

Weight

Weight

the gray day that waits arrives;
it comes again and waits,
a calm breath sinking out of time.
once more it surrounds my window
with a landscape that waits.

I know this waiting day
that waits for me
to come to a decision –
a decision I postpone
although I know what it will be.

today's gray sky is a drawn breath,
far more cool, more infinite
than those blue buzzing days
that spread out the heat
of the sun and dispel uncertainty.

this landscape opens onto a surrender
far more infinite than the one
by which I immerse myself in the daily world.
it does not press; it does not retire.
surrounding me,
it waits.
I come loitering, because I love the weight.

Passover

three strokes of blood dry on the doorpost.
we who wait
inside eat in haste, one foot raised to go,
boots and cloaks weighting our limbs –
even though,
through the open door that stands
unguarded
to the night of God,
we can see the dark wings
of the Angel of Death beating like a heart,
swelling out of a whirling wind of sand
like a dark eagle that mantles
door and wind and quivering prey.
we who wait waver,
and pray
for the Passover of God.
the paint flies in chips, sandblasted
from the darkening wood. the bloodstains
deepen.
the wild Godly air thrusts its talons
through the door.
the dead Egyptian has come unburied
and wanders barefoot in the whirlwind night
of sand.
death shoulders through the door
with the Bridegroom.
we who wait
cry out
for the Passover of God.

Rain of God

No longer the small rain
that patters down dust,
and is gone. Not
the brief grace, the finger
that touches an exhausted
afternoon, reminding us
of what lies shut up
through dry chaparral
days –

no, this rain floods.

For a few days
the land is awash.

Let it come down harder!
Let it abandon all restraint!
Let it soak me through!

This is the drenching rain
that rises in the wind,
that keeps standing water alive
with pelting circles,
that catches me alone
in showering fields,
the stripping rain
that pebbles into bare ground,
the inexhaustible rain
that drives across the water's
surface and under my hood,
the exultant rain that runs
down my face.

Between Snows

the sky is immobile, expectant,
gray; lowering
a deaf, formidable gray,
a pre-snow gray
that descends into iceblue weight
where it comes to earth.
under it, the grayblue waters
of the Sound churn,
a troubled mind that comes to no
conclusion. ceaseless
intimations, not quite named,
not distinguished,
run to shore and are
stopped. the day is cold,
numbing – and live, vital.
it waits the conversion,
the plunge that sunders paralysis
splits the belly of cloud
unleashes mass, unstops ears,
and draws open obedience –
the moment of will, the irreversible
moment when weight
bears down restraint
and surrender is the arrival of faith.

Pullman Silo

during the long winter, snow
piles on the sill
freezing at the bottom of panes
through which no one watches.
in summer, sunlight
settles there, and dust
that flecks from silo walls
over decades.
and the window from which no face
looks
first becomes a black mouth
and then consumes the wall.

Sorrow

sorrow is a water welling
out of deep ground only
when no reason calls it.
it is what comes of its own
need.

the ground is porous with sorrow;
it gathers in low places,
running toward the lowest
center without cause
dissolving

our mineral explanations.
it seeps through cracks,
opens faults, carrying them
a grain at a time
away

leaving caverns in our souls
through which we find
our night-blind way, no longer
baffled, understanding their turns
at last.

and if we can't quite laugh
as we go –
the sorrow cleans
like long
laughter.

Caverns

we can't resist them; the slopes
of the old brain
run underground here.
down their crevices thin impulses,
night rivers,
find their course. down here
we take a tortuous path,
and until we know it by heart
and are capable of walking the whole way
with the massive, measured pace
of an elephant, we cannot say
"my soul."

we have been here a long time.
again and again, we begin
the same round –
so many times our uncomprehending
feet suddenly found
unfathomed emptiness
disappearing beneath,
the next step flying into nothing;
our hand flew out to meet
a wall, or abruptly

found the way closed.
here are vaults of rock into which
time continually pours,
cold waters
in which our parents calcify.
here small words
form; minerals
seep into slow, round vowels –
words whose endless repetitions
drop into the shapes we are.

