
a celebration. Out come the board games—  
at dimlit dinette tables, on worn old ouija boards  
talkative ghosts play Scrabble with us.  
A sea-plane lands in the dark. Men are waiting.  
I need to tell you. What color is yellow?  
Those slopes are empty — through powerful binoculars  
I see nothing but more sunlight on dry grass  
and glacial outcrop, just like here. One looks  
evidently only (always) at oneself. I also weather,

I also was born on this moraine. This hill is home.

11 August 1995

The great work is a plum or like it left  
through the blue evening and found at morning  
new-spangled on your table. Yours,  
governors, yours, decipherers of leaves,  
you living. The great work is beginning.

Phase purple. Hot blondage. The midday news  
a glimpse of navel. Potteries at work below  
mending the gap. Between mind and money,  
the Bank Street station: two tubes in cross section  
— study this engineering diagram, leave it out  
all night on a table in Rangoon: the Empire.  
A drawing so apt it makes you weep for sweet  
technology, the gist of things deciphered by our hands,  
red brick and iron work and comely prose, you  
*are* weeping, bridgekeepers, noble governors,  
o my lords and ladies, weeping for a clean tin thing,  
a stucco dialogue. The great work is beginning  
and the Raj like every décor changes overnight,  
your navel's showing now, and her tattoo of a gull  
flying forever down the nape of her neck. What seas  
are hidden in us? You know, you conquistadors,  
you who have conquered every morning  
and wakened on an outbreath to rule the world  
while little girls like me breathe in and sleep  
the desperate never-ending dream of poetry.

The great work is an island. A tower on it  
built of time round which the gulls  
for some reason do not clamor, wheel or park  
ever though the oyster shoals are just below.  
Gulls go meekly there instead, and rare,  
taking the cliff chances and the stripling bass  
rather than negotiate at noon  
the dubious geometry around that tower  
as if some landsman built a sky from rock.

But not from your land, princes, not from the silken  
touch of papal chamberlains, or nuncios of the Catholic king,  
Portuguese lawyers with a taste for torts, not you.  
That nostalgic settler who, I infer,  
built sky villas in the shape that mattered,  
house of the arrow, fewest dimensions  
possible, to point to Far Home on the zenith  
even you have on your heads, aldermen,  
and you, boyars of the GOP, you too are briefly breathing.

Watch where gulls don't go. The great work  
is going where no one goes. The great work is beginning  
and gulls know. They could  
be smart as crows but kill too much  
for any steady knowing to arise.  
There are no crows on the island,  
the great work is beginning.

A tower where the gulls won't go. A place  
where it has forgotten how to rain.  
What color is blue? This miracle  
is not for you, fullbacks and senators,  
though I will let you taste the pudding  
God makes from such stale bread,  
but not for you, lansequenets and soldier boys,  
though I will let the steam of it  
sashay past your snorting nostrils.  
This is for you, kind one, the wife you are,  
or wise, or able to withstand  
unhating if [                      ] the sleazy politics of time.

For it was ever so, and so the great work is beginning.  
Hags and faxes, dead children on the stoop, ambulances  
and all the brittle metaphors we take for life,  
hot crowded, and unfriendly — from this perception  
of what is to be perceived I would rescue your perceiving.  
The great work is beginning. The plum  
in better light's a peach. Or changed to be one,  
who can be sure what happens in the night.

Or does not happen? Might change. Things do.

The canvas stretches the wind  
and holds it in. The wind  
in its liberal will must needs then  
struggle to be free, and from its throes  
the boat in its measure passes  
in jittery high-soul progress  
towards the far shore. Last night  
you sailed close to the rocks  
and saw this time no cattle.  
One island to another: all  
our time is such journeying.  
The cows now toss their long sharp  
horns at the multicolored moonrise  
on the other side of their hill.  
They are closer to what happens  
when the sky comes towards us.  
Then you come back to me to tell.

Our lives are like this neglected tower,  
one gets a little feel for what one's doing.  
Pirouettes, gull wings beating, boat people  
climbing past us for no better reason  
than to see where they are, as if their feet  
and all the sweet etceteras of their physique  
had nothing to tell them of where they stand  
and only eyes could make sense of islands.

