

ONE

LOOKS

AT

ONE

Poems by

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ONE

LOOKS

AT

ONE

PART I

ONE BREATH POEMS

WAVES TELLING THE SAME OLD NOTHING

Waves
telling the same old
nothing.

*

Waves over waves
sound sea-
changes.

*

Churning
white
can't fool me.

*

Storms
on the surface.
Rest in depths.

*

People all gone.
Sand's waiting
for footprints.

*

Who's
drifting from shore
to shore?

*

Who's
deeper
than I?

*

Who touched
all the way
down?

SEARCHING FOR DAWN

Goldfish
swam as we
slept.

*

Arms going up
hands spreading out
body a flow of slow waves.

*

Searching for dawn
I pad through leaves
to the lake.

*

Light from the lake
leaks through
woods.

*

Reaching
a little more
sky.

*

Dew drips
from beached
canoes.

*

I look
at the lake
face to face.

*

That fisherman's
paddling
out of a Chinese painting.

*

Swallows
stitch
lake and sky.

*

Fish rip
the surface
and fall.

*

I dip
my mind
in the water.

*

Does the sun
rise from water
or mind?

*

Sounding the sky
bubbling poetry
through it.

*

Pine boughs
shadow
my poems.

*

A spider
climbs down from my cap
to read my poems.

*

My poems
blow all over
with leaves of Tu Fu and Whitman.

*

Clouds pass
buds
brighten.

*

Weeds
in first light
look good enough to eat.

*

The ease of grow-
ing weeds, the joy
of their perfection.

*

Raindrops
quiver
on the line:
I am thirsty
but only look.

*

The sparrow on the wall
watches me
watching him
watching me fly away.

*

In the garden
squirrels
quarrel.

*

The blue air
bathes
a bluebird.

*

A bluebird's air
bathes
silence.

*

Moss on birches.
Clouds on sky.
Where am I?

*

Stones, moss, dirt
in greenery of light.

*

A garden before gardening:
we have been here all along.

Panicking
red
leaves.

*

Beware
be aware
beware.

*

Above all
mind
the birds.

*

Leaves burn
in the sun
like suns.

*

A new
lit
world.

*

Sunshine
melts me
down.

*

Clouds of the mind
drift on.
I touch the sky
with my tongue.

IN MUMMY-BAG

In mummy-bag
in a tomb of leaves
I gasp for you.

*

Here, love secrets
in my bones:
too long.

*

I lost all
friends but you.
Now you.

*

Snow fools
with yellowing leaves
as you fooled me.

*

Thunder growls over
the mountains.
I gasp for you to return.

*

Ghosts blow
from tamaracks
yellowing in snow.

*

Land of
loess and
loss.

*

The Buddha
stares at headlights
in the rain.

*

Overheated
hungry for you
I try to write off love.

*

Like you
the sky
shuts me out.

*

Snow chokes
and blinds me
in pursuit.

*

Watching snow
listening to snow
and "snow."

*

Sounding
shaping
darkness.

SNOW GLARE OF ABSENCE

The snow
glare of
absence
under
the moon.

*

Moonlit falling snow
shapes faces flying
past, forever lost.

*

Snow breathing on snow.
Deer are bleeding in snow
that drifts behind the summerhouse.

*

Washing my face in snow
in the middle of the night
my heart still beating

half my life behind me
half before me
living half a life.

*

Under the December moon
I broke off a twig of pine
and a twig of Washington Hawthorne
with wrinkled orange berries.

Inside I planted the twigs
in a cup filled with
Japanese stones.

The needles were dusty cold.
Among them berries glowed
like distant villages burning.

*

The snow
holds the dead
together:

the whole
world is one

*

Birds before dawn
singing
together.

I am ready
to let
go.

Listen as if
when they stop
we die.

*

Is the snow
too bright
for form?

Shining
surrounds me
absorbs me.

Where

did

I

go?

THE MOON IN MILK

The moon
in milk
hunts for you.

*

Where
is a ray
of your eyes?

*

Who is as bright
as the moon
and as clouded?

*

The moon
hunts hiding
moonstones.

*

The moon
flares meadowstones
back home.

*

Hazed moon
in forbidden trees
we played under anyhow.

*

I go
lost
in glow.

*

Slow moon, I am
yours on the hill of
summers, lasting.

*

A night
I could swim through
to you.

*

The moon
going down
I give up

going.

MINDING THE MOON

Baby breath in moonlight
 astonished eyes in moonlight
 ghost of a dog in moonlight

Moonlight on hedges
 moonlight between glances
 moonlight beyond barracks

Wanderers in moonlight
 howlers in moonlight
 devourers in moonlight

*

Hellooooo!
 Everybody
 under the full moon:

are you anyone at all?

Enough of ordinary life.
 Everybody's ornery
 under the full moon.

Anyone at all?

Everybody's blinded
 by full moonlight:
 enough of everybody!

Hellooooo!
 No one
 under the full moon!

No one
 at all!
 At all?

DARK WINDOW TO THE WORLD

In the window who looks in at me, no less alive than I, writing on a table too, propping his elbow on it, chin on hand, knuckles highlighted, what kind of poet is he?--unfluttered by moths, animals in leaves, chilled air from the lake, certain his poems will be read around the world, while I worry about each word, moth, cold, face, who am I, why is he there?

Who stares at
me?

Who?
me?

*

Whose
blank eyes
open mine?

*

Whose
mute lips
echo?

*

Whose
frown webs
the window?

*

Whose
head floats
in the night?

*

Whose
hands lie caged
on the page?

*

Whose
hands join
in depths?

*

Who
sounds

*

O window window
window:
open to the wind!

*

The wind in the wind-
ow wastes its breath on
a night of nobody.

*

I waste my breath on
nobody while the wind
mixes up my mind.

*

Wind
in leaves
in the dark
I am still.

*

In the dark wind
I forgot I stood
in the dark wind.

*

Wanting
the wind
that wants.

*

Wind on my face.
Hair rises
I rise
and fall.

*

Wind
touches my cheeks
like a woman
forgotten.

*

You?
From another
world?

*

Are you
forgetting
I remember you?

*

What do we know
of you
or me?

*

Wind
in the woods
where are you?

*

Wind
a-
way.

*

Listening
where the wind
was.

*

Fly
in web of window
I?

*

I
buzz and
die.

*

Webbed
in the window
to the world.

*

Who
hears my buzz
as anyone's?

*

Who's moved?
Who buzzes
back?

*

Whose
words rip webs
off the world?

*

Where am I?
In world or
word?

*

In world
I'm webbed.
In words
I fly.

*

Darkly
webbed
in world.

*

Bright
words
fly.

*

Words
know no
world.

*

And I?
In light
or dark?

Sickening
in the dark world
till the bright word.

*

The air
waits
to be breathed.

*

A breath.
A poem.

*

Sink-
ing. Sing-
ing.

*

Are these words
in or
out of mind?

*

Father coughs
in his sleep, Mother
sighs in hers, nothing
I can do for them.

*

Grow-
ing cold
and old.

*

Raccoons scream
over garbage
and a skunk streams
into my light.

*

Animals quieten
in the center of
dying.

In the pane of night
I stare at me
more real than me.

*

Knowing pain
like a difficult
friend.

*

Quaking
I do not
crack.

*

This night
of visionary headache
could not be improved.

*

Milton saw
lights of creation
and judgment
blind.

*

Birds twitter
but
no light.

*

Lightning!
Too late
for truth?

*

How strange.
My life.
No other.

*

The light
of not trying
for light.

I could lift
the world off my mind
but where would I rest it?

*

The night is open-mouthed
holding its breath
about to speak
or swallow us.

*

The night is deeper
than darkness
but I see to the end of it.

*

Stars look back
knowing whatever
I see.

*

The sky
my skin
home.

*

Doing nothing
before the fire
fills the night.

*

Moths, and their
dust on the window
words
and the dust of their wings.

Moths on the glass
flutter to enter
the mind that thinks they are outside.

In mind of night
in the mind of moths
what are they thinking of me?

Thanks for bringing me back
to our glass after wandering--
the glass reflecting me

reflecting you in these faltering words.

In the dead of night
we suddenly wake to wings
of the sky, and far beyond the sky.

*

Leaves on the window.
Wind from the meadow.
Face leaves the window.

*

The meadow lies
out there, out of mind
minding the strangers of night.

*

Speaking of shadows
of strangers departing
I am on my way.

*

Preparing
for exile
from death.

*

Where am I go-
ing sitting still
so long?
So long!

*

Where are we
if not here?
Not here.

*

The night is so
clear I no
longer look.

*

I have sat so long with the Buddha who is not
and my self that will not go away
that I no longer know which is which.

*

The night is too
quiet for words.
Are only Buddhas
awake?

PART II FLYING AROUND TO FIND ME

I AM HOW I BREATHE

I am how I breathe beech smoke in rain
 leaves eyeing me at dusk rustling me asleep

eyes harboring a sea

birds swim fish fly

in tidal green

masts flower trunks bob

from mossy wrecks

I swim through fragrant leaves

laughing

as I drown

MORGAN

Morgan am I
 from Welsh sea-dwellers
 Breton mermaids
 Irish moon-goddesses
 Celtic mirages

and Fata Morgana
 of many forms, many lovers
 sorceress-healer
 bearing world-treasure
 from womb-caves in the sea:

the son of singing
 Mary Elizabeth
 (mothers of Jesus and
 John the Baptist)
 enchantress of children and

daughter of Clay
 Morgan Leeper
 (sorceress-healer
 of babies and lilies
 leaper of faith).

George Morgan Gibson
 am I, the last
 son of sons of the
 protesting Word of
 George who stabbed the dragon.

All in the name that I am.

MOTHER

You were born in a Texas sandstorm
your mother's long hair on the pillow
twisting in wind and pain.

Just before Easter
you died.

You are here as you always were.
Our smiles and frowns disguised us.
I ran free of your love
and misunderstandings.
Now our struggle is over.
Rest.
Let me rest.
We are finished.

THE TABERNACLE WHERE MY FATHER PREACHED

Pilgrims knelt here
hearing the Word
in wind and book.