down here a wind sucks
at our ankles –
the confused breath that escaped
our parent's mouths
when with their last strength
they lay catching
drip by drip
water from an unseen ceiling.
when this wind lets us fall,

two years may have passed, or twenty.

here the synapse forms from red
to yellow
that leaps from streaks of paint
to become a woman's skirt and blouse,
and here we carve
raw stone as we feel a way
in the uneasy black. much later
we discover that all this feeling
has been done
with mallet and chisel
and we have sculpted not so much
our lives as our souls.

here are wells of legendary clarity,
pools whose surfaces never stir,
and here pure
beauty feels us, and it is here
and not in the great cathedrals
that we see the face of Christ
for the first time.
but we don't gaze up in awe for long
because our feet know
the slip down steep shafts

and our bodies know the fall
that vanishes
from the safety of a floor.
here we are forever surprised,
falling, blind – we grope
one hand along a wall of madness
whose turns take us into
narrowing passages
that make no sense,
seeking a way out.

here we remain alone. never once
in all this stone way
do we encounter
a living person; this way
is ours alone –
not ours, but us.
we have no choice –
until something larger grips us,
we hear the echo of our own voice
and guide by that.

here is the slow formation
of a life – millimeters
built over decades; what we have become
piling over what we once were,
mingling in slow motion;
and in the dark we bump
into these burgeoning shapes
and are confounded. here are
no castles, but vast lostness
and overwhelming difficulty

and the rough feel of stone.
our hands smooth it,
tracing the path of years,
forming a map,
cutting a way between insanity
and the dullness
that only abandons the search.
coming full-circle again and again
our hands rub meaning like grooves
into the stone.

but the pass which scrapes our hands
leads out,
widening into a great music chamber,
huge rooms opening out
on either side. having grown
to love it, it yields up
its incomprehensibility –
and we stand blinking
in an early morning spring lit
by yellow daffodils and purple iris
pushed up from bulbs
underground
no longer.

Job

There is no end
to these arguments,
these claims.

Yet, at the moment
I walk out before You, (who called
Your name so loud)

Yours is the standing,
Yours the whirlwind ground.

Be Still and Know that I am God

The still, small voice spoke
in the night
and said

no word

but my name.

If we die
and nothing more

than nothing is redeemed,
none of these moments of life

are redeemed

if all passes
even its
own echo

still the small voice

spoke

Before 3 Things

god-longing
matures like wine
deepening ruby
when in communion
a few people
reveal their solitary
questioning and speak
before God
to one another.

not the centrifugal
stone flying
from the crazed
careening wheel
aghast at its own
random spinning,
going to the refuge
of God, alone
in the Presence,

but the toiling through
a crushed garden
most fragrant just before
death, waiting
for yes before our
broken stems too
leak our brief life into
a fertile, unspeaking
ground.

Matthew 24

I

Time ends – Jesus is crucified,
the temple thrown down.
And my own history collapses
like an elephant skin
held up by poles
in a children's circus parade.

In the hot breath of afternoon
it gasps and flattens
like a deflated tent,
its weight
throwing up tons of dust
as it pounds the earth.

II

Our flight *is* in winter
and on the Sabbath; our labor
just beginning. We search
like frantic children.

He is not in the desert.
He is not in the inner rooms.
He is not the one acclaimed.
Look, eagles
gather around the corpse.

III

One sits at a dusk door,
just inside,
the door open.

Another is farther back
in the house, cooking,
eating sleeping.

Who comes, comes
by the death door,

takes who waits,
and goes.

The other one comes to the door
in the morning, stretches,
yawns, watches the sun
spread over the land. His life
remains a long, rootlike
clinging that dies at last
in his grasp.

IV

One leaves the overthrown temple,
reenters the tent of the soul.
The other rebuilds in brick
and brass.

God inhabits both longings,
living in one Who does not speak,
Who waits for me to confess
Who He is

Who looks at me, His eyes
piercing
all that glitter of my life,
that stock of lies I own,
that least clod of dried dirt,
my heart.