But islands are not meant for looking..  
(The great work is beginning.) if we just look  
we lose the great part of what it's telling,  
this living Earth that stores intact and ready  
all the sequences of knowing. If we just look,  
we shut out the myriad other knowings  
by which the Earth is willing to instruct us  
and be known, when the bones listen  
and the skin knows how to hear.  
It everything's so busily below.

Read



inside yourself the ancient shastras of the Earth,  
read by heart-light and keeping still  
and let the winds blow through you  
preaching the calm of all Earth's evenings  
in the storm world of your private weather.

What color is yellow? We dare not answer,  
and least with the name of some flower,  
maybe the coordinates on the beach shingle  
between a rock and a rock it maybe grows.

But what language such things speak  
you learn exclusively by listening.  
Eyes unfocused, he writes down:  
*the great work is beginning*

and has nothing to report about it,  
nothing to say.  
But it has, and keeps revealing.  
Watch it with your hands.

Count the spaces,  
they have meaning too.  
Or more of it from time to time  
than all my busy language means.

Through what arcane neurology  
do we come to speak of roses, sea-roses?  
While not a cloud exactly,  
there is a lessening of brightness

in the early sun, a releasingness  
where true colors seem,  
unglazed by glare, colors  
of their own, legitimate and soft.

The world needs some rain today  
and it's Cawúk, day Seven-Rain  
in the pre-Conquistador island lingo  
when a calendar tried to tell you

when things are ripe for happening.  
The world needs rain. My colors  
are bleached from too much thinking,  
mix sea and sky together bravely,

what color is wet? Better not to know  
how busy you are, better let it rain.  
Forget it, decouple wits from weather,  
let it care what happens

and let me just husband what comes down.

No church. No commonpalce. No chord.  
Unfettered by learned harmonies, the wind  
picks up, your curtain tells me,  
everything washed clean.

Filter coffee through an old white cotton sock,  
read Auden with my feet in nice warm sand,  
heaped nervously up around the astragals  
and try to forget the sky. It's down here, stupid.

Bentham language, brokers disport in surf.  
How did we get here? Single-engined Storch sea-plane  
such as might have carried Göring to Bornholm  
for the herring. Small ferry with its nose in weed.

Today is Lammas, Old Lammas,  
Loaf-Mass of the Used-to-be's  
when we celebrate the amplitude of Earth,

foison rich and all forms disposed  
to be for us, and things  
consent to be our patriots,

come soon, the Harvest.  
Marvin's cutting back the mint. Renew  
the miracle. From what

he trims and jettisons  
we'll make spicy green podina  
to serve with lamb.

Businessmen poets, offer *all* your sheep.

*'Looks like rain,' he said affably.*  
*'Who does?' asked Mr Braddock, puzzled.*  
—Wodehouse

Chirk Castle: a calendar  
with windows  
in a picture  
of a castle. Each window  
worked by wheel.  
To tell the day and date  
and even year.  
Grey stone, the long  
memory.

Two items  
on the brick mantle. The second  
a small card tray  
from Wales: Pontcysyllte Aqueduct  
carrying the canal  
high over the big valley.

Things we find  
in people's houses.  
From some Renaissance  
philosopher, meek  
proofs of the existence of the world.

12 August 1995

The great work forever beginning is swaddled  
in day wool , we wonder will a cloud

or then we falter sleepward on a hill of hope.  
But the work is pregnant with us, and must,

must. The compulsion to be absolute  
strikes many a sinner. From Elmira

to Dodge City there was a Reformation  
in faith and morals. Words are dogmas

enough, isn't that so? Worth fighting for  
like all the free soil of Missouri,

slavetraders in their Sunday best  
exchanging theological excuses.

Why should the LORD live on a mountain?  
Isn't He, of all, best suited to the prairies and the crowd,  
swell of visitors idling round the fire

where the Lammas Evening Pig Roast  
brought over more shorts and tee-shirts to the island?  
Isn't God there anywhere, among the many,  
vivacious, vere-moving? Not a single  
cloud, of doubtful portent, afloat on some  
far horizon, all alabaster abscondite,  
hidden in the stony distances of self.