They dreamt of Jesus
dividing trout
on a Michigan beach

walking on waves
where tanned grand-
children now sail free.

*

The tabernacle where my father preached
stands in spring woods.

When summer children dance and sing
is it less holy than during sermons?

Is the wood of its walls more sacred
than autumn trees from which it came?

Does it stand empty all winter
or echo my father's Father?

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

When I imagine the baby tearing
through the cervix into the night
gasping for love like all of us
crying for a breast
I ask you,
I ask you not to laugh
but tell me if you dare:
did he glimpse the star?
Did the Magi's adoration
comfort him?
Did he love anyone but the one
from whom he came
who held him tight?
Did he taste his own divinity?
Did he smell animal death?
Did his heart beat for everyone of us?
Did he breathe eternal life
for all of us?
Or did he suck and sleep?
Did he dream or do we?

WHEN I WAS A WISE MAN FROM THE EAST

Chicago, Christmas 1941

When I was a Wise Man from the East
blinded by the burning bulb of Jesus
deafened by angelic glorias
itching in burlap robes and Persian beard
frozen by the snow of faith
that blew in from prophetic stars
I lost the war, the world, my mind, myself
how long I never knew
till those church doors squeaked shut
Jesus was only a bulb
the cradle an orange crate
Mary rose from her knees to grab her furs
Joseph stood upright with a joke
shepherds stretched into kids again
angels giggled, the light went out
“Who pulled the plug?”
everyone was groping in the dark
and we knew not even that we knew nothing.

GRANNY GRUNT

Your father
dropped
in the garden.

Your mother
roamed
the desert.

Rising
or sinking
you groaned,

"Jesus died
for our sins
but could do

nothing
about them
O

Jesus!
put me to sleep
forever!"

Now closer
to me
dead

than when we
jabbered
together.

*

"Your Papa ruined you, poor boy,"
said Granny
"and I don't know what all."

"You won't drag me north,"
said Granny"
"every which way."

"O Jesus save the poor boy,"
cried Granny
"and lay me down forever."

Down dead she calls me
I don't know what all
save us Jesus save us!

WAS I THE SON?

In the Parsonage way back
Mary Elizabeth mothered me
gauzy among candles

my father's voice the Father's
on earth as He was in heaven

and Granny the Holy Ghost
floating like a moth
whispering I was the Son
doomed to save
unsaved.

SHORTcummings

I

her sighed blue
 sob
 slipped ever so slow
 from the tip of the tear
 to the lips below

and bounced so blacked
 to my heart
 (alone
 sunk sleepily under
 the walls of bone)

II

sonnet

dick and billyjack seek spring in mud
 but essiejane and babs hunt flowermay
 what matter? winter will spin dizzy thud
 and die that spring may after play

it always happens: after snow gets tired
 and yawns for spring to carry on awhile
 around she comes 'til in the mud she's mired:
 so why keep lookout? a year's a longterm style

that's just the is of life: the isn't sings
 and laughs and makes the soul a carnival:
 that's the spring that's sung in wanderings
 of mind and legs--of fred and margymal

the world revolves, and yet i'm wondering
 if hungry searchings might wake the spring

BICYCLEMAN AND TELEGRAPHMAN

1

Bicycleman had stumps
legs were left on tracks
where nobody lays pennies anymore.

He wheeled himself on a stool
to an airhose under a bulb:
"You need a new tire," he said.

My father gave him a buck.

2

Telegraphman swirled dust
clicking in shadows cold as the butcher's freezer.

"Try the key," he told me:
clicks from down the tracks
where a couple of legs were lying.

THE WAR OF MY CHICAGO

Neighbors in tenement windows fought.
I watched through a scabby screen
in Granny's bedroom where she prayed
to ancestors and poor Jesus.
After shots in the alley
all the lights went out
except the bloodied sky.
Sirens twinged my teeth.
That was peace.

Did I dream
Pearl Harbor screamed
in Chicago flames?
Never stepped on a mine
never dodged snipers nor
tanks on the meadowy Midway
no groans of anyone hit
none of my teachers held hostage
none of the Jewish students sent away
only a couple of fathers
reported killed far off:
but war was in my bones
as if Nazis battered the door.

A-bombs flashed us
into Peace at last I was told.
Neither child nor man I staggered
not quite awake
not well
bones still throbbing
communiqués from the front
of the loveless world
called Peace:

I call it convalescence
and the cure is still the disease.

RENOUNCING MATH AND GOD

I renounced mathematics when
I fell in love
licking evening snow from evergreens
instead of proving theorems.

I renounced God when his worshippers
bombed each other's children
in the cause of Love and Justice
in the name of the Prince of Peace.

FILLING THE WOODS WITH MUSIC

Gulls circle skies of my childhood
when from the highest dune
my head was a constellation
and every cloud a gesture--

my eyes keen as jackknives
cutting woods to whistles
filling skies with music
more piercing than dawning birds.

LAKE MICHIGAN NOW AND FOREVER

"Meditation and water are wedded forever."
--Herman Melville

Sunlight like moonlight now and forever
sparkles waves into battlefield crosses
gulls dip and touch and sails pass over.

Five boys and a girl dive into the roaring
whitecaps, kick down, rise, calling
each other out to the gray horizon

where black hulls move like memories
of destroyers they'd gladly drown for.
Too soon, a thin voice calls, "Come back!"

They turn toward shore. Two dogs circle
an old man holding out his hands
to heads in whitecaps, and calling again.

When I was a boy before the war
breakers churned me in the rubble
bearing me forth again and again.

Now I watch from a dune, unwilling
to roll in currents of death and birth
unable to move like moon or sun

standing beech-straight, young and old
leafing in my dazzling vision

of Lake Michigan, now and forever.

FLYING AROUND TO FIND ME

In the Congregational Women's Lounge
 an old preacher's portrait flaps
 in wind rising from the lake.

He scowls down
 I listen up:
 no Word.

I have nothing against him.
 What has he against me?
 His Word is lost in the wind.

I am lost in the wind.
 I am flying around to find me
 beyond the Word of the Lord

out of the Congregational Women's Lounge
 soaring into the sun
 and splashing in Crystal Sunlake.

*

In shadows on the flowered beach towel
 tiny hairs on my hand glow.
 I breathe in and out with the ebb and flow.

A gray lady staggers from Sunlake
 collapsing beside me, a mother
 of aging children.
 Looking away I want her
 when her breasts were sweet
 and her eyes didn't squint away bodies.

A blonde's smile rising near her
 looks for small ones in the water.
 I am scared of the bearded professor
 sloshing through Sunlake
 to harsh blond laughter.
 She lifts her hair for Bronzetan
 he smears on her back. "One finger"
 he sneers, "is all you get."
 She pulls up plastic straps
 staring at me through violet
 lenses as if to rub me
 raw.

Wind on my hot back rises
 away from loveless bodies.
 Why must they sit beside me?
 I am loud enough to be heard
 without a sound.

But I will not be silenced.

The old preacher is long gone.
New words wind in the wind.
I give myself to the wind.
It lingers, laps me, lifts me.
Flying around to find me
I will dive into Crystal Sunlake.

CRYSTAL SUNLAKE

I walk through smiling heat.
I walk into Crystal Sunlake.
My body stiffens, the chill
stands off from my center.
Smiling I
go under, swim under, stiff
as a waterlogged log, still smiling.

Now I stand on a raft
floating cold in air
staring across Crystal Sunlake
at shore-faces strangely small
until they freeze in view.

You break the ice of the mind
churning the blue towards me.
Diving, my stiff body
shatters the body of water.
We float in watery light.

I walk into the air
blood surging through my body
body surging through air
man I did not know
heavy with watery light
facing your faces in sand
all eyes sun crystals now
seeing one sun one seeing:
nothing more to say.

Always more to say.
We went in less than one
came out many together
turning sounds of water
into the flow of fire:
one body of watery light.

FIVE FOR THE FIRST AMERICANS
and for Gary Snyder

The Indian graveyard washed away.
For years we stumbled on ribs
and skulls, picking teeth from sand
where storms had washed them down
from bluff roots where they were buried
at some tribe's end of the world
the great lake dying
washing our soles and their bones.

O burn my bones when I'm through!

*

In deer woods, burying Indians'
brown bones gathered from the beach
I enter again dark memories of birth:

mosquitoes over the fungus-path
whining waves of annihilation on my cheeks
shudder me into damp growth of deer woods

where buzzing light flows painfully new
over fresh trillia and ferns
of mounds of trees and graves of Indians.

*

So far I have walked
so far I forgot
what I started for:

from dune roots
to luna leaves
mushroom woods
suicide bluff
beach of bones
sumac farm
meadow stones
between pine woods

in the skin of space
in the breath of time

I wait for the sky
to take me in.

*

On hands and knees
in cemetery wild
strawberries

here I am:
Pilgrim
woods dreamt of in city winters
rooted in graves of Indians
here
wherever I go.

Their sky in my skull.
Clouds pass
leaves darken
glow
I am here and there
breathing their air
walking their earth
one body
rising
raining
burning
storming.

*

Leaving the lake of moons and mushroom woods
tearing my roots from Indian graves and dunes
I'm going back to city masks
muscle-minds and babel storms
off-beats of the heart
battle-swirl and snow of death.

BEYOND LIFELINES

Returning to Pilgrim
woods after city winter
have I been here all along?

June dusk melts old
machinery of snow
that packed the heart
and senses flow
to crickets in sweet grass.

Leaves stir faint light from old summers
old love snowed out from cities.

Still leaves of green flame
gold dust in the air
birds sing more sweetly than choirs of Christians.

Passing the field where we captured the flag
in dusk of Depression and War

I hear Red Rover Come Over
and the King of the Mountain roar

as if I had never left
trees that never grow old:

reunion of boy and man.

*

Heat circles trees and my limbs too.
Leaves fan leaves.
I wipe sweat from my hair.
The gray sky sags.
Something is going to happen:
a change of life?
A storm arising out of
what we have survived?

*

Paring my claws
clenching jaws

tongue digs teeth
instead of telling
hunger and anger

feet sleeping on the cabin floor:
I want to go where?

mountains of ancient mist?

