

Soul

The Wound

(for Clint)

The little boy walking away from the wooden
concession stand has, this year, had
a heart murmur, rheumatic fever, and no friends.

It will be an abyss in his memory –
a time when he stopped being one boy
and began being another. And that
quiet, timeless space fills up between –

where, forever, a small blonde boy wanders
(inside him)
head down, hands scrunched in the pockets
of a blue wool jacket, scuffing his shoes.

(along the backs of his hands, behind his face,
never growing older with them,
this boy wanders in a moment stopped.)

Soul

(an afternoon of writing)

I create my desires
one by one
with sharp pencils

and erase them all
with one motion
as through the open window
the sky falls, white-faced
upon the bed.

I create my desires
one by one,
a dark forest
struck through
by sharp pencils of sunlight
against which the breath-
balancing flight of two birds
is my soul.

Morning Bath

sigh, drain
throat curve long.
quiet, and sound
is a recluse.

the wash water
wrinkles, and slips
down the basin
to the drain.

wring wet hair,
walk
to the bedroom.
the sky – like my bed

– white

and empty
of possessions.

Alone a Long Time

i exult in this
porcelain
hardness,
like a bathtub
or sink
pure and cold
that stands
all night
alone
unshivering
in the dark – oh
i am not
so disciplined.

Left Unsaid

Thought I needed to say something
all morning.

But now it's afternoon
and the wind's in the branches
with the same regularity.

Poplars in the side yard
damson plum in the back
cover the ground with red and yellow leaves
thicker and thicker.

Today I Feel

today I feel that all the riderless
leaves that blow down
off the poplar
are the thoughts and words
that I

ought to have said
but didn't.

riderless (yellow) I go
using the wind to climb
the infinite sky.

Bicycling

(after a day of reading Dylan Thomas)

A helicopter drifts like a box kite
over meadows at the intersection of Weaver and Wyatt;
meadows lolling and yellow as wheatfields
rolling a long tongue dug into a sky
balanced like a boxcar full of blue marbles
on the dime edge of my thin head –
marbles blue as a sieve swallowing back
all its water. Waited

for a car and crossed
dipping
head and shoulders
till I tipped Brook's Hill.

Matching my rhythm, a Brewer's blackbird
flops from field to fencepost,
lops time into hops and leaps to wood
sheeny green on its black back
settling with wings.

Nameless

we know each other so well,
could we ever be anything but friends?
for years, your words
 in the back of my mind
 reaching into my unconscious
like a twilight fading into the dark, your voice
merging with mine,
like a butterfly caught up by
the darkening wing-beats of dusk –
 soft strokes merging,
 becoming unintelligible,
 speaking to me.
I know your face from the inside out.

Pause

What I had yesterday –
what I would give to have that today!
What I am not today
I want to be; what I am today
I am not happy to be.
Irises in the neighbor's garden
beaten down by rain, fell in bundles
yesterday, wetting and spraying
their odor into my mind.
Today the irises are gathered in.
Dan visited yesterday –
(I look for the poetry of activity,
not images) –
Dan lay across the bed, reading.
I lay beside, reading; together we warmed
the words with our presence.
I looked up once in a while; Dan
fell into my mind with his own odor of familiarity,
wetted with an unexpected rain of detail.
There are still irises in our yard,
not beaten down because they are supported
by the fence; there are still afternoons
with Dan to come.

I Stumble Forward

longing for security, I substitute structure.
but in living, there is only the
 grain in wood.
getting up early tomorrow morning
to climb Mt. Eleanor,
I give my bed tonight to Dan
and sleep in the guest room. drifting off,
I reach up to touch the headboard.
but there is no headboard on this bed.
suddenly I find myself falling headlong
through the universe.
afraid, I create and live in the illusion
that I walk on solid ground. I walk cautiously
up to the precipice and look over.
should I jump? flashes break in
to consciousness – it is not
a matter of deciding whether or not to jump;
 I am already in free
fall. I expect to go through a gate,
but not only is there no gate, there is no fence
in which to hang it, no gatepost to hang it from.
something false in me snaps,
 I stumble forward
on the front lawn of the universe.