We did not eat the pig.  
We did not dance  
around the fire  
just a slow  
waltz in the kitchen,  
I stepped on your foot  
only once I think  
the great work is beginning,  
the Lunar Battery the Windclock  
the Language of the Tides,  
we walked around the island to the war  
left over casemates, the far  
pillboxes where they watched

to keep the sea from speaking German,  
U-boat traffic and how they must  
have idled in their khakis  
among blackberries all afternoon  
and waltzed the down maidens  
in the gull dance common  
to the west end of the island  
where a quick abiding wind  
has the property of making you love  
the one you're with  
when you stand into that wind  
and watch the darkness gel on Gosnold Pond  
until only a sort of silver  
root of light is left in the world  
to find your way back home  
over the moors and matted grasses where  
some small grey deer slept  
last night and the night before  
made their bowges there but retreat  
silent, invisible, discreet,  
to hide until you've passed,  
the two of them, of you, of us,  
all the times that lovers ever had,  
passing with that special wind's  
entitlement still easy in their eyes.  
It makes friends keep faith like water-fowl,  
glad in the downy necessity of one another.

The great work is beginning in the leaf  
—you do not know how many ring your house—  
and in the footsteps of people who mean  
no more harm than we, innocent, blundering,  
prone to accidents, dangerous to self and others,  
wanderers in a dream. The only hope is waking.  
The great work is beginning, my eyes unfocussed  
but my mind is clear as amber, clear enough to know  
and know it isn't mine. What a strange  
idea, that it could be me who's thinking!  
And that all that wordless logic that I hear  
is my mind or my deciding.

What color  
is yellow?  
Will the bell  
start ringing  
in a quarter-hour  
to invite the wind  
to Holy Eucharist,  
the business of that white building on the hill  
with a wooden fish on the top of it to tell the weather,  
to clock the wind?  
But the wind is not the same,  
it's touched houses and owned things  
before it gets over Lookout Hill,  
it doesn't taste the same as on the cliffs  
where first it touches land.  
Where something invisible  
comes from far away and knows us.

But it has magic and comes to church.  
The business of white buildings—  
why doesn't religion help us,  
why is it always sleeping with the enemy?  
Why is it always going away?  
Will the bell  
in all the liberty  
of wind begin?  
I'll wait ten minutes to decide,  
and listen to the gulls  
and up the hill a child has woken  
and teaches itself to talk  
loud and lonely,  
the way language  
has to be

lest anybody listen.  
Language is what we do to keep from hearing.  
The Chomsky shibboleth that keeps us from revering  
the great work that is now beginning.

Heart over hand  
a boy stands

to pledge his body  
to quick white elements,  
Na, Hg, Ne,  
he would belong  
to exposition,

be a semaphore  
with all his limbs,  
a walking crucifix  
and a talking clock,  
a mirror mended  
and a child no more.

A boy pledges  
all his selves  
in one wild waking  
the drift of meaning from the deep sea outward  
till it reaches all our shores — he means  
to bring you that, and wants the scout paths  
through poison ivy and elder flowers to fetch him up  
at length against Grail Castle  
(Ben Franklin comes to Philadelphia)  
from which he plans to bring you home, just you,  
in his sudden and absolute convertible, red,  
a car full of diamonds and a hidden medicine,  
he thinks he brews it and you decant it,  
that cures all ills.

There goes the bell,  
the Protestants are on their way to  
hear about heaven. 8 AM Episcopal,  
8 PM Methodist. And in between  
they go and slaughter fish, a kind of fun.