I wait for what to move me
out, up, away?

Blood surge? A war?

*

I could have seen the
dawning lake
but I stayed in
afraid

of what? The kettle
steamed. On the porch
I sipped tea.
Why should I be

the first
awake
to dawn
and death?

*

Flames come and go.
Coals glow.
Winds come and go.
Woods sway and stay.

Wherever I've gone
I'm always here
like trees that
feed our fires.

Sighing, drinking
Lapsang Souchong
smoky as woods
burning before me.

Errors burn
to be
free
of my skin.

What's on my mind
but words for silence
beyond the wind?

What's in my heart
but words for stillness
beyond the fire?

*

Returning to my skull
 crawling into it to stare
 I am body-glow.
 This is my body speaking!

I am all about me.
 Not the lonely me
 that holds itself like gold
 a part from an other

O no, no other now
 my years flow into yours
 I see through your body
 you are all about you.

*

Lines of trees
 lines of poems
 fire of trees
 lines of fire
 how I glow

paper fish
 swim in heat
 wanting out
 into rain
 into clouds

we go

*

All summer, waiting for summer
 to hold us forever.
 June storms into July
 August friends crowding like city
 winter, when we waited for woods
 and now, in woods, for fall
 wanting to stay all year
 year after year until
 waiting would be forgotten.

*

The dog dozes in the open door
 lying belly up with no suspicions

among cornstalks on the porch
 where raccoons left them.

Chinese ginger and jasmine tea

My daughter drops dead leaves on me till
I am gratefully dead.

Looking inward
we are about to wake up

to the green glow
of old summers.

Leaves sighing, I am
leaving the cottage of sleep

creeping towards crickets in
leaf mold

scouring rush, shade
of birches bright as whitecaps:

sunshine spilling
through groves of song

blue smoke from cottage
chimneys flowing

across green sways
of leaves

woods breathing me
out and in.

*

Certain our lake is there
dark as love

we
lean

over the dune's warm contours
extend beyond our worldly

limits, our certain
touch of sand and air

and could, with a light lift, soar
everywhere.

*

Saws whine, hammers
hurry cottages up

but no one need

for doing nothing
is right for now,

I go over
nosumi-e stroke

just sigh
and pee:

Lao Tzu's
wu wei.

*

Beginning each line
as if finishing my life

moving as endless
waves of light

summering
home in water

swimming beyond lifelines
into clouds.

INCENSE OF SPRING

Incense lingers.
The spark has gone out, ashes
sprinkle your poem.
You have gone away
your smile and everything else.
The air is nearing spring
and I am looking out for you.
The snow is nearly forgotten
graying under the birches.
You are like none of the others
in their separate bodies.
Your incense lingers, your smile
and mind of earth and fire.
I have always known you
in the feel of earth in my hands
fire on my face
and the incense of spring.

THE SEASIDE OF YESTERYEAR

The seaside of yesteryear
is very much with us, still
with its parasols and heat.
The light is steady and free.

On the pier, children run
to the lighthouse and back to the sand
as children are wont to do
but their faces are turned away
and their voices are turned away
so I hear nothing at all
as if sounds had drained away.

You are no longer in sight
not even in shadows of birches
up from the hill, towards lovers
who hid till they passed away
as we have passed away.
I cannot find our bower
nor any sense of you.

Fish lie in murky pools
quiet as Quaker prayers
and a ship waits on the horizon
perfectly bright and still
as if the chronometer stopped
when you slipped over the edge.

O what would bring it all back
your lips and full body of sound?
Listen!--till you feel me
on you embedded in sand
in our heat again.

NEIGHBORS

I saw my neighbor sawing
through the night between us
at mid-day.

Teasing the wood
he would
say nothing to me at all.

I saw him
eyeing me eyeing him
till I saw through his cuts.

Laughing
we softened like
mud.

ON CABIN HILL

On Cabin Hill
in grayish light
I sit hard on granite.
A woman meditates.
Cars rush below.
Mountains melt into clouds.

Between her and car-rush
having told too much
I stop between breaths
and listen, listen
to the sky:

her huge breath
enfolds me.

IN WOODS AS DARK AS I

I look at myself as a stranger
looks at a stranger he suspects
of suspecting him of suspicions

watching him enter the woods
at evening and disappear.

Now that I have been looked at
suspiciously I might speak
as if I had something to say
beyond suspicions, smiling,
if he were not lost in the woods.

I am inclined to preach
holier than thou
holier than God
telling everyone off
as if I did not know
I too am lost in the woods

as if they did not know
their glaring imperfections
as if they were not mine
as if I had not
anything to say

that they had not read
somewhere and forgotten
as if I could possibly speak
to anyone but me
outside the midnight woods.

I am inclined to stare
at myself, as if possessed
possessing you in nightmares
as if in love
with nothing but myself

as you, all you, in love
that burns us up, as if
you did not know
you are as nothing as I
in woods as dark as I.

NO ONE IS ANYTHING NOW

Birds sang in rainy woods.
 Boarded cottages glowed.
 In a rush of rain
 darkness rose from the earth.
 Then the woods went out.
 They drip on dead leaves in the dark.

Sounds sink in my throat
 as a sailboat sinks in fog.
 I lie where we made our first child
 who has hitched to San Francisco.
 The woods breathe warm and cool
 music from the lake through the open
 window across my neck
 as she dances in strobe lightning.

Rain gentles the roof and stars
 the window where firelight strikes it.
 Flames come and go and coals
 glow on
 cold banana soup in a Chinese bowl.
 I glow, full of jasmine. Moods
 ooze from smoky doze.

I am only an animal whose home is earth.

*

Rain comes and goes.
 My head on her painted window throbs
 music through dull light.
 She has gone, is gone
 will be gone tomorrow
 with rain on her hair. There she goes
 only a child how long ago
 now west with him
 to swim in seas
 at the other end of the eart
 Rainy jungles wait
 birds sing in steam
 from seas where they will sail.
 Where will they build?
 In trees where monkeys play?
 Mountains where gulls hover?
 Beaches where seals sport?
 What am I waiting for?

Her rainy voice from the sky.

Kneeling by meadow stones
 where I stood last winter
 alone in the Milky Way

I am not praying, just homing
 here like golden lichens
 colonizing stones
 where a dead farmer loved

my body crawling with bugs
 wedding me to weeds
 dying into sunlight.

*

Starlight rains on leaves
 and my face where I float free
 among galactic trees.

Stars snow
 in August heat.
 We swim over moonlit stones.

*

Starlight snowing leaves
 among galactic trees
 your face floating free
 among moony stones
 no wonder I despair
 total other there
 no wonder, I could float
 into the darkening lake.

But knowing you dream of me
 knowing we are dreams
 there is nothing to hold
 nothing of you to cling to.
 Memories cloud by.
 No one is anything now
 but wonder. I float
 in a lake of light.

I am swimming around you.
 You are swimming away
 down moonlight to weeds that freeze
 your mouth and thighs.
 Your cries bubble through moonlight
 into stars of wonder.

AFTER LEAR IN BERKELEY

Lear raged himself out.
I lie on my belly
between birth and death.

Near dark, near dark, go away.
Take your fire out. My eyes
turn from yours, out near dark.

Ancient rages of Lear
hang at the edge of my ear
hang at the edge of sleep
his face wrinkling,
seeing no more than bones.

The sky was bright
my mind too, once upon a time
in a legend no one believes:
I knew all the answers, bright
as your eyes, as we loved.

Tonight with you on flowered sheets
I am too tired for touch
too low from Lear to tell
how low I lie
on my belly on flowers
bones sore, dying
to you, to one
after another
my lids heavy against them.

But I will not sink, not yet
into the flowers, feeling
the flowers move me
knowing I will wake
if only I let go
let my kingdoms of women go.

*San Francisco floats in fog.
I sit, having nothing to say.
I want to start over, all over.
I want to say a first word:
new name for a life unimagined.

I watch you dance in the fog
each turn dancing me
out of my self to you
as you dance me too
in and out of the fog.

I SEE MY BREATH, THE SNOWING LIGHT

I snowshoed to the brook and back
 thumping along in semblance of a poem
 wanting to tell my life straight through
 but finding no beginning, shape, nor end

wanting to stop wanting
 waiting for stopping to come
 but woke to a blinding setting sun
 where there is nowhere to go.

*

I went out to gaze at stars.
 They came bright into me.
 I would drift gladly among them:
 mind cloud.

Looking for little words
 (but they are too big, too loud)
 I am tired of people-mind
 all the bad dreams of faces.
 I am tired of the many
 and The One is beyond me, far.

How can I drift
 beyond stars?

*

Shoot, shooting star
 through my eye:
 shoot me to sleep.

*

Sing
 whip-poor-will
 whip me with your song
 awake.

*

I see my breath, the snowing light.
 I hear the breathing of my mind.
 I do not wait for stepping stones.

I went on too long for light
 Streaming from the mouth too far
 till my breathing fell apart.

I woke from pieces in a show of light.

to songs I watch in snowy air.

THREE SNOW SONGS

Snow dusk she
winds yarn
the wind sleeps in
the leaning barn.

*

Snow castle, the moon
over spiky woods
garden black, horses
steaming in the barn
the song goes on.

*

Sing song darkening
walls of fern

for falling sunlight
drowns the eye

and the cup falters
in mossy fingers

all over, all over
the singing closes.

MOON BONES

Trudging in drifts behind our summer-house, I blinked at pines on the hill. They withered beyond my bleached-out world as the moon blossomed in my arms.

*

How could they sleep, the Somonour
and Wif of Bathe and all
before their pilgrimage?
Dreams of final grace
and worldly joys on the way
to the holy blissful martyr
kept their eyes open.

Mine look within.
I have never craved
shrines and relics
because my head is filled
with fetishes of bone
cannibal hair, fire
of generation, mockeries of
reverence my father
taught me.

I heard
his piety boom and toll
from pulpits till I glimpsed
a muse in green woods.

Still

I love her more than thunderous
commandments could move me.
The woods have darkened
with his faithful eyes
trees shriveling
with his voice and neck
as I am shriveling too.