Awareness

I. Birth

poised on the ball of the earth,
 grown old on
the folly of the rotating globe
and the salt sea,

in love with turning time,
inebriated with the earth's axis,
the plunging pivot,

 chanting
spinning time onto its reel;
 the sphere
revolves beneath a flock
 of seabirds
that flee like white-sailed boats
over her waters –
 and then

thrown from this perch
 to land
among the manifold world's
man-old sins.

II. Sense

born with eyes
that see the world a misty patchwork,
soon i learn to organize.
look into my eyes (a liquid palate
 on which colors run
 to form shapes) to see who
i am.

my whole self shines out
as i invent it.
but what i see
invents me
in as precise a shape as a flat iron
or rocking chair –
do i invent, or only reflect?

my eyes shined by the trumpeted world,
heralded me by all the small prophets
of my life – parent, teacher, peer –
ordering an agreement for my consciousness to sign.

living, i shine my eyes away.
my vision adjusts, but i do not.
limited by name and form, shattered
on the silvery bars
of the cage of rationality,
devoured by the sequential, the linear,
the orderly,
hung by my shoulders on pegs
that puppet me,
losing light in lucid pails
pouring from my streaming sight

III. Return

returning,
returning along a line balanced,
 balanced by two gulls,
two gulls in flight above the laughing ocean,

 the breathing sea where we laughed,
laughed to see seas leaping,
they leapt along coastlines,
along continents, and washed back

back to a baby's earliest recollection,
 to see with unshined eyes,

removing even the air from between me
and existence
until names wash out, even names and
borders wash away, and extinction
washes in.

IV. Moment

in the moment
as we go back, further
and further, back
beyond childhood,
 back
to that baby's earliest
recollection
we see first a clear

white light

and as we go back
it dominates
more and more
of our perception
until only small black
lines are left
and at last
the picture
is painted all in white.

then we listen
and there is the pure pulse
 of being –
the beating breath –
and that too slows
and slows and
there is silence

and we are aware
of the silence
for just one moment.

Questioning

(for Andy Konigsberg)

quietness, Andy, and the deep thought of the wind
in the quickening branches. is it late at night
or early in the morning? who are we?
and how many of us are there? how far can we reach?
it's like blowing out a candle
at the first gray part of dawn on a night
when all the lights went out; questioning.

in the summer, between midnight and 5 a.m.
a wind shakes the rain in our wild hair.
the poplars, whose language is not as yet understood
by men, speak out. the flintlock eyes of a few men
spark and deepen into souls, all wine and electricity.
so far gone, so far left that each must stop –
when did you, your wine-dark eyes dancing sparks tonight?

sometimes i try to say it like a car that suddenly
creates solitude at 3 a.m., skids
on the rain-shiny black street
outside my window, accelerates, and is gone.
this is the long journey that must be made alone.
sometimes it's astounding that you might care –
who do we think we are? what befalls us, beneath
a process of stars?

it's morning, come hunkering down on toes and haunches,
a strange calm inside, watching the light grow
namelessly and knowing nothing.
white screen in a darkened room,
i am as enlightened now as i ever will be.
reasonless light slips like a thought
into the window, and i feel it on me.

What the Boy Sitting Alone Staring Out the Window Wants

To live alone
in green lights over the sea.

To sink into the dark
like a family, warm and endless.

To sit in the penitent dark
like a stone as dawn widens.

To lift above the green sea
and spread toward land.

Sitting with the Cat

Light gathers around the window
of the second-story room
standing open to August rain
while on the bed the cat licks
brown-tipped paws,
pretending not to notice the enormity
of time.

In the chair for hours,
silent, sit still
watching the window.

Although it is midafternoon,
curtains of darkness
drape the room with indistinction.
When the stereo shuts off
the cat's purr fills the room.

Mowing

(for Bob McAllister)

the grasses grew high, and their heads
were green as apples and supple
when i came wheeling the lawnmower
back on its rear wheels to cut them.

the sun fell off the poplar,
dropping from leaf
 to leaf
 to ground.

the hard knots in my shoulders
make me think of you, the poetry –

words
rustling like grasshoppers
in tall grass –

you showed me; how it sprang from your love
of the hammer, the saw, the half-built house.