The shape of returning
carrying sea in the head
as never, and again
a presence, the wall
against which I stand
supports me, keeps me in—

what would it be to go through the sea,
not the swan or u-boat of it
but through, entirely, what it is,
the cold mothering stone
that does not know how to keep still,
or if it does, it is another angel
suddenly stopping time
so that the sea can rest.

And what kind of man is the sea
that I, strong as I am, could hold him,
compel all the genders of him to yield
and quiet me with his tumultuous peace?

20 June 2008
Lindenwood
for PLW, on the backcover of our Atlantis...

Where’d he get that figleaf
in the sea?
   And why are his tines
so blunt and curt?
   Ah me, I am
a believer, I care too much about such things—

god knows there aren’t so many gods to go round.
and I know Poseidon, who was *Potei Dan*, Ruler of the Earth
itself both wet and dry,
   and he was god and great and green,

   I know his tines
could spear an eel for thee or cod for me, I know his cock
could never hide beneath so trim a leaf,
I know he is mighty and his wife is a secret name
or maybe a name the waves are shouting all the time
and we don’t dare to hear.

   20 June 2008
Open and obvious, like a dream.  
The sand you spread out belonged to me, was the name of it a curious green like a lizard in Victorian times the way they thought they thought about war.  Like a dragon he said but really more in summer islands close behind the porch the way Americans became watching ever watching small.  
Things mean you.  He averred and not a single in the whole afternoon. Things really do and nothing else does ever be secure.  Sure is short for what today.  
In the parlor alone with a candle.  
Everything was so far away that day the way the country or the ocean can and every street was leaving me.  
Some dead animal between road and hedge. That’s what makes this sort of thing a sonnet when you aren’t counting men.

21 June 2008
Scurrilous attitude spelled with a W—
over the counter I explained to them carefully
the earth is asleep in the summer its work all accomplished
in winter it works and is busy with enterprise
so in spring when it comes and you all look about you
what you see as a rose opening is the world falling asleep

now it’s our business only to make sure that the earth
is there when it wakes again, hasn’t been transported
into some ash-heap randomly orbiting Úranus
because of inept politicians in love with themselves
and no other creatures alive in the universe
just the dollar sign: a snake wrapped around numero uno.

21 June 2008
Oil from an olive
tree grew before there were goats
to graze at the stem of it
rock over a sea no named yet

water, we are just water.
Oil is water thickened by time
said Tarsinius. Time is space
diluted by memory.

Remember. His treatise
Peri Nēsôn—On Islands—
is full of ingenious lies.
There are no islands,

the sea is continuous
and I mean forever. We stand
on a quarter-hour either way
frozen into place. Place

is somewhere else. Someone
lives there. No book tells how
and most books try. He:
I touched time once and it broke.

So children still keep coming
though almost any other way
would be better. Is better.
In another book he denounces the womb.

21 June 2008
UNFAVORABLE DAY. EARTH FIRE. NO MARRIAGE

1.
What need know. Polestar
on flagpole, dimity frock, slack
perpetuas fading neath shrubbery you bet.
Men mean different things by it or this man does.
Every puzzle answers sex. Not hygiene
but Ordinary Rain bedew another with and by.
A sacrament a stitch in time
not a commitment but a timely pledge
to last inside the other as oneself at best.
All the sonnets are subsumed in this.

2.
Why go on. Calf speed two hours Denver
no places please. Raise your hand
as you’d raise a red heifer all tenderness and name
and know this body pays someday for all it gets to do,
sans which the spirit would go reft of agency
a toolless mind is hell on wheels.

3.
Tell little enough of what’s to know
but it still has to be some poor soul’s hand
to hold it. The parts are of something.
Which weather are we part of, the windows
shake with rain, drown out the rabbi’s
questions, all we have are soft evasions
of the obvious, Sunday twilights,
auntly get-togethers I pick up sticks
you build a whole house. What to do
there, under the roof tiles with the dormice,
under the rafters, under the ceiling,
bats in the bedroom, and under the covers
what to do. Unfavorable day,
earth quenches fire, fire turns earth
to a fine clayey cup we do drink from
at least. All day and everyday. No marriage
but an infinite gymnasium, a long thought
to feed that Hegel in your head. Your hand.

22 June 2008
Could I be right in all the purgatories 
slick black streets don’t say it’s rain 
no brother and no mother the agency 
ever apt at parting x from y amazing 
space between and between a river 
has two thoughts in mind to stand 
before the loveless and proclaim 
shoeless penances of seadrift and be gone 
I got here and where are you or is that 
meaning redundant as a leaf on bushes 
in summer how much light does matter 
need to eat before the soul-stuff 
ripens in it or the tiger-lily knows?

On the day after knife the chemicals used 
be thrown out and start again o rodent Time 
up to her hocks in foam ‘effluent’ anyway 
now the theme recurs in fire seeking 
a witchy subdominant in morning glow 
rapt in fiduciary calm, all music’s sentimental 
and every breath is the beloved’s yes.

Then it was evening. Scruples of fireflies 
tumble from the rye grass a spook in meadow 
under the huge sycamore acres of time 
the Persian army rested once beneath a single leaf.

23 June 2008
If I wrote a word every day
how long would it take to reach the sea?
Or an immature blackbird
is speckled brown and odd
like a caprimulge or whippoorwill
or I don’t know.
You showed me one, you said it was
and I believed you like the very air.