Fantasies of green
touches in moonlight
darken snow. How can I
sleep before my pilgrimage
to find her
before the woods are cut?

Will dreams of love
drown me
dragging me down
seaweed-choked
eyes swallowing
oceanic wonders
at the instant of
death?

*

Returning to woods in winter
 pilgrim to Pilgrim searching
 for the birches where I dreamed
 in August sweat and shadow
 before fighting in cities
 of sterilizing light

 snowy holy
 I will find her
 snowy holy

*

Is this the grove where she lay
 warm before wars
 numbered us nameless?

Is she the moon in the birches
 or one of their weaving shadows?
 I dance around them
 singing in circles
 to turn them green
 so she will fall like fresh fruit.
 I creep but no one comes.
 I leap but no one comes.
 I push over dead trees to keep
 warm. But first
 I bow to their shadows
 groaning in moonlight. They
 fall in shrouds of snow. I tire
 quickly of seeming heroic.

Cracking branches I try
 to kindle a companion.
 Smoke tickles the moon
 and my throat. I cough.
 No love-death comes for me.

*

Where have ebb and flow
 of great lakes gone?
 Can songs melt snow
 make flowers grow
 and bodies join?

*

Shall I wed a tree
 like the Roman Frazer described
 who embraced her and kissed her
 and offered her wine?

My lips freeze
 to the bark and tear.
 I dance round the shining birch
 wailing prayers to turn it green.
 I climb up to kiss the moon.
 Icy fingers of light
 close my lids.
 Fool!--to fool with the moon:
 Moon-fool!

The moon is only the moon.

*

Climbing down
 I see footprints leading
 out of the grove to bluffs
 of love in summers
 before one war or another.
 Bones lie scattered in snow.
 Are they her bones or mine?
 I fall on them to trap
 whatever memory made them.
 Snow flies up like frightened
 gulls, beating my face. I run.

*

I climb a dune storm-hollowed
 bone-picking a bush.
 In it a rusty skull
 waits for birth.
 Snow-eyed, I ease it out.
 I lay it on bones to see
 if I can kindle a
 companion, warming
 her awake. I
 light a fire
 to love them alive.
 Smoke feathers
 a face. They grow
 flesh of smoke
 snowy holy.

Light cascades around us
 eyes swallow oceanic wonders
 warm tides sway us, we
 swim in eternal summer.

HARDBOY

Lost in you
I die in desire
sperm lights ovum.

THE MOON OF YOUR MIND IS THE MOON OF YOUR EYES

I have loved the moon ever since, a naked summer baby, I waded in wet grass among sleeping bees and bats. Who did they think they were? The moon was anything I wanted, in or out. It was about to land as I raced to the water's sandy edge to lap its light, now in your loony eyes.

The whole blessed lake was lit as if the turned on moon were dissolving in it. Lying with legs on slushy sand and lips in light as thick as cream, I closed my eyes, but moonlight shone through lids, flooding my body, drowning me most pleasantly.

Virgins, threshing moonlight as they swam, sucked frothy moonshine from their thumbs. They swam to shore, hugged each other warm, danced away the murky depths, and sang of mountains of the moon, their voices climbing up and sliding down the slopes until they saw me lapping at the edge.

They ooo'd and cooed all over me, they swept me up and fluttered through the sand, into high grass, rustling in breezing moonlight. Hushed, their lissome bodies gleamed. Through the affectionate air they passed, their hitherto untouched breasts caressed by its wanton breath. Without a giggle they danced in a ring around me, cooing in the grass. Swinging left and right, they hummed like bees who catch a garden's scent and won't let go. Unknown of masculinities, their unsullied individualities blurred in a ring of fleshy glow, humming high and low, louder, until they collapsed about me in the grass, their moonshined bodies squirming as they kissed me all over.

Rolling away from them, chortling, giving them the slip, I swam through dewy grass. And when they came upon me, I rolled upright on pudgy buttocks, raising my right forefinger to the moon. When they looked up I ducked between their legs and wiggled free. They pounced on me. I bounced erect, sitting again to point my finger up, the right forefinger always, steadying it until it did not move, fixed on the moon until they quieted down, they lingered in my pointiness, looking up in worship of their own reflected light.

Their lunar flesh enchanted me even more ecstatically than I was already polymorphously free versed, unknowing where my mother was, which tits to suck, so taking turns, sucked virginal wisdom till I dreamed of bright and dark, of warm and cool, or murmuring, of earthy odors mild, in unbroken doze, cuddled by communal flesh nourishing my flourishing heart-mind.

Rosy-fingered Dawn tickled open my eyes, and eyeing the virgins of the moon, I laughed at the hills and valleys of flesh which I climbed, tumbled, crawled among meadowy breasts, and sang out songs without words, higher and lower than they in choral bliss sublime, now in your dirty ears.

PART III SHADOWS OF BUDDHALAND

WAITING FOR LAO TZU

A woman in me waits
as valleys wait
for rain.

She waits
for a lover
to drown her.

She waits
for a child
to swim from her.

Quietly
she lies
ever giving.

Possessions
pass
away.

The powerfu find her:
dark woman of the valley

hidden deep within us
far from manly
power.

Wait
as she waits
for rain.

STAYING IN THE BROOK

The brook
sings
over stones.

They stay put
waiting for me
to sit.

And so I sit
on one and wait
for stars to turn.

Trees turn
air is turning cool
summer turns away--

all changing
but stones
in the cold

curling
undertow
of singing:

the way
I stay
a stone.

A CHINESE TEAPOT

Left on my desk
as if by chance

the teapot was studied:
the cup as if studied

was left beside it
wholly by chance.

*

My fingers moving
as if they are thinking

or as if words are
thinking of themselves

but not self-centered, really
after all, they know

themselves as movement
of hand, man, kind of everything.

*

Nothing moves hands
into a poem.

"I" do not make
the good ones

though I try
like a judge condemning

men he'd reform
to death.

*

When you stare at words
they gape like fish on a pier.

Like fish by a pier
poems hide among rocks.

Among rocks they float
like seaweed in our dreams.

WASHING IN A RUSH

Washing in a rush
I lose touch
with each
crashing dish.

"Where's your loving
touch?" you cry,
"And your Prajna-
eye?"

Your words wash
me peacefully, I stare
at nothing in the
rinsing air.

ZAZEN AT MYOSHINJI

One smiles, looking down.
One looks up through glasses.
One looks around.
One stares under eyebrows.
One lifts one.
One gazes over hands.
One glances.
One dozes.
One looks at one.
Onooks at no one.
One looks as if trying to shit.
One looks as if trying not to.
One looks as if she knows.
One looks as if nobody knows.
One looks as if nowhere.
One looks as if looking.
One looks as if looking at nothing.

AFTER YEARS OF CROSSING MY LEGS

After years of crossing my legs, what
do I know of nothing
that I did not know
when I thought I knew
how to cross over
from the way of the cross
to the way of no way?
No way!

THE VOID: A VOICE

Listen
to the void:
a voice

sound-
ing
the void

who
speaks?

who
me?

(echoing
an empty
mind)

LOOKING FOR MY FACE

Looking for my face
floating in the sea

among ripples of desire
on the verge of sleep

slowly being remembered
in the ebb and flow

looking into waves within
for the face before I was born.

*

Passig through Chinese mountains
at times on a bird, at times
on foot, behind ox-carts and warriors
stumbling through the night

I sit on a skull to write
this poem in peace, alone
where blossoms survive battle
others leaving me

under the moon rising
from waves behind dark hills
moon of my smile rising
from the face before I was born.

NIGHT CLOSES IN ON THE LIGHT

Night
closes in
on the light

as silence squeezes
meaning from the
slightest sound.

I want to touch the moon
of a night no one sleeps through.
I want to star beyond
this iffy floor.
I want new galaxies
from day-old crusts.

“Why not?” makes it so:
a shooting star, dog barking far off just are.
Your light touch swirls auroras in our bed.
The darkness rhythms into song
snowing past on future, high on low.

I am a teller all told.

THAT NIGHT, THIS NIGHT

That night was not dark enough.
Light on the path misled us
out of the only mind
whose night is illumination.

*

This night is so deep
that drunks groping for spotlights
cannot wreck it, their revelations cannot tear it:
this dark would not be darker if they died.

YOUR SHRINE BEDROOM

Waiting for waking in your shrine bedroom
I sit tight in the sun between traffic and solitude
between my self and yours
just as if, not being--
dozing my way nowhere
a toad in the sun.

Cars jabber mantras of passage
to those whose ears are open.
I am yawning.

The sun spreads light to those whose eyes are open.
It tickles mine wet. I blink
as if under water
swimming up for clarity.

Blinking, I dry them out
squeeze them free of glare
till I see how I am not and say
a breath in a timeless silence.

MATSUI KEIKO

"Pine-well good-child"
wed me in Heian
reflecting the sun
of Goddess and Buddha.

*

With tweezers you bought when we married
on the other side of the world
you pluck lashes growing inward
from the world into your mind

and laugh

watching my eyes watching yours
in the mirror my mother held
before her face when I
strained in her for the world, and you.

*

Lonely? Your friends are as numberless
as grains of genmai
baby carrots you sing to
nori saved from darkest depths
onions you liberated from insects
potatoes eyeing your dancing fingers
daikon longer than your arm
mochi swelling like Hotei's stomach
noodles swimming in your vision.

Each pea and lentil is your companion
enjoying your Zen jokes
your prayers to Buddhas of
soil and air, water and fire
your mantras against polluting demons.

How can you ever be lonely
wherever you wander
to the ends of the earth
your only home?

HOW THE SUN-GODDESS ROSE FROM ISE BAY AND
SANK IN LAKE MICHIGAN

After our wedding we
arrived at dusk at an inn on Ise Bay.
Water seeped into the sky
and the sky into our sleepiness
as rain had come and gone and come again.
Or were we underwater in our room
as fish dozed on the table?
Steamy from soup and tea
we came up for air
to play bamboo flutes
but even the tune was soggy.
So we crawled under quilts.

I dreamed that volcanoes of flesh and blood
rumbled together, rose
through the churning sea
to bloom as islands of Japan.