Ob Audire

(St. Stephan's Dom)

do You want these words?
– obscure mice
that dart in all directions
and are swallowed
by the floor.

when they go, the air
itself relaxes.

but i know You want the music,
the chords
rising through the hollow,
hallowed air when the upward
rising urge that is the human voice
becomes the calling
and the breath at once
that, listening, obeys.

Ecce Homo

(Matthias Templon, Budapest)

this pride hunches
sullen
as stone
until, carved
into Christ Bound,
it sinks to His toes
where

– rubbed
by the innumerable fingers
of prayer
that approach,
hesitate,
and touch the Holy Feet –

it at last
begins to wear away.

Evening Mass, St. Stephan's Dom

old men and women arriving for six p.m. mass
blunder into St. Stephan's Dom like big, clumsy insects
out of an April evening (and the tulips,
the daffodils have today, at last, unfurled their reds,
their yellows) oblivious to us
(who have become insubstantial
as the Cathedral recesses, shadows
that continually fall away from the center
at great speed). they come
almost like men and women might come from
a death camp, each step just able
to catch the forward-falling weight,
so that their frail bodies almost sail,
almost float down the center aisle.
i think they almost forget to stop and take a seat,
almost keep right on going into the cross
to be consumed. but they pause, seem momentarily
bewildered, seem to shake their heads,
then painfully genuflect. to see them
come sailing down that central aisle,
the inner light balanced, undistracted, going home,
you might think, as i did, that the little votive candles
banked in their red plastic cups along a side altar
had come down, their small flames stretching
up eight, ten feet high – in each the face,
the hands and arms barely distinguishable – so that
they swept down the floor, a strong vigorous
procession, returning to that place where they
belong, knew once, and now know again.

At Last, the Difficult Passage into Spring

at last, the difficult passage into spring
accomplished –
the gray, indecisive days when life
hung in the balance,
when weak, late winter delayed us interminably
in the waiting room –
over.

the smell of the warm body of the earth
rises to me
like the breath from the body of my lover
when she takes off her cloths
and in the first moment of nakedness
her human warmth
escapes, bringing me her odor
mingled with her heat.

Convinced That God Does Inhabit the Wasteland

convinced that God does inhabit
the wasteland,
I allow myself to be led that way.
having exhausted all delay,
unsure whether this is cowardice,
obscurity,
and the snuffing of what light I have,
I wobble toward a desert over which
night spreads its cool, starved blindfold.

I Have an Existence Like a Stone

I have an existence like a stone,
flat, gray
with a weight that holds its place all day,
a smooth stone
that has solidity and a presence that knows
the earth –
a cool, undeniable being that slowly sinks
into the soil, working its way down –
a hard, grainy stone
that meets a spade and is unearthed
and pulls the fingers down toward earth,
a downward-longing weight
just balanced by the four fingers
which only now begin to remember
that pull.

Kneeling in Nada Chapel

the thick heavy stone wall
absorbs the heat of day
and returns it all night long,
alive as an animal,
the palm of a huge hand
that does not close on me.

after kneeling an hour,
another hand reaches
up out of the ground,
only the forearm, the palm up-turned,
the hand clutching, striving
to rise. the rest still unformed earth,
buried, clogged,
dense, dull.
the struggle with thought,
expectation, the inner wrestling.

suddenly,
like the candles, I cease to flicker
and exist only to illuminate
by being
only a man keeping 3 a.m. vigil
in Nada Chapel,
feeling the huge night,

the potency of sheer waiting,
alert to enormous stirrings
in each moment
that bear up
and carry it along when it must be carried
with both hands full of imperfect being
respite from striving to perfect with hands of clay
what has already been cast in gold.

Portrait (Joe Query)

I

the *Stephanotis floribunda*
each leaf a musical note
cascading over its white stand
toward the floor,
the *Pertita Teresiana* playing
Part One: Kiss of Breath,
the Sculptor preparing his stand,
his portrait pastels,
the lemony scent
of the abundant wedding flowers
which are not in bloom,
but which both he
and I
know are there.

