

# Luteinizing Harmonium

## Luteinizing Harmonium

if only harmony between the sexes were so easy!  
a simple release of luteinizing hormone  
like hot tea calming the relationship bloodstream  
that bathes the couple. a click and a whirr  
and all the quirks pop in place  
like the chiropractor's snap that either  
breaks the neck or adjusts it.

peaches swelling on late August branches  
red, yellow rounded  
drop at a touch –  
would it be like that?

## Denial on Denali

denial dangles two dead wolf cubs  
about its head  
and dances down the hard boneyard,  
dances the brittle bonehead dance  
of the thousand clacks and slaps  
designed to drown all discrimination

the chakras play  
their chthonic aerial orchestra  
and the great mountain, Denali, rears –  
shadow shuddering the barren land  
somewhere far to the south where  
something lifted its head –  
some huge beast  
lying exhausted on its side in the sand.

## Bethlehem Steel Foundry

*from the West Seattle Bridge*

a caul of steam            late May rain  
    blown sideways  
boils upward in shards of cloud  
scalding molten steel rail  
glow exposed:            three parallel  
clawmarks  
    resentful

outside the soggy sullen slag lies  
in piles waiting to be transformed —

how like my soul.

## Electrical Storm

we dance, an electrical storm above the roof  
of our brains, a cloud alive on the feet  
of rain, undivided in every part, emerging  
in the play of untold billions, leaping as we did  
from fish to Form to fern to Form to fawn  
leaving as lightning flashes all space

empty.

## Wisdom

I bought this wisdom with great banknotes of pain.  
I paid with my innocence, and with all my ignorance.  
I bought it from life – it wasn't in my books.  
I paid with my youth and it cost all my years.  
I paid everything I know – not a thing was left  
and they were all changed beyond recognition.  
I spent all my security and my limits were all reinvested –  
dividends slowly accumulating in a life's savings.  
I bought it with hands of suffering and dear love.  
It cost me all my shame. I dug up the can I had buried  
in the garden in which I've saved up things unfaced for years  
and spent that too. I had to let go all the seeds  
I'd saved to grow next year's food – I dropped them one by one  
into the account and around each one a crystal formed.  
All these I paid and now it isn't even mine.  
It repaid me with questions that in time I came to value  
more than rich jewels. I instructed my accountant  
to cash in all my beliefs and my broker to buy more pain.  
To my surprise I found I had to buy back many clichés,  
as they were needed for the down payment;  
as were large sums of credulity.

## More Easily Than A Chalk Drawing Erases

who would have guessed?  
more easily than a chalk drawing  
erases  
more like a smoke dissolving  
as it rises  
how thin! how brief!  
like a paper covering nothing  
pulled away  
painless as water sinking into ground  
– and the loss that's feared  
already paid in full.

## Once There Never Was

once there never was  
(events change all their histories)  
the wind like a big train  
blows by high in the treeees  
far above, hurrying inland  
once there never was a life  
once there never was a home  
once there never was



## To be Lost

is to ask "is there meaning?"

To ask "where?"

is to be as hopelessly confused as the dreamer who starts awake  
not knowing he is in his own home.

To push off requires touching bottom.

To breath again, that the surface be broken.

To search under the protection of such questions  
damages the seekers own capacity to be answered.

Never to search at all, to be stillborn.

## Thought Bleached Out

the thick mat of thinking  
bleached away  
the senses beneath like weak grass  
white from long lack of sun  
beneath the black tarp  
– beware!

they are not yours  
they are no longer yours  
they belong to all

an eagle screams from the bare snag  
down the snowbound pass

## Novelty

With life there's always something extra thrown in,  
something unexpected  
that changes everything.

The mutant gene raveled from the long skein  
of evolution, the cell in symbiosis.

Someone has untied the parcel and slipped in  
a postcard from a dear one in another life,  
a bonus offer

that for the price of your karma  
includes two,

the self-important intruding gabble from the  
next table at the café.

Don't expect to complete that comfortable  
script on which you are at work.

## Encounter Driving Over Blewit Pass

driving over Blewit Pass  
pure-voiced Amazing Grace  
pouring into me  
a momentary inkling  
of what Yeats meant.

and then realizing, a little ruefully  
there is in me something  
that takes delight in arranging my failure  
a part of me  
that works for my own destruction.

## they die trembling like moths

the swept-up bits of tissue-paper blossom  
withered on the floor  
broken wings that tremble against  
the stiff broom  
(the broom that is never able  
to pluck the sticky spider remnants  
from the beams overhead  
where they stay, clumped and ruined,  
obstinately clinging  
just like my own grudges over  
forgotten words).