Whereas the Fisher King  
(all stories are Grail stories,  
there is only one cycle,  
Anna Karenina is Guinevere,  
the world belongs to us  
by dint of finding)  
whereas the Fisher King

(a king in name only,  
like all the others,  
people listen to the name  
and bend the knee  
— the bell again,  
to Communion  
come — and icon  
painters can show  
the colors themselves  
in acts of genuflection.)  
Whereas the Fisher King  
sits wounded  
in his little boat  
all day long  
trailing something  
in the lake's waters  
from morning mist  
through brazen noon  
—he hears a shield  
clashing in the woods—  
the bells of Mass  
summon the crew  
of the island,  
the wind is true —  
whereas the Fisher King  
still there by twilight  
trails his line  
but is he fishing?  
Is he listening?  
He is the King who Fishes  
but not catches,  
the books never speak  
of what he takes,  
he takes nothing,  
he is a failure there  
as at everything  
elsewhere, his limp  
and dangling desire  
draws no bream,  
salmon, carp, seal,



whale, dragon, kraken.  
Nothing bothers the mute  
drift of his line

Below the level  
of his language  
curling and floating.  
All day he fishes  
and catches no fish—  
each day he rejoices  
at his fishlessness,  
to have been blameless  
one more time  
despite all the instruments  
deployed whereby  
a life is taken  
into his own. Back  
he is carried  
to his bedchamber  
where over a fire  
of juniper — branches  
and indigo berries —  
men cook his frugal dinner  
and he sleeps,  
worn out with his dry  
study, his all day  
not killing,  
worn out with thinking  
and not talking,  
a king is all thinking,  
worn out with knowing.  
He sleeps now  
warm and painless,  
his dreams are an island,  
a lucid coil  
investigating  
around the roots  
of that conspiracy  
called history  
all the ascensions  
into that fate called fact.

To know everything  
and not blame.  
To catch everyone  
in the act  
and not prosecute,  
noli prosequi,  
to trail all day long  
your slender wits  
in the endless water  
of circumstance  
and still at nightfall  
be brave enough  
not to decide,  
not to name  
yourself, not  
to settle for this  
fish or that  
but let  
the habitants  
shimmer, free flash  
below the lowest  
horizon, preach  
their rippling gospel up  
and dazzle you, amaze  
you and be gone.  
And you watch them,  
your line  
(your instrument)  
harmless with hearing.

A king is thinking. The great work is beginning.  
Over the old Welsh valley a Nineteenth Century aqueduct  
carries the transverse canal. Barges pass  
over mock-Roman arches, pleasure craft float forward  
with the determination to be amused, look,  
a boat in the sky!

You can see from down here

the happy flags on the stern, the red  
geraniums on the window boxes, lazy  
husbands adore their languid wives, brunch,

a boat is passing. A boat in the sky  
reminds us of something, old druidry,  
all that stonework and engineering  
to make Osiris's whaleboat cruise across the sky  
and fetch our vagrant meanings home.  
We also think.

Or do  
that ooze  
of light/

The wind comes back,  
the tabernacles shake,  
cloth walls of our quick house  
shiver, my wife walks up the hill  
her sea beyond her, comes home,  
my wife of reef and south wind,  
my wife with barnacle cuts on her little finger,  
my wife my wife and the waves come in  
big now on the reef off Barges.

13 August 1995

The great work is beginning, now we know it,  
last night on the big bay easy floating  
on the big combers coming from Bermuda  
where a storm is brewing, serene it seemed,  
silvery in a strangely textured light: a solitary  
swan. You saw him fly here, a whir of white  
over Colette's pond, coming from in-island,  
and then you spotted him far out, at peace.  
By the time we got to shore he was near.  
We hobbled down the stones to see him  
big, white, drifting, dipping sometimes  
decorously to feed. To preen, neat  
as a big duck, an ocean swan. A page  
open to the merest sign. This is the island  
where the wind keeps house, it is no  
small matter to have the wind for your wife.  
Chatter of fishermen in the dark. Moongloss  
on clear sea. The avatars are busy

finding their way in us, downwind the schooner  
fights for the far shore. Nothing easy,  
everything beautiful, a centaur on the rocks.

No fog this time. No sweet evasions.  
Full frontal sunshine and the wind falls—  
sometimes the wind's a veil too,  
that hides your eyes — face the sand,  
the infinite divisibility of compound things,  
the broken sign. Name this house.  
We struggle all our lives to wind a broken watch.  
Meantime the sand is counting.  
Sometimes wind brings it here,  
cool as a rain drop whipped against my bare arm,  
I find it late lodged in the hair, blond in blond,  
minute, a necessity. Compose myself,  
nothing can be avoided. Compose myself,  
one grain of sand rescuing another.

