

**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.