## Tick the Tock Clock

tick, the tock clock  
makes the feet walk  
    ways of end  
branches that depend  
    pinched-out days  
stages that were play  
through eyes of storm  
and arms of warm

the body warm the length of the bed  
and the sun the length of the body  
the rain walks back  
crosses summer's dusty track

the light of days and eyes blows out  
incommensurable in all beauty  
irredeemable to all purchase  
irreducible to all fact  
lost to all hands, lost at last to all lips

snow that night, that all night falls  
face that turns to no more walls

## Trespass

I trespass softly across the populated valleys  
of my own life, stretched somnolent in the sleeping house –  
the sound of rain on the roof and the dog's bark,  
echoing far across the Shinglemill like some exotic crane;  
the barely perceptible breath of my sleeping wife  
that breaks into a moment's surf on no shore subsiding –  
and follow the still-phosphorescing footsteps  
of Saint John of the Cross, who stole out of the house  
many centuries ago. Follow the ancestral memory  
to Sweden, trespassing across the lives of others  
whom I do not know; watch a moment from the outside,  
from the train, from the windows of rooms I occupy  
only a few days; see the landscape, the frozen lake,  
the scarves, the Santa Maria Day gingerbread, the painted  
tolling on the furniture, the Taiga woods, the bogs  
through which the train runs endless days,  
the clothes drying on a rack, the showers so feeble  
one must flatten oneself against the wall to catch a trickle.  
Trespassing in my own life, a traveller who does not yet know  
the language, no part of the web of human affairs that defines  
the meaning of each gesture, face, event – slowly drawing  
a fine silk imperceptibly across each mouth, eye, mind.

## O Say An Us Do Own

*with apologies to Wallace Stevens, Shakespeare, Nostradamus, Homer, Jung, and Gurdjieff*

now that I, own Prospero,  
studious as old Nostradamus,  
    with bravissimo  
of small command  
over Ariel and Caliban,  
vertiginous as old Odysseus,

have sailed the archipelago  
of anima and animus,  
    voyeur à Calypso –  
and in Bukhara and Samarkand  
met remarkable men  
as barbarous as beauteous,

and today, a faded generalissimo,  
come to daughters of old Hesperus,  
    an impresario in calico  
who's played a master hand  
no better than orangutan,  
am avaricious, before I pass to Erebus,

                                to know  
what more can then be made  
of this I own mine?



## Two Impressions

i

She has a face given to expression, and she places so much energy behind it, opening her eyes wide, raising her eyebrows and leaning forward slightly as she sings to her Vashon preschool audience that she seems to be forcing her indelible impression into every small mind. It is not a Pollyanna bright face given to false cheer, but an unfortunately humorless countenance, rather thin-lipped and controlling. She has raised her eyebrows so often that the furrows etched on her forehead give the appearance of miniblinds, and she raises them so high that one becomes afraid for the integrity of her face, as if she might, like a windowshade pulled too far, suddenly snap back, leaving her face flapping around its spindle over and over.

ii

He rides the 7:10 morning bus from Vashon without fail, Dickensian, tall, rail-thin, erect, the image of probity and decorum – and indeed carries himself as though he had an example to set. Gray tweed or black raincoat (alternately), black leather gloves – one could easily picture him in a stovepipe hat. Salt and pepper hair, thickly wound and closely cut, a brushy stand of coiled wire. Shoulders pulled perpendicular to his neck do not slope. And yet a ruddy, round-cheeked face that appears to smile, for all the sharp, angular demeanor of his bearing – but as if an attitude adopted, not an inner joy but an amusement as carefully selected and kept up as the rest of his appearance. We are presented with the person; we do not encounter a soul. And yet not unkindly; not even unfriendly. A hint, possibly, of pomposity, but perhaps that is a side-effect of self-protection. Certainly an air of correctness, even a bit pedantic, a bit of the old-maid schoolmarm. One can't help but feel that upholding this image is a burden as much as it is a pride. Not unsympathetic, not one who would do any sort of wrong, but not one from whom the dancing human spirit leaps.

## Sea Fronds

long-necked leggy women  
fallopian tubes floating like fronds  
of seaweed swaying in intertidal flows  
that lift and recede in their inner  
saltwater sealives, unimpregnated,  
ostrich-hipped, doggy-lipped  
or gliding like condors  
tall over mountain wonders  
far beneath their notice,  
graceful in flight, unfortunate afoot,  
ordering double lattes from sidewalk  
baristas, poised atop their stilted  
strides like cans set on a fence  
for small boys to throw stones at,  
seething to be seen and desperate  
to draw away attention to girlfriends  
whom they are too large to hide behind  
and too small to accept.

## Those People You Saw on the Bus

those people seen on buses as a young man  
with their ingrown histories, small and bitter,  
their reach truncated and their faces clenched  
on hard disappointment – biting down on  
what their life has become, their withered relationships,  
their knowledge of what was forfeited,  
how much was squandered, misspent, fumbled, unclaimed –  
those whom age has soured, seen on any bus  
in any city – have you become one?