Before dawn I touched your sleeping face
whispering to see the dawn.
But you swam in sea-dreams far below.

Alone, I walked on
the sea-wall in the spray.
The Wedded Rocks, roped
together, rose
from dark waves as I had dreamed
we had emerged from ancient depths.
And as I held my breath, the sun
bled into the waves.

Old men in white robes bowed
clapping to the rising sun
that spilled the blood of all
the dead into the sea
and across the stones at my feet.
I shriveled in the spray
terrified of holiness
dissolving me in the sea.

An old man clopped towards me
on wooden clogs
pulled tight his robe against the light
and smiled to me as I bowed to him
and to his aureoled balding head.
We clapped
to the goddess sun.

Blinded by her bloody glow
 of love-light pouring through the waves
 I lost him, lost all
 human sense
 gasping in her light.

As vision cleared to sight
 I wiped my eyes free of the
 mist of myth. The old man hobbled away.
 I hurried back to the inn
 before the sun could consume
 all she had created and we had spoiled.

*

When the earth had turned to the other side of the sun
 she sank in Lake Michigan
 as we sat, hands joined,
 on the beach near the cross
 where Father Marquette
 carried ashore by Indians had sighed
 "Here I shall finish my voyage."

The sun was only the sun to him
 sinking as he sank from the world
 to rise to his only God.
 My father, another Reverend
 half-way to heaven above the beach
 watched from a hospital window
 the sun set
 taking the world's blood with her
 to sleep underwater
 till she rose again from Ise Bay
 as Jesus rose from flesh to heaven.

The Sun and Son join like Wedded Rocks
 and all their followers, east and west
 north and south
 receive their double light till they are one
 in love of all the colors
 as we are one on body's earth
 in mind of sky.

CHRIST AND BUDDHAS IN PILGRIM

In our Pilgrim cottage
 twigs hiss in frail flames.
 Smoke hesitates. Steam
 hovers over teacups.
 Hunching, I poke
 papers, blow
 them ablaze
 add logs
 living their bright death.

We drink Kyoto tea
 under bronze Kannon
 who pours a stream of compassion
 over the wishing jewel.
 On the left, Shakyamuni sits
 under the Bo tree, growing
 out of it, out of mind.

On the right, Yakushi Nyorai
 Buddha-physician of souls
 holds out the medicine pot.
 On the cross, the Savior's soul
 rising from ripped flesh
 embraces the fallen world.

I turned away from the cross.
 I flew to Buddhas of Japan.
 They dissolved in me, as me
 till I was nothing but pain
 no less yours than mine.
 Your empty heart-mind smiled
 when my way was lost.

Where there was nothing
 love created us
 on the other side of the world--
 pilgrims to this home
 drinking Kyoto tea.

HEARING HIM DRONE IN JAPANESE

Hearing him drone in Japanese
circling drunk on mono-no-aware
kimono sleeves flapping in the autumn breeze
she reminisces of hair
when hers was long, never cut
heavy from the bath
a damp burden on her back
hearing him drone of scholars
she reaches backwards through the night
tunneling to midsummer of naked dancing
in the meadow, in the moonlight
in a mild breeze
she could have sunk
into tall grass
drowned in its green swirls
she could have returned to primeval dusk
by simply falling apart
legs sinking, arms melting
breasts bubbling over
the rim of midnight
into the dark beginning of another day
when she would ready herself for
the made up morning
to teach the lies of traffic.

LOSING OUR FACULTIES IN JAPAN

A professor of German
crawls for a cup of tea
and back to his seat.

A professor of French
pinches precise pronunciation
from his upper lip.

A professor of English
leans over his notes
as if about to throw up.

Three more professors of English
chins in hands
elbows on table
close their eyes
as if recalling
what Hamlet said
to his father's ghost.

The professor of Russian
peers over his glasses
as he pulls his left ear.
He does most of the talking
when he isn't sniffing.

The only woman professor
giggles at all the speeches.

The fattest briefcase
fools no one.
Nor do the silk suits and ties.

Leaves fall
outside curricula.

The jaws of the lone foreigner
clench as if tetanus
had struck
as he writes:

“Are the teacups
half-full
or half-empty?
Are our minds?”

IN THE WISTERIA GARDEN

In the wisteria garden
the Buddhas are waiting for tea.
Are the ladies in kimono
smiling at the Buddhas
or the heady scent of wisteria--
the folly of wisdom or beauty?

The ladies smile as if they are also Buddhas.
Odor of wisteria, taste of tea
confuse all sentient beings
till samsara is nirvana
as it always is.

The Buddhas wait ladylike
as the ladies smile Buddhalike
as is, pouring tea.

THREE FOR THE MOON

Bright mountains at the
black
edge
of the moon

stars
staring into my eyes
coldly burning away
cosmologies

wisps
of galaxies in the glass
whirling the mind away
through my raw
animal
eye

paranoia
of Northern Lights
Venus
blinding

and mindless
dawn.

*

Moon
breath
lights
the river
we
swim
starward

home.

*

The moon
in the pool
where I look for
your face

is the face
behind all masks
wisemen have faced
in scripture or sky

overseeing the dark

SEA SWIMS

Sea swims past porpoises
Sky soars past gulls
Earth whirls under locomotives
 Love waits

The neighborhood plays in children's sleep
The factory bleeds
Science sneezes, art ticks past
 Love waits

THE SKY HAS CLOSED ME OUT

The sky has closed me out
the wind has its own anxieties
trees turn inward
I am free
a surprise to me
I do not wait forever.

On the edge of sense
of light and dark
on the edge of a shape
that is almost clear
too late?

Ready to fly or fall
but where are you?
Listen, if we touch
ending is at an end.

I jump across the road
no one laid
to trees of a night
no one sleeps through.

THE CAVE THAT YAWNS WITHIN YOU

Larger than the cave in which you stand
halloing echoes of halloing
is the cave that yawns within you.

Listen in the darkening silence after
halloing echoes of halloing:
the cave within you yawns you into knowing.

A MORNING OF NOTHING TO DO

Waking
from busy
bodies

to vast
sky
light.

*

The infinite fades fast
skyblue firming up
in a cracked ceiling
above this lumpish body
mummied by bright quilts.

I am darkly in my mind
nose sticking out of quilts
chilled in walled-in air
sniffing to stay alive
snuffling for food or sex
or any finite joy
imagined in my belly
that rumbles into tune.

*

Kissing fish
glance at me and pass on
wall-eyes like shooting stars
their tight lips craving each other.

The hunger!--crawls in my belly
and in dark seas where I
prehuman, swam
ignorant of land
in awful depths
of ravenous mouths.

Hunger
for sky
light!

*

Is this a museum of death?
 (What museum is not?)
 Under the paralyzed clock
 under the headsman's axe
 and cabinetted skulls
 before photographs
 of mummied freaks
 am I an artifact
 waiting for public eyes
 to wake me into a dance?

*

A morning of nothing to do.
 Air sighs slightly beyond
 motionless flowery curtains.
 The floor shines, clear of people.
 The chairs have never been emptier
 and the clock stopped ages ago
 before the staring fish
 were invented for the awakening.

I too have stopped
 propped up for mourners.
 But there is nothing to mourn
 no one to die or be born
 in the fish's eye
 in this frozen room
 in this morning of nothing to do.

*

Hearing you scuffling below
 I imagine you squinting
 under your hooding lids
 waiting for the one
 real image
 snapped.

Then plunging negatives into
 the dialectical soup
 developing blacks and whites
 celluloid yin and yang
 and fixing though nothing is fixed
 for me, not even my blanketted body
 is fixed as your image is fixed.

So I have begun these poems
 to fix an image or two:
 mummied life in death
 poet wrapped in quilted words.

*

Where does my body end?
In a touch of quilt or guilt
of cold air on my nose?
In the blue of walls
or wakening glass
or in sky light or galaxies
computed by future bodies
of my blood?
If my body is all that may be
in any words imagined
is it more than nothing at all?

From Pacific to Atlantic I stay put
in my familiar body universe.
Spring has turned to winter on it, but
the changes have changed.
Cold air clings to my nose.

I stay.
The rest goes on, all but my rest, it stays.
Homeless, I belong
in this body home
in this loafing art
in this morning of nothing to do.

WATER MUSIC

Raising your flute
to "Water Music" on the stand

you close your eyes
blow color from your face

clothes, walls
and all the paintings and rug

blow yourself and the room
into melodies of clear water

in which we ecstatically
drown.

THE BATH OF SPACE

My December body glows
 hotter with each breath
 swelling in a sea
 tingling towards new worlds
 temples throbbing songs
 from choral breaths of steam
 eyes tunneling to light
 that balls at the end of time.

White dwarf pulsing eye
 staring at me in steam:
 near or light-years far?
 Eye of God or me?
 Pulse after pulse of me
 make us one and see
 in oceans on the wall
 cliffs slicing black expanses
 ice floes larger than Europe
 nudging and cracking and south
 a continent of palms
 divided by great lakes
 blossoming volcanoes
 and valleys of purple nurture
 where giant birds in pygmy rain forests
 screech warnings of marauders
 from the north.

From undersea flames rose
 in petals of exploration
 exfoliating comets
 adrift in my sea of vision
 yours, whoever sees
 beyond the tub's horizon
 beyond the kiss of complacency
 to invent worlds of steam
 blood throbbing into seas
 and back into the body
 till body is sea, body-sea
 sees beyond beyond
 in hot pursuit of ice-floes
 and off the planet to others
 in orbits of rebirth
 beyond our sun to others
 black holes, red giants, all

I see I am in hot water
 body universe drowsy now
 melodies untuned
 closing eyes of inner light

new worlds darkening out.

REXROTH

Rexroth
crept out
slow to speak
as an ancient tortoise
from whose calligraphic shell
the Chinese told the future.

A PHOTO OF ALLEN GINSBERG

Slipping into a mudra on the sidewalk
giving the Other the finger
grinning around the outbreath
starry teeth staring out of your skull
above its shrunken brother
hanging from your neck
watch ticking lies of samsara
among beads on a string of non-being
outbreathing a funny smile
of one nonentity to another.

