

Late Depending Branches

Fate

Fate is what brings us –
strained through the muslin
of small acts –
the residue of what we thought to make
of our life.

It happened while we were busy
with something else.

It is what, inborn, overcomes itself
helping us beyond
the one who had the Fate.

The Years Melt Like Hours

The years melt away like hours –
a flock of small yellow finches hang at all angles
 along the flowering branch,
 fall away like leaves –
how much that I have learned, gone
possessions shed like layers
as summer heats the morning air
one after another all the things that defined
 a life
leaves that fall on water carried off
forever never once always

Our Lives are a Great Forgetfulness

Our lives are a great forgetfulness
and then we sleep.
We live an abiding forgetfulness,
light as the down on the air from the blown head.
It is not the job of children to make meaning
from their parent's blight,
and yet we had to make it.
And what we thought had won through –
 a few decades more at most,
and it will evaporate and be a mist.

Untitled in Life

The brief flash of winter sun so soon gone
into the dark green fir
so bright it cut like a cold knife
the day into its portions
now gone down, gone down
so soon the young year dies
that had come so soon, soon
goes on, taking me along
soon, soon the grave like the dark fir
knifed by the swift-setting winter sun,
soon the brightly flashing sun
only a memory that ran along the needled
branches and vanished in a day,
soon gone, soon come
soon runs the world around
and life again turns dying to new life come.

There it is Again

silver-gray showers
lay a patina on the cedar
thousands of tiny frogs
croaking look, look

under the footbridge
the swale
 ponds once more
the fingertips bouncing
its surface
 tap this roof

 spring's come
the hills are clipped
but in our yard wild grass
grows wet and long

The Small Rain Down It Rains

weekend morning after long reading
I run water in the sink
imitating the rain that has not let up
on the roof

today the light will not clear
the silver gray that softens
all the square-cut boards I see
from the bedroom windows
rain bouncing off the deck
streaming down the siding
that stood all winter, exposed

The Ferry Slips Ghostly

the ferry slips ghostly
out of fog
are our lives not
like this? –

slowly appearing to us
from a passage
whose time we no longer
comprehend,
and
whose direction
becomes clear
only as it finishes?

flowing through fog,
quiet, silent
white

living under its slow
protection

–
it's better than the dark
prolonging,
long before the prolepsis,

anticipation
of what
is already done,
our story.

May in Full Leaf

Every water-laden
branch broken out
in full leaf
droops like a lush robe
laid over winter's old chair.
Scotch broom leans
in yellow languor,
fingers brushing grass
off earth's forehead –
don't miss
the white lilac
beaten down
by showers, the
masses of red
rhododendron,
the woodpile wet
in May rain.

Potential

the boy opens a handmade box
rough wood unsanded and
hands unskilled as green cedar tips –
what did potential mean then
but the unfolding
of the love packed within –
packed with the care of a parachute
or a fine scarf in tissue –
that opens out to spread
over a life spent in care –
children, elders, work, home –
until, late, there's not much left
but this old (now cardboard) box
grayed weathered, corners
bumped, and the crumpled tissue
in which it was packed
when all was new
and the excitement of the gift
danced the eyes –
not much left it's true but that and this
marvelous bright tissue that,
billowing
out of his mouth like a scarf
seems to take on a life of its own

The Stem Releases the Bough

swell, full
drain
still

wave
swell
hold full
 a moment
long drain calm
still

 the wave lifts
 up the beach
 sound swells
 to the out-breath

the ripe plum purple
at summer's height
the pregnant belly
(impossible more)

the longing to slide down
the sloping shore –
 birth
expulsion of breath
the ocean subsides
into itself

the stem releases the bough
the hand of a friend
 you see
no more –
 into the hand
the warm plum.

soil made from the thick mess
 of fallen fruit –
the cullender of old age
loses all its water
 breath
releases the chest
 to wait a moment longer
than all the moments before

whose stillness
is the seed whose exuberance –
chubby legs chasing robins across the spring;
20 bathtubs of seawater pouring over
protruding rock