## Walking Downtown Seattle

Walking quickly to work, passing the coffee  
houses, gathering in turbulent knots  
at bus stops,  
streaming by me in the street,  
each one sparking, trailing light like a comet  
though they do not know it –  
I look in their eyes and see they do not know it –  
So many human beings!  
    Each lit from within  
and avoiding my eyes on the crowded street  
in a light rain that falls like Grace.

We live here, where space and time appear.  
Inward, outward, quantum,  
astronomical  
vast emptiness –  
the structure of the middle ground  
vanishes.  
Even more confusing, the light-spel –  
all our familiar structures breaking down  
and disappearing.

Only here in the middle  
human beings wander by me  
on morning streets, in crowds.  
Not like clouds of stars  
not clouds of electrons –  
Living beings!  
A marvel –  
intelligent, conscious, heartfelt.  
And close-guarded,  
as though what is published abroad  
were kept secret from the population at home.

## Strategies

my strategy is to ride the 10-million-to-one pony.  
my strategy is to be struck by lightning.  
my strategy is to climb to the top of the anthill and complain  
to the wind of my fame  
while huge feet darken the sky overhead.  
my strategy is to club moss into submission  
and lie in the dark, breathing.  
my strategy is to outsource all the big questions  
and monopolize the small ones.  
my hope is to throw strategy to the winds  
and damn the short straws.

## Ego to Self: I'm Your Man

"You have a project?"  
"I'm your man."

You can't think this thing through.  
It can't be done by trying.  
That's all an act to keep  
a going concern,  
created in the guise  
of self-elimination.

## Promise to the Ego on its Abdication

there will still be books to read  
and we'll visit Sundays  
and even though you will no longer be emperor  
you may keep your cardboard crown  
and plastic sword  
and we will read your poems, like now.

## Involuntary Materiality; Immaterial Evidence

The dental estimate says three new crowns  
each costing more than a new computer;  
the computers clash together when I eat.  
The car is too hungry, I can't seem  
to keep it filled. The furniture  
and décor are hungry too –  
devour any company that may come.  
Something is swallowing all the heat  
every night from the rooms.  
I sit in all-night diners, ordering continuously  
through the wee hours, but can't  
keep the household fed. Something is gluttoned  
on my life. My gut wakes me stuffed  
with the wreckage the household  
could not eat. Online shopping  
sucks arms, sucks legs of the unwary  
into the black monitor.  
The propane wheezes and sighs all night  
with the galloping consumption.  
It's clogging my vanity, the doctor says,  
the arterials to heaven all traffic-jammed.



## New Age Gaian Ecological Cooking

I am not your most compatible lover.  
I do not love butterflies or flowering plants  
or small mammals so much  
as to be willing to sacrifice the highest human  
capacities to their determination.  
I am not willing to reduce to the elegant  
winter ecology of the golden-crowned kinglet  
That which it is, but not All.  
I am not prepared to surrender grace  
to the most primitive rhythms of the old tribes.  
It has all been overdone again. Like  
too much wine in the cooking  
too much of any spice, it galls the tongue.  
Or did you really believe that were cooking  
without wine, without spice?

## M&M's

To spread them out is almost to eat them,  
set down from the unsoiled hand  
in all their colors – chocolate, cobalt blue,  
cherry red, lemon yellow,  
apple green, pumpkin orange.

Six colors –  
no two side by side, except  
two yellows like eyes at the bottom of the array.  
Two red frame orange and blue – the only green  
immediately to their northeast,  
three brown around the rim.

## Cancer

perhaps the only way left open to me  
to relearn gratitude.  
dark mass in a bloody bed  
swept by rumors  
fears and the undefiable  
certainty that nothing much  
will change  
even as everything changes  
and this brilliant sunlight  
pours over me.

all the dark points of myself  
return to myself  
calming this metastasis  
of misinformation  
teaching its own disharmony  
slowly halted through  
reoccupying the undisturbed  
equanimity of which  
its ripples  
are a part.

## Death

we die  
when nothing changes  
old age hardens  
time no more rearranges.  
blindsided by an instant  
that freezes us forever

the breath is stopped  
the heart is stopped  
the mind is stopped  
the eyes see no more  
the ears hear no sound

a faint breath of wind lies upon the skin  
and stirs no sense  
the sex on no account is stirred  
the mouth takes no food  
and gives no mothlike kiss

the body does not move.

## Exit

Exit, ausgang, sortie, salida.

You are here.

No Exit. You are here.

No matter what Sarte has posted  
on the door,

this hotel has

no safe escape

and the charges easily

exceed your life.

Don't use the elevators,

Hegel or Augustine.

## Unquiet Grave

inner turmoil,  
unquiet grave  
fragments of ego  
ghosts that cannot die  
through whose eyes  
the incredible brilliant real  
is only the pallid vision  
spoken by the countless  
ceaseless incessant  
reiterations of thought  
I see, I see.