GINSBERG AND FATHER MARQUETTE

(for Allen Ginsberg's reading at the University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee in 1967 after Marquette University had banned him)

A day will come when Ginsberg and Father Marquette
 embrace on a snowy Wisconsin shore
 and in the Joan of Arc Chapel
 Menominees will chew peyote with Joan
 hallucinating immortalizing fire
 in cathedrals all over the world
 priests will intone Kaddish
 churches imploding like light bulbs
 corporations tumbling
 multiversities crumbling
 governments and old generals fading away

the Pope dancing with Krishna
 Mao chanting with Buddha
 LBJ composing interminable illuminated elegies
 to Vietnamese dead
 the wolf lying down with the child amputee
 to lick her wounds
 the human race will be run
 Blake returning in the "human form divine."

On that day all hearts will beat underground
 in volcanoes of affection
 hair growing all over the globe
 in a jungle of Eden
 where everyone naked as eucalyptus
 make love, their voices winging
 through entanglements of flesh.

COMES DER REVOLUTION!

Clouds hang in the sunshine of victory.
Crowds multiply like bacteria of a new culture.
Speeches harmonize cacophonies from the streets.
Bankers are in hiding, generals run naked
through the jungle, transvestites chasing them,
no one bothering to confiscate papers.
Who could have prophesied such sublime chaos?
Anarchists and poets are nonplused
surrealist anthropologists stare palsied
at intergenerational copulation.

I hardly know how to put it
before it passes
like all other victories
into oblivion.

NO ONE THE ONE

If no one eyes me am I here?
If no one reads me have I writ?
If no one hears me do I sing?
If no one feels me am I flesh?
If no one loves me do I live?

"I am the one who eyes you here
and the one who reads your writ
and the one who hears you sing
and the one who feels your flesh
and the one who lives in you."

PART IV MIND-BODY IN A KNOT

A KNOT YOU TIED AND LEFT

Mind-body in a knot you tied and left:
who can free me but you?

Not you, but the you in me
that ties, unties me
ready to strike.

HUNGRY GHOSTS

Hungry ghosts pray to the earth for solid flesh.
Slipping through shrouds of rain
they know of nothing to gnaw on.
They prey on thinnest air.

Everywhere I turn, they turn
dancers without music
without any form at all.

And yet I imagine them women
I once held, desiring me
as I desire your emptiness.

Moving through rain
straight as your midnight hair
I stay dry
as dust of leaves or dying cough
praying to the earth for solid flesh.

HUNGRY BY THE BAY

I don't know what I've done. In the afternoon of engines near the bay, the electric saw screaming through someone's bone, the red house a new wound in the shrubbery, the shooting rich, the cave of green, the upside art of money, the warty trees, the tranquil bay, the epidemic war, down into the sea, to sleep.

NO ONE WOULD LET ME KNOW

Once when I awoke alone
our room came slowly back to me:
map of Paris "a vol d'oiseau"
tapa hanging, Indian spread
your absence in the wind

drapes hanging stiff as uniforms
of frowning border-guards
who would not let me pass to you
in that Otherland whose name
no one would let me know.

I AM STILL AN OTHER

Beautiful women passing
photographs just hanging
bricks lying in the walls

a man with a violin
another with arms crossed
and a what is it

looks around, lighting up
you sit and laugh
another sitter gulps

and I am still an other.

TIGERS DREAMING

They are tigers dreaming
of tearing me apart:

I cannot give them a script.
They must invent their lives
and act them out to love.

But no: they deny gory
headlines their shadows
stole out to commit.

They pull down shades
on lovers in the garden.
Drifting

into ennui they
forget the moment of
dipping in the river

all the way under
in moonlight, they
close their

eyes.

WHO CRAVES THE SACRED MUSHROOM?

Steamdrill the peacock's eye.
The loins of goddesses ache
and dentists from the dark lagoon
yank jawbones out with a laugh.

Percentages crawl through our guts.
Sopranos bleed under the moon.
Who worships Dionysus or Isis?
Who seeks the sacred mushroom?

AFTER HIROSHIMA

Build a city in the dunes?
Flourish and die like the others?
Stars would come out anyhow
over rusted computers.

The lake is turning to iron.
Fish of iron are spawning in the shallows
iron fish waiting to gobble our cities.

Alewives lace the stony beach
and floating on dun water stink.
Crows peck eyes.

After Hiroshima
I hoped for little more
than a sudden end.

PASSING PASSING

In vain the glory
of racing or
roving
fleshing or sitting
in contemplation

passing passing
no one to hold to
losing what we were
nothing to winning
passing passing
now too late
losing in telling
nothing to save
passing passing

MORE OF LESS

I hurt to tell you more of less.
Thin are the lips of cleverness.

Glorious the empty page I sing
as you approach, entrancing.

Glorious nothing I confess
in eloquence of emptiness.

THE SLAVE-DARK MISSISSIPPI

In the Green Parrot Sweet Shop in Galena
the hand of a one-eyed farmer slurping soup
flutters like the wing of the Golden Macaw

as we chat about the house where Melville stayed
near lead mines, flood gates
Black Hawk, stockades

and the slave-dark Mississippi.

GOING GOING GOING GONE

A dissonance between us
 in love-music between us
 as I tell you my hurt in the pasture.

The hurt in my head passes
 after wild asparagus
 and tea.

You hear and cry with me
 holding and letting go.

And when we part
 you are a part of me.

My throat and face
 open. High calm.

*

The night is curtained out:
 all but the crickets' singing.

History is out there too:
 all but my hunger

for the past to come into the light
 but everyone I love is out, out:

nothing here but me
 surely going out.

*

Crows squall over desolate gray
 rice fields after harvest.

I wake up cold
 blinking away the blur

of years I planned
 lying soggy:

no punishment but neglect:
 memory of earnestness, a joke.

Van Gogh heard caw-
 ing in a sweltering field:

nothing but art then,
 nothing now but this.

Dry as leaves
 that scrape the roof
 in the summer night
 I call you, wherever you are.

Tired of pushing
 useless without you
 smoky all over
 I want to give up the ghost.

But crickets go on, moths and
 flies in the corner keep at it
 and the white belly of a tree frog
 on my black window twitches
 never giving up.

Air cools my face
 as if you are breathing the night
 nearing
 as if I am breathing your breath.

*

A tea-stained empty cup
 sits on a shadowed saucer.
 The sleek white teapot
 points its spout at me.
 My tongue-tip twinges
 a cavity.

Alone with the dog
 lying between irises and muddy boots
 I stare at myself
 in the grandfather pendulum
 that swings before the dignity of pussy willows.

In the sunny air of the farmhouse
 in the desperate smell of scrambled eggs
 waves of ancient orgasms
 sweep me from dead lovers.

*

Cotton, leather, wool
 and sadistic words
 caress us with total
 protection from air
 and earth
 those honest lovers.

*

Hiking to the forest
 I am still in my body
 still, with respect to my body
 still, respecting my body
 we move across the pasture
 one, with respect to the pasture
 one, respecting the pasture
 and sky
 one us, pasture and sky.

*

Sitting on a stump by County Z
 reading the Tao is like a lifeless crooked tree
 I look up at one at the crossroads
 of A and Z, the universe's center
 where I stood last night under the turning stars
 until I saw nothing at all.

*

The last cloud drifted from the sky,
 the sun set, the moon set
 stars dissolved in
 total nothing that would be
 clear as dawn if words
 O if words stayed away.

*

All has been said of Nothing.
 Enough of silence and Void!
 They laugh at all said about them
 here in the noise of plenty.
 The Void is an open mouth.
 The Buddha sings fully of
 Emptiness:
 that is all that's left.

*

This room shines in the house.
 The house gleams in the yard.
 The yard radiates in the neighborhood of strangers.
 Here goes nothing.

*

This a mood of that:
 a toy, blood, a cloud.
 How I played all day!
 Never saw a plot.

*

Each begins and flows to its end.
Each is part of all that flows.
Each is ripples in the endless brook.

*

Bluejay bluejay bluejay bluejay:
four bluejays squawk my tree?
Or do I hear one bluejay tree?

*

Spring. Snowing. What's new?
I am telling you green
in green, all green
but no: a lie.

No one hears me anyhow.
No one knows how dead
the world is here.
The only life is snow
except for this poor
excuse for me, my breath,
and words: semblances of
life.

So on I go in green
makebelieve, till
telling spring is true.
Till then, what's new?
Spring. Snow. What's new
at noon of make-believe?

I'm still traveling
here at home:

going, going, going, gone.

MIGRAINE VISION

My world blurred as if
strapped to a surgeon's chair
I stared at his irises
as he bored mine out.

*

Trepanned skulls lined up in La Musee de l'Homme
my skull being bored by Indians as I lie
strapped to a wooden plank, bearing
up like an Indian.

*

My bones sigh under glass.
My eyes are opening.
Forests rise around me.
I take off with condor wings.
For centuries I've waited.

A BOY GNAWS FLESH

A boy gnaws flesh from his dying father
who shows him the choicest morsels.

They groan and laugh together.

In the corner, his mother tells him
they will treat her with herbs before the feast.

If you don't believe me
why are you breathing my dying breath?

LAZARUS

If you are at a loss for words
dig into the grave of Lazarus.

Breathe between his grainy lips your song
until he hums his own imagination.

Help him, with your inky fingers, rise
to sing his fall from light.

He is our brother, and his words our drink
long after he is packed in dirt again.

THE MASOCHISTS OF BOSTON

While I wait for the end of the blizzard
I ponder the masochists of Boston--
not those who ecstatically nail themselves to crosses
but cold grandmothers kneeling between pews.

When will they rise from callused knees
and, stripping off their weeds and rosaries
sing hymns to grandchildren, embracing on flowering alters?
After the fire they dream will consume all sinners?

After the fire they dream will consume all sinners
their spirits will snow down from mushroom clouds
cooling quiet Gomorras
of Boston, Milwaukee, Moscow, Peking, and Paris.

THE TORTURER SMELLED

Chained to a leaking stone wall
hearing the crack of martyred bones
I was dead to the world
but dreamed the ecstasy of private jokes.

The torturer smelled his watch as if
it itched
then semaphored the smoke.