An hour after sunrise usually the wind comes up,  
that's one way we know the wife it is, slow rising,  
the long, long wife dreams that run the world.

(Most wives happen to be women  
but some are men, stones, winds.  
And the stars themselves are instances,  
mute instructions stored for the earth  
at the close of day disclosed  
in bright erasures, wifeness far.)

I am no swimmer. The sea for me's a page  
of endlessly renewing text, unfailing narrative  
of the best kind: full of surprises and room  
to let me in, to guess the drift of things.

Waves come from forever. From the contour  
of each one intuit the mysterious core of ocean,  
core of telling. Everything that happens marks it.  
That storm in Bermuda sends its footnotes here,  
the odd big combers that once in a while crash in

after a week of calm sea. I am no swimmer  
but the great work is beginning, is bringing,  
I have to get wet to be in it, to let it,  
the sound of neighbors, those unpredictable galoots  
who use this lovely language. How can people  
like people ever have come up  
with such a music?  
And one that seems to know  
more than we know  
like a picture bigger than its frame.  
It goes on meaning while they eat breakfast  
next door and the dog keeps quiet.

The cause of all  
is telling. Tell.  
Once I dreamed  
of alchemists  
and their dangerous  
daughters,  
reprisals of art  
against the mute  
rule of matter.  
Now I behold  
with wonder  
my wife and her mother  
making peach cobbler,  
the act is single,  
various and free—  
the transmutation  
in us, signed  
by the least thing.  
I have seen  
the grail, gull,  
grain, green  
of aspen and the sea,  
cloud fall  
sunburnt revelers  
leap ashore,  
sign upon sign.

Through a dark tunnel in the quaking leaves we reach the sea.  
Fishing boat can be heard close, out of sight  
around the cliff that closes in the cove.  
Humans at their catch. (The Lombards caught  
their 39" striped bass, their record ever,  
lifted high on our lawn, let fall, a meter  
of dead silver on the grass.) The cove  
is private except for their language entering,  
finding us, feeling us out, finding us out,  
as if the sea weren't enough to say.

And the wind's caress is adequate, no charm  
like what doesn't need us  
to complete itself.  
Even the jabber  
of invisible fishermen  
the words that come  
so strongly over water  
can release  
into the sweetness of the actual.  
Stand aside and see.  
Stand aside and hear  
clock tick in the empty kitchen  
the magic  
of my single life,  
a sound and me  
to hear it  
maybe, a maybe me  
to touch your certain hand.

The great work is beginning, stand aside  
in moonlight, hard listening, divining.  
We can see it at the ocean clearly,  
now how to get it to the mountain,  
valley, the virtual  
unreality of the given, the holy opposite.  
Weekdays and wheels.  
The sea is always Sunday.

My eyes are tired with going away.

None of the usual symbols need apply.  
The road is different,  
is made of me,  
all goaty and forgiving,  
going, is made  
of sharing  
(I hate to share)  
and of caring  
(care about me!)  
and a daring  
(*lass mich schlafen!*)  
and of dancing  
(my feet are moss)  
of going out  
(let me in!)  
and out and out  
until I'm six inches or so  
beyond myself  
and then let go.  
From the cliff called No Coming & No Going  
it might one day be safe to fall.

So let's go out and see the cliffs again before we go.  
Past the cemetery and the weathervane in the shape of a bass,  
even the dead go fishing in this place.  
We are their fish,  
our Scrabble their devotions,  
unifying our lives  
in the words of the game—  
plume, whine came twice,  
ajar, tantra, mesons.  
Their words come near us  
telling, telling, get it straight  
or set it crooked,  
bent as a song,  
the bread will rise  
for all our lies.

The wind in the shape of our faces  
meets us with delicious maybes.

Gulls over and under, a reef  
peopled with cormorants—  
ten birds fit. When an eleventh lands  
one is displaced and floats about  
disconsolate until he forgets  
the exile all our life is, and just is.  
Forgets the exile in the fact of it,  
the wind world we share.  
Then he rises to his usual ecstasy and goes.