23 June 2008
Outrage metabolism swiftly river
pluck the ornament anent desire
but do it swoop no sparrowing around
but phallus to the metal à la vroom
beforehand, as a kid butts – even her milk
makes drunk – who granted this alpage
into cloud keep shatter pasture? “A shabby
slit betwixt philosophers,” said the reviewer—
who isn’t plastered in the window commodity?
Welcome, walk home like a jay, all blue and enemy,
the earthirls itch from all the tunes
that notch right in, a granite face
watches inside every dream ever landed
rough in sinful jungle clearing one pale head.

24 June 2008
I’m not going to try to prove anything. Aspirin tastes harsh and sudden but that doesn’t last long. Prose is clutchier than poetry—

I want a novel that knows how to leave me alone, a novel full of unexplained absences, no startling weekends at the shore, divorces, fainting fits. I have my own life and sometimes I’m willing to share it with a book.

But a poem – even the dullest, most pretentious, predictable, rule-bound, correct poem – is pure light. The glee of it is swift as salt.

24 June 2008
FROM THE TABLES OF THE LAW

1.
Desire is stronger than anything else, the desired thing always better than the thing itself. So desire must be a force ponderable, a constant even, a gravity of heart.

2.
Every book has twenty-one chapters like the major trumps of the Tarot. The 22nd trump, which is the first, in my end is my beginning, is the sacred figure called the Fool. So the twenty-second chapter of every book is the Reader: shown reading, thinking, letting the book fall from the hand.

24 June 2008
MIDNIGHT

the summer road covered with a snow of light
the stream you hardly hear all day
roars by.

24.VI.08
CELLPHONE

Listen to the voices – she
is all alone with the instrument
her heart is in her hand
the rest of us flow past

hearing scraps of what she so
urgently is telling the unseen
on this ordinary street among us
her eyes in hell.

2.
I too have spent a lot of my life
(here it comes, the me part)
talking boldly to the street
but with nothing in my hand.

I didn’t even have the courtesy
to hold a plastic shell to my ears
pretending to listen to an angel
or the sea. No, sir. Telling is all.

3.
If you (and here you are at last)
listen hard, who knows where you’ll be
or what you’ll see when the phone
finally goes dead and you open your eyes?

25 June 2008
THE RULERS

1.
The rule-bearers of higher hindsight
are willet-legged semaphores
pillaging the lower sky – you know how,
you have flown with them in your dreams
falling from heaven. By definition:
the place from which one falls or fell—
nothing else is known for sure. Or noon.

2.
The rule-breakers on the other side
wear red bikinis and wake early.
Care be full, they say, existenz is night,
they say, we are glorious with wordies
ever-seekish, catoptric presences abound
and only I am escaped to break the frigging glass.
Peradventure paramours? Red-clever blackbirds
pecking holes in Pindar’s text, crumbs
of difference make the little wordies dance.

3.
So much meaning! So everywhere!
Impend, great Sanhedrin aloft in Thee
or me indifferently! Adjudicate, precipitate! For I was Mercury then I fell. The oxide of me crept into your hands. Buried in horse dung the ancient violin ripens months into the even older sweetness of the original Wood. Sounds better still, like an old king singing in the shower. Steam everywhere, ships oinking through the harbor fog, smokes, sulphurs, saltines gone soggy down in the third class cabins, what would I know about God? Isn’t it enough I fetishize everything that breathes?

4.
And all too much that doesn’t. Moraine. Sad bit here, about the clay-hued souls interred on Long Island’s spine in rain. The angel of death carved above a tomb (on the right side as the bus climbs north) explains all this: if they didn’t die there’d be no room for the living and the ones to come. Why must they come, the students asked, we paid good money for you to answer all our questions so now tell. They must come because I am powerless to stop their soft arrivals. We can’t
correct the world but we can interfere.
That is the night-shift we call art –
screw you, they said, we want our wants,
we want our money back. You have no
back, personhood these days is only front.
A flack for something on its way, an ad
for angels or for the apocalypse.

5.
Solipsism is such a relief after bullshit.
Intuitionalist workshops with no coffee break,
just Brahms chattering out of the headset,
sonata lonely as a beach at Childermas.
Metaphors keep staggering in, ’s not my job
to keep them out. Is. Welcome! Is
the old king clean even yet? Must be,
hear nothing songly from the bath,
the light is on, the transformation done.
How gold comes glimmer through the shithouse door!
How the things that we make love with
never tell us what love is, hush, hush,
eschew the clamorous guitar, I tried
to clear my mind once and look what came.
Having sense one moves on to another
or be at care for somdel thingliness
amort the many – hoick flag!
stoop fowl! A hawk is catching for you,
second-string cosmologists eat lunch—
coffee for me just coffee thanks—
it is nothing that we see out there
and nothing the other side of it and nothing
we can do about it. Sugar just sugar.

27 June 2008
DISCORSO

Pour talk into nothingness
and be a monk of it,
to be glib, and glad,
and give infomercials
by universities and be paid
o paradiso!

      Could he mean me?
It’s pronoun time, Augustine, you
who invented the second person
singular. And in the shadow of that
great You is Me – is what you said
I ween, for how else would all those stars
fit in one window and leave room for me
or all those different crystals in one snow?

These aren’t real questions you divine,
bothersome entanglements of orchestral sound
like death in Texas or Salome prompted
to her final dance. Not the bible,
somewhere else. Equivalent conspiracies
of grace poured down from all our
past lives the light that we call God.
But there is somebody there! If
and only if there’s somebody right here.

27 June 2008
It’s hard to forgive Africa for being so far—
modern ethics is a calculus of blame.

Ill-favored rhapsodes grunt over their keyboards
a thousand Onans plunk at their guitars—

I loved your painting of the slender leg
vanishing up a billowing skirt as if

we build our bodies like houses from beneath.
Whereas the roof comes first in us

and all pours down from that transparent bone
in the half inch between your head and God.

27 June 2008