The tyrant's clock-face
stared me down until
I was too small to be clocked
mapped catalogued or crushed--

a point everywhere at once.

RUNNING FOR HELP ON MELTING LEGS

Dusk all day.
 Colorless amalgams, half-alive:
 why write pretense of fixity?
 Words lined up by twos and threes
 but fell down the basement
 stairs. Who stays up
 all night with my poems
 as I stay up with Whitman's?

The day was sicker than ptomaine.
 This night is anarchic. How
 the body blinds the mind
 and how!

I ask you how
 to work at play
 how to play
 at work and
 how to sing
 the work of the world:

that is the question
 mark clearly the quest-
 ion in on in on in on
 inundation of questioning.
 Shrouded in reason
 philosophizing froze me.

Have I made too much sense
 of poetry?
 What have I demanded
 but that its music
 change the world
 no less
 demanded
 burden upon burden
 till poetry dilapidated?

Whining like tires
 in the slush of night
 I am much too thick
 to be a ghost
 but hardly a body for Olympics.
 Girls titter in the street.
 Air is opening just above my head
 dripping ooze of breathy lust
 hotly on my mind.

Chaotic day, human uncreated
why have I not
and why do I tear myself
instead of
O!
why do I fierce and folly
not fire forth
spring splendor
out of others?

Now I lie all night
watching for a change of heart.
Lips and thighs await me
but you do not
call upon me
not me not me
all is mayhem in and out.

Collecting dead leaves of
lovers, to burn into midnight's
gasp, fingers on pages paler
than their fear.

All those nights of waiting
for an awakening voice
waiting for my mind
to make itself up
like a hospital bed, my corpse
lies surrounded by eyes
in the clock tower of no.

Friends closed in
pecking my eyes
their fat wings beating praise.
And to think, I fed and watered
all sizes until
solitude echoed their flap
till all I had to my name
was fame their droppings whitened
into my pure tomb.

Their haloes mouthing blood
heads thundering, teeth
loving drills on nerves
turning on
faucets of war.

Brown teeth and tingling prick or
 bright blue wings
 over shipless seas
 above all singing
 which will it be?
 Forever in this sensual prison or a
 resurrection?
 Are these the only?

Her stirrings draw me from
 bed, body, and sleep.
 Others have jobs, garages
 front-page photos
 games, largesse
 guerrilla-tactics.
 I have only sleep or
 ruthless waking: which?

Waking or drowsing, which
 is it to be, where
 do I go after bath and
 Sunday funnies? To
 this folly, cracking
 my bones for love
 that laughs at
 infantilism, or to sleep?

Eat, cheat, fuck, go through your
 paces, and only that? That's a
 long way to die.
 I'd make it quick in talk
 that poisons veins.
 Why babble in this preview of a wake?

Dead air.

Writing blind, I look at the iron sky
 hear the birds in mental trees
 serenade my headache.

Holding in crazies too long
 I am dying to tell you
 my turn toward death
 skidding into shadows
 the ice-dome cracked
 I don't mind
 I knew it would crack
 crazy all come alive.

Crazy water stoops under the sky
 crazy water all around, gurgling

My left eyebrow
droops over this cubist face.
Do I incarnate Marx or Freud?
Anachronistic
cheeks, eyes slanting
blue Buddhas
tongue chirping
nudging twinging teeth
for fillings and banana
and a phoneme here and
there for the Brand New Word
to end all words.

I am licking my teeth
into cubes of ice
gagging on words
lodged like chicken bones
ripping open my face
coughing out chunks of brain
running for help on melting legs!

ICE LIGHT

The avenue stood straight up
before us raining pink
columns of ice light
jailing the car, your face
oldened dark and flowered
bright again, and dark
and light.

The sperm of truth, the logical lie
began in green, the fertile
rush of traffic
lurching from necessity to a choice between
a sprouting race to another light or leisurely
cruising, sightseeing, daydreaming to harvest red
and wintry contemplation of an idée fixe.

PART V THE WANDERLUSTERLESS WANDERER

First performance at Kanda University of International Studies, 11/12/94.
 Accompanied by musicians playing cello and traditional Japanese instruments.
 Performance text available from the poet.

Pardon me, is this the Way?
 Sorry, have I lost the Way?
 What did I do to lose the Way?
 What didn't I do to lose the Way?

Are you going my Way?
 Is your Way My Way?
 Is your Way the only Way?
 Do you really know the Way?
 O show me the Way to go home!

But don't go out of your Way for me.
 Just point out the Way for me.
 Or are you also off the Way?
 Is everyone everywhere off the Way?

Is this Way the Eastern Way?
 The Zen Way north?
 The Tantric Way south?
 Amida's Way west?
 Is this the Way that you know best?
 The Way to the Western Paradise?
 Or no Way at all?
 No Way!

Will you pardon me for wavering
 wondering as I'm wandering?
 Will you forgive my wanderlust
 this lusterless floundering
 theological meandering
 philosophical philandering?
 Will you pardon this Wanderlusterless Wanderer?
 This Wavering Wayward Wayworn Woebegone Wanderlusterless
 Wanderer?

Is this the highway or the low Way?
 By the Way, how high is up?
 How low is below?
 Are we low down?
 Is this the Way up or the Way down?
 Is the Way up by Way of going down?
 Are the Way up and the Way down the same?
 Is they the same?
 Up down one?
 Falling are we high?
 Or are we just plain low?

In every Way
Far off the Way?

Are we down and out in Paris and London?
The Kanto Plain?
Yokohama?

Are we down and out at YCAC
High on the Bluff
Bluffing as the Referee
Counts over us
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10?
Are we down and out?

Are we Way out in left field?
Are we Way out?
Way out?

Hey, hey, is this the American Way?

“Oh, say can you see
“Any bedbugs on me?”

My Country, ‘tis of Me!

“Way down upon the Sewanee River!”

“I did it My Way!”

The Way of Me, profit and loss?

Or the Way of the Prophets
Moses’ Way?

Or The Way of the Prophet
Mohammed’s Way?

Or the Way of the Masses?
Marx’s Way?

The Existential Way?

The Anarcho-Pacifist-Feminist-Ecological Way?

Lao Tzu’s Way?

The Budhha’s Wisely compassionate
Middle Way?

Or a muddy bloody Way?

Is this Swann’s Way or Howard’s End?

Land’s End?

The End of the Affair?

End Game?

The End of History?

The End of Nature?

The End of the End?

Is this witless endeavor endemic?

Or endless?

Are we endangered? Specious?

Have you endearing young charms
or endometriosis?

Halitosis?

Osteoporosis?

Or esoteric gnosis?

Will you endorse the cello’s endpin?

Will you endure?

What problem?
 What question?
 A Way to the Way?

What are the Ways and Means?
 Do the means justify the end?
 Does the end justify being mean?
 Must we break eggs to make an omelet?
 Must we break heads to make Utopia?
 What does it mean to be mean?
 What does it mean to be?
 Or not to be?
 What is the Meaning of Meaning?
 What I mean is
 is this Way off the Way?
 Way off?

Are the questions unquestionably unanswerable?
 Am I asking the unaskable?
 Is this the easy Way out?
 Is this the hard Way in?
 Is this the Way to come?
 To come!
 Is this the Way to go?
 Go? Go?
 Go, man, go!

Is this the Way of All Flesh?
 Is this the Way of the World?
 Is this the Way the world ends?
 Is this the Way to no Way?
 The Way of no Way?
 Is this the Way at last?
 The Way here?
 The last Way?
 The lost Way?

Could this be Lao Tzu's wu wei?
 The Way of actionless action?
 The Way of acting at rest?
 The Empty Way of the Buddha?
 The Way of compassionate wisdom?
 The Way of the White Clouds?

No mind?
 No nothing?

Is this the Way to the end?
 Waylessness?
 Weightlessness?
 Endlessness?

Is this the Way to the beginning?
 Is this the Way home?

Home to the womb?
 The tomb?
 The tomb with a view?
 Here's looking at you!

Hey, which Way is the Way?
 Hey, hey, am I on the Way?
 Are you on the Way?
 Where is the Way, the Truth, and the Light?
 Is this the Way of light or the Way of darkness?
 Are we "Poor little lambs who have lost our Way"?
 Is this the Way of the cross?
 Forgive me for crossing you.
 Don't be an old crosspatch.

In a Way life's a two Way street.
 Or is it One Way?
 Wrong Way?
 Suicide curve?
 Dead end?
 Don't ticket me for jaywalking.

Forgive me for waylaying you.
 I meant no molestation.
 Pardon my frustration.
 spiritual masturbation.
 But isn't this a democratic nation?

Isn't this your station?
 Aren't you getting off?
 Forgive me for lying in wait for you.
 No, not you.
 Sorry, I'm waiting for someone else.
 Forgive me for lying.
 Pardon me for troubling you.
 Pardon me for mixing you.
 Pardon me for being me.

I'm searching for a muse
 beloved
 inspiriting
 beauty.

You?
 Who?
 Where did you go
 moon of my heart-mind?
 Where am I?
 Where are you?
 You? Who?

Who am I speaking this Way to you?
 Where in this moonless night are you?

Came we from the quaking Earth Mother?
 Breathe I in the body of Gaia?
 Where is the Way of Awakening?
 Where is our guide in this darkness?
 Sage? Prophet? Goddess?
 Guru? Buddha? Messiah?
 Charlatan? Quack? Liar?

O where is what's his name?
 Godot?
 Artaud?
 Genet?
 Olé!
 The Lamb of God?
 The Prince of Peace?
 Le bon
 Kannon?
 Or is he she?
 Androgyny?
 Both beyond two?
 Unnamable name?
 Biospherical muse?

Sorry, not you.
 Wrong one.
 Wrong two.
 Wrong number.
 Wrong gender.
 Wrong species.
 Wrong clichés.
 Wrong Way.
 Wrong day.
 We're in a really bad Way.
 How can you ever forgive me?
 Not you.
 But anyone might do.

Can't see
 the Way
 any Way
 north or south
 east or west
 nowhere's the Way that we know best.
 No Way is blest.
 Where is Kannon?
 When is the dawn?
 "I'm just a poor wayfaring stranger
 wandering through
 this world of woe."