14 August 1995

The great word is beginning, the pinwheel spins in the child's hand,  
the birds need to be fed, a door is opening, rain stopped,  
the flukes of Long Island, arms, reach out to the sun,  
no, the self's mirror with hazy brightness, England, far.  
The terminal moraine. The place I was born.

What you have to understand over and over  
is the last glaciation, glacier shaped us  
and everywhere we live is its long verdict.  
It pushed before it and left behind it when it  
as they say retreated (but really just receded  
into the next gathering wave, when everything is sea)  
a vast crescent of debris and rock and stuff  
and left it on our lawn. The Terminal Moraine  
and what it is, is Brooklyn, Cemetery Ridge,  
north shore of Long Island, Block Island,  
Cuttyhunk and the Elizabeths, Cape Cod and Cape Ann,  
and that's it, that's one long rocky street,  
that's where I was born. The long house,  
the curve of consequence.

How can you talk  
with the wind in your face?  
—How can you talk  
without it?

It was cooler in New Bedford after the hot crossing,  
I walked solitary up those cobbled streets,



not a soul my mother would have said in the streets,  
rush hour, pass the Fishlumpers' Union  
to the Elm Street Garage, and there were some people there,  
nervous pretty women with briefcases locking doors  
behind them. Not even many gulls.  
A bright in time I looped my fingers through and pulled.

After some prayer, the car started.  
Then Union Street was full of cars,  
going their ways. I wanted  
to end on the island,  
the geology understands me,  
but end has to be home,  
a home is not where you're understood  
but where you do your understanding.

Or the last one house  
is an island.

Why a church  
has the shape of a ship  
and the Holy Dharma  
crosses oceans

to come to us.  
"Cross me," we said as children  
to grownups, meaning Take me  
across the street  
I am too afraid or too forbidden  
to cross by myself,  
please cross me,

take me  
to the other

side  
and they did,

usually,  
why not?

They too were parents or had parents who said  
wait for someone big to cross you  
or an older child—

green fire and we walk right over.  
The other shore. New Bedford  
cooler than the island.  
The schooner *Ernestina*  
dried her timbers in the Coast Guard slip  
where the tramp from Funchal  
flying the Portuguese flag used to berth  
but now is repainted and renamed  
something like Susie or Sally and anyway is gone.

In the lost name of an absent ship  
bearing the colors of a land I've never seen  
I greet you, sea, my destiny,

you teach me my glad pomposity  
and leach it away, out from under,  
sucked out from under my heels  
and back I go, beach sand, the undertow.

Memory is our only democrat,  
it holds the secret of humility,  
the mix of mind, the minister's old socks,  
instinct with the hope of heaven,

the grace of being wrong,  
the mix I mean and the mix I am.  
They sell good beef at Giammalvo's  
and good brooms, thick solid handle  
you can get two hands on and whack  
the dust out the back door  
and scare the little snake by the propane tanks,  
and what do they eat while we eat beef  
and the folks next door cook their bass  
and bluefin tuna and a creel of clams?  
Crickets, I suppose, and crawling beetles,

or june bugs like the one I found on my nape  
and let out the front door with a hope of heaven,

the great work is beginning, after eating  
even the diners begin to dream, beginning,  
the Geats ride over the hard sea,  
the mysterious troubadors  
are up and at it,  
the ones who make the wind  
in maple leaves sound like voices  
then like some refined Strauss opera exaltation  
where the soprano's voice, lifted high,  
is seamlessly continued upward by the clarinet,  
the leaves, or flute, breeze, crickets all  
turn into voices and someone calls.  
No, it's just the window walking.  
No, it's just the morning, always.

A fat marmot grazing fast against the Fall.  
The wall  
I'll never breach and always must climb over,  
o obstacle our intimate Everests,  
to reach the sky where they're busy dancing  
and not a rehearsal but the real thing,  
just like the leaves and breeze and Charlotte coming through the door.

15 August 1995

This time I have a picture of it happening