II

terrible fate, to become an angel,
the stuttering, halting steps
that fall forward
convulsing his body,
crouching like a crane
gripped by transformation –
ungainly stoop
that almost leaps into dance,
jerky breath that grabs,
sudden grunts and coughs,
hand shaking away the colors
last used, fingers burnt
drop the hot pastels quickly
the arm long afterward deadened
by the weight of the fire
that ran along it,
the hands steady,
the whole body swaying
in the metamorphosis
of their giant strength
will be swept away too:
nothing
but this cascade of God

Six Prayers

I

Come in then, if you will
I am neither begging nor proud
I am just me, and I am here.
Touch me, if you are there.

Yes, and if I allow your musical waters
to flow through my soul,
will they carry me far –
to where the music comes from?

II

Changing nothing,
remove
obstacles to change.
Left to itself,
water flows
downhill.

III

The life without sorrow is like
a picture painted all in white.
The tears and pain draw
the little black lines
that give it depth and meaning.

IV

A hand moves through us,
an urgent wind through grass;
we bend
to celebrate.

V

Every step must be taken,
every moment has its duration.
Every step must be taken,
every moment has its duration.
Every step must be taken,
every moment has its duration.
Every step must be taken,
every moment has its duration.
And here I'm walking, half-way home,
in the rain.

VI

I must remember that whatever I do
carries the possibility
of infinite extension. When I step
out of the door, I must do it
as if there is the possibility that I may run
all the way across the field.

Not Answering Fate

I give no answer –
I reserve my yes,
I will not say no,
so, waiting, fate comes
and steals me away.

Great Mother, Primal Father, Old Law

Let the dead bury the dead

Even after they leave us the dead
come to us like moths out of the tombs,
those parts that must die returning,
asking “what do you want with us?”

We want to dispense with you,
even though it will drown
our means of income.
Our little herd of swine plunges
into the water and drowns.

We Want the Thing That Escapes

what is it we want
to hold on to?
nothing
can be held.

but we want
the thing that escapes
our grasp,
the one that slips
from our words,
the little transplant that dies
in our pot,
the flicker that went out
from our drawings
and carvings.

we want to walk before it,
call its name,
hear it speak
and feel it move
like a stone that leaps toward us
from the ground of its resting.

Agenda

To go digging deeply, fossorial
yet raptorial. Little mammal burrowing
underground, bird of prey striking
screeching unsuspecting prairie dog
ground squirrel jumping mouse
lagomorph pinned suddenly
from behind and above
sinking talons into the small back
of fur sunning
at the entry to the labyrinthine
burrows of mind, safe
no more, seized unaware and intent
at the instant the fuzzy, bemused
and completely self-immersed
mammalian head pops
momentarily from its burrow.
Espied from above, the eagle's eye
discerns detail at several miles,
the falcon plunging
plunders the ground, an arrow,
direct and hurtling,
the hare snatched
in a moment of rabbitry
unassuming security
that prompted fatal loitering,
the silent screaming attack
from above. This is my agenda:
rodent or lagomorph ferreted
from underearth, raptor
diving in one fell sky-astounding
stoop to take it in the only
instant available. To feed this raptor
and keep it alert. To go beneath
ground to lure, coax, drive
upwards the stupid, tricky,
coaxy melf from its hidden bed of dirty pelf,
winding self-ways
self-feeding gone to ground.
I the prey dug in
and so tantalizing, I raptorial
arrow-aiming
flushing rabbitward,
me shoveling furiously
fast-reburrowing tunneler,
me alive and eaten, well fed.

The Fish

the silvery life aflash
in the depths,
the salmon waterfalling
upstream or
catfish awake on
the muddy bottom,
bottomfeeder on
unconscious detritus
aswim in dark
selfwaters
that keeps me
from falling asleep,
filtering the *aqua permanens*
into deep red wine water
that brings the dead
to life.