I'm just a Wanderlusterless Wanderer
 a Wavering Wayward Wayworn Woebegone Wanderlusterless

How true
of me and you.
How like you
and me to be.
How you are like me.
I like you in many Ways.
I'm like you in many Ways.
I may have a wayward Way with words
a nutty Way with what I say
but in many Ways I'm you.
My words are yours.
Your words are mine.
One heart, one mind.

By the Way
on the other hand
this hand for instance

No, this one.

That one.

May I give you a hand?

I've got to hand it to you.
You have a Way in darkness
of waiting for a ray.

Ah! If hand in hand
we make our Way
would we ever find The Way?

Make Way!

PART VI A DEFENSE OF POETRY IN COMPUTERLAND

NO VERB FOR MAKING IT

What do we do when we make it?
What what what can we call it?
What are we doing, I mean,
not what we make?
“Making,” “writing,” “creating” are clichés
unworthy of those who do whatever we do.
Do we really make it? Like cooks and carpenters?
Do we ever know what we are doing
wholly as we are doing it?
Socrates never found a poet who knew.
Of course he never met a critic
with a Ph. D.
But if critics know, can they be
poets making poems?
Does inspiration blind us?
Do we die into poetry and love?
Is it safer to “construct”?
Or do true poems make us poets
who have no verb for what we do?

FACT AND FANTASY

The fact is
sitting.
The fantasy is
flying.

Sitting
and flying
at once
I split

crying: O
how can I
be
both?--

how, here
solid and
there
lighter than air?

Crying
I settle
for
singing.

CAT-SCRATCHINGS

Cat-scratchings
in the corner:
poetry in the making.

Smiling at false notes
when children play
perfects the melody.

So Socrates smiled at
fallacious Athenians
and Joyce at the Irish.

A poem a day
awakens
slumbering children
and giants.

PLOWING

Plowing
before
planting.

*

Weeping
before
reaping.

MEDITATION FROZE ME IN JAPAN

Dear John
Solt of the earth

whose poems make air of earth
whose air is sung high

and low
down derry down down

Buddhist descendent of
Genghiz Khan

Wandering Jew of
Shingon Temples

multi-lingual
impresario

what do we know
of nothing?

* * *

Resigning from poetry is a daily temptation
like gluttony, adultery, and self-deception.

Would resigning be a liberation from proofreading,
deadlines, and worst of all, the incessantly
agonizing quest
for the word to end all words
the word implying worlds without end
the word of eternal peace?

Resigning from poetry is a daily temptation--
but what a deadly condemnation
to incessant prose!

* * *

Resigning from poetry
resigning from the world

resigning from acting
seeing, hearing

resigning from touching
tasting, smelling

resigning from feeling
thinking, imagining

resigning from being
I sat

aware of
awareness

in spite of intending
nothing I was

conscious of
self consciousness

imagining imaginings
feeling, thinking

touching, tasting
smiling in spite of

painfully intending
nothing in spite of

nothing I sat
smelling here and there

hearing apart from
ears

seeing apart from
eyes

couldn't get rid of
words

couldn't get rid of
aches of actuality

couldn't get rid of
warts of existence

couldn't get rid of
anyone

couldn't find nothing
apart from others

couldn't find nothing
apart from me

couldn't find nothing
apart from everyone:

Is that all there is

I couldn't let me
be

couldn't become
what I wasn't

couldn't just sit
couldn't let go

thought
who thinks?

thought
who's he?

thought
who me?

Thinking is
sensing is

feeling is
acting is

speaking is
hearing the

world
word.

Do you hear
here?

Do you know?
No?

Distance is thought.
And thinking?

Thinkers think
of thinking

as if distant
from sensing

but sensing
is thinking

as much as thinking
is sensing.

A change of feeling, say

may be said to be
from up to down

consciousness being
space.

Experience
changes and

changes us
being experience

because it
changes.

None of these words
seem right.

How to live truly
conscious of acting?

The specialist is
conscious only

of what he was
trained to do.

The Buddha is conscious
of all unattached.

But what is this mind?
No object.

Does every noun refer
to object, or illusion?

Was the world created
through thinking?

Without thinking
we collide, blind.

Does existence divide
between objects and activity

or is it
objects-in-action?

or activity
and illusory objects?

and illusory activity?

If reality is
particles and energy

and if particles are
energy

there is nothing
but energy

and energy is
becoming.

But what's
becoming?

Not One
for that would become something else.

Is there only
becoming?

A single process
or many?

Becoming conceals
the unbecoming.

"If you're not becoming
you should be coming to us."

All is possible
especially the impossible.

Is thinking generated
by the brain, or discovered by it?

Is all becoming thinking?
Playing with words

creates ideas
that add to the universe

as much as hatched birds
or new stars.

Poetry sounds
depths of dark unknowing.

*

Philosophizing

Meditation
froze me.

Poetry began
in the touch of youth

tongue tasting snow
on a leaf at night.

*

I resigned from poetry
last Thursday, forever:

never to read it
never right old wrongs

in verse or reverse
never break babble into lines

never imagine a world
beyond this garbage

I declared sincerely
only last Thursday

in frigid moonlight,
vowing

never to compromise
truth with beauty

life with art.
Philosophizing

froze me
meditation froze me

till the ice cracked:
heart-mind thawed

and poetry flowed
free.

Now I am at it again
lining this innocent page

as if I had never sworn
off it, at it again

knowing not what I do
out of my mind again

poetizing a storm
configuring transcendentals

hearing voices from stars
in the flow of ink

Writing till
death

projects me
beyond death

NO MEAN FEET

Loving	
sounds that	mean
I make them	mean
more than they	mean
at first	mean-
ing. It's no	mean
feat making	mean-
ing from no	mean
feat: a golden	mean
between	mean-
ingless music and	mean
legalities. I	mean
sounding	mean-
ing is loving.	

THE POET THAT I AM SEARCHING FOR

I could not write a poem
craving one to be
in spite of me.

*

Putting off poems
in the middle of my life
was putting off the rest of it.

*

Poetry is living
as if nothing is something
else.

*

It takes time
to write
out of time.

*

I am telling you tales out of time
so far out of mind
there is no distance between us.

*

Switching on Apple as if it is indispensable
I wonder whatever happened to my fountain pen
and the loose-leaf scribbled full of private
words that echoed worlds for everyone.

Now light dances into sense as I tap each letter
as if in mind, not projected from mind to paper
as in the old days. And a tap instead of a swipe
wipes out blunders. It cannot be denied

that poetry has growing pains. Would this please
Emily and Tu Fu? Will it be read
by our children, or will they program
realization of the unlettered mind in space?

*

If politics is “the art of the possible”
then poetry is “the art of the impossible”
and poets are impossible people.

words in their proper places but
living freely in the art of nature

and yet we go on reading and writing it
as if objects were eternal, as if
ecstasy could be entombed.

Lazarus and Jesus escaped all that
and though Romeo and Juliet were discovered
too late, their passion pulses in our veins.

*

Poetry I am searching for
spoken in light
renews insight into art and nature.

No, what I mean is not for me to say
for it is channeled through me
from nature to you and out
beyond mere sense.

I desire truth in words that stay.
But I cling to words
that leave me deluded.

I pick at dead skin
bite nails
and scratch the Buddha.

*

The poet that I am searching for lives in imagination on earth
conceiving as she loves all beings
philosophizing as he wanders off paths to push
through thickets to the sky:
androgynous creator
of languages out of grunts and shouts
dramas of murderous embraces
epics of explorations of the void.

Of all the poets who clamor for attention
some sing of flesh, others rage against Being
some master langue and parole,
Each poet, each child beginning to speak
re-creates creation:
no words, no world.

Once I imagined being the one who would
speak to all people from within their hearts:
their worlds, my words
their lives in mine, as they gave birth to my poems
heaven relighting earth.

But I do not give up, I keep my eyes open:
The poet that I am looking for lives in imagination on earth.

*

Poet of snow
singing "Snow!"
watching snow
writing "snow"
hearing "snow"
in my head? in the sky?
snow rushing past
faster than I can say it
each flake a word
I never saw nor
heard before
hieroglyphic blizzard

*

The True Poet imagines all as is
creating a word for each as-is
and a word for each as-isn't
a syntax for all interactions
ways of saying anything at all
about nothing in particular

as if everyone had died
or everyone turned out
to listen to the song
from mountains or oceans
in a language understood
without interpreters

by all, like a kiss.

*

No priests, temples, gods.

May these spells summon
anyone, anywhere, singing.

These love-rites I give you
to make your own.

FIRST WORDS OF SUMMER

At last! First words
of summer

after forgetting how poetry
long lies in wait
to spring at our throats.

And the poet?
He whose speech is musical;
she whose dance is spoken;
he whose touch rings true;
she whose taste illumines;
he whose vision harmonizes
her mental body with the world.

Speaking as a poet
I am not myself.
Who was I
when I was I?
And where
when I was not
among the stars?

Not the stars
of a summer night
not even stars telescoped
to the earthy eye

but galaxies of thought
created, swirling me
up and away
through black holes
worm-holes
holiness

destroyed
with a snap
leaving this non-I
in no-space:

poetry
at last!

MORGAN GIBSON is the author of many poems and essays, and some stories and plays, in periodicals and anthologies in America and Japan. He has been publisher of Great Lakes Books in Milwaukee, editor of “The Arts of Activism” issue of *Arts in Society* in 1969, and Poetry Editor of that University of Wisconsin journal from 1965 to 1972. In Japan he has been a contributing editor of *Edge*, *Printed Matter*, *Electric Rexroth*, and *Kyoto Journal* as well as poetry editor of *Japan Environment Monitor*. Having received a B. A. from Oberlin College, and an M. A. and Ph. D. from the University of Iowa, he has taught fulltime at the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee, Wayne State University, Osaka University, Japan Women’s University, Kanda University of International Studies, Chukyo University, and Goddard College. He was also a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Knox College and Visiting Associate Professor at the University of Illinois, in the Institute for Advanced Studies and the Department of Comparative Literature. He is the author of

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