– bursts forth

Sea-Born

blue mussels tongued to black rock
by these tough byssal threads
a tight-sewn hundred sessile heads
hissing when the sea chocks
shells tight-tied to wave-washed stone
unclamping thin lips to sea moan
roughly clinging to clicking beds,
spin-drift rising, falling, the surf zone
sucking in seawater detritus that feeds –
bits of languid seaweed –

ah world I live in and love, seas above
stars below!
what's not dear, now the life's beloved
imagery tires and slows?

First Sight of Night Arriving

The thinnest curve of palm uplifted
opened to catch
or hand back all that falling
that Rilke saw,
or the corona on silver standing in a dark room
lit by the next room's light
falling through the door,
or a breath that falls
just before song –
there it was
only a moment later, having looked
where bruised clouds
glided stately between two tall firs
silhouetting dusk –
the newest moon, sheer bowl into which
night pours all its light.

First Sight on Arising

The rising sun caught
against the massive fir trunk
like a bole,
 an intense white hole
from which threads
 unprepared
the fair filigree.

Pouring from the white hollow –
what the black hole
swallowed
 light.

Eyelids curtain
the expanding cone
 slightly
rays thinner than needles
emanating lightly
dart from the dazzle
stream into air
encircling any eye that sees
 from anywhere.

It's About Beauty

I thought unremitting suspicion and bitterness –
come to find out, it's about beauty.

I thought constantly short-comings,
my failures –

and now come to find out
it was always about beauty –

oh these moments passed over
in resentment and distrust.

I sprout green stems, new leaves
wagging from all the body's openings.

Even young nettles droop softly
in a rare sun-filled spring morning

and a series of quiet notes fall
from the elderberry, the cedar, the dogwood,

from the red and pink rhododendron –
always the same notes, always new,
always about beauty

It is a Spring Rain Again

it is a spring rain again, drenching
the already full pond,

the singing frogs
have swallowed
their voice sacs,
feeling vulnerable
by light of day,

the wet grass,
already growing with abandon –
it is the irrepressible
surfeit
of wind singing the grass –

it is only
the Pacific Northwest
itself
singing itself.

Winter Band Concert

Sixty have gathered – perhaps
as many as 100 –
in this small, darkened high school theater –
winter 2016

band concert – *many individual threads*
interwoven into the fabric of sound
Young student faces, so much practice,
well beyond scales –
so much *not yet* built by hand into each
life to come.

We sit facing them,
some in our middle years, focusing hard
on what's here, what's needed
now, and what's to come;
others older,
suddenly astonished by a vision
that confuses us;

each exfoliating
our own memory, not just scales
but multitudinous leafing branches –
and yet *the one shared memory,*
the one event,
the 2016 winter band concert,
bundles all,
from separate lives
thin tendrils reach *individually*
from common ground
towards common sky.

How is this possible?

About 30 are young, fresh, beginning,
opening to the possible glimpsed
already out ahead. About the same number
in their middle years, getting on,
getting through, charging their children
with the future as if they were some battery.
And then we older, still confused
at being newborn in this comprehension
of all these lives gathering, separating,
rejoining, at once individual
and *at the same moment* utterly
entwined, woven in one fabric. How
is this possible?

Each one passes here only briefly,
a moment, a life, unique, unrepeatable,
irreversible, irretrievably committed
to *this life*, yet all laced,

all woven in one –

“*tapestry*”

would be too poor a word –

but let’s use it.

It’s more like a living inflorescence,
a rhizomous exuberance binding
multifarious shoots together –

momentary bundles

like a climbing vine

like fascia that bundle muscle fibers

to leverage their strength

– shoots that

separate to feel their way into new
bundles of unaccountable scope.

How is this possible?

Consider: we are not concerned here
merely with the thin threads of a single tapestry

but with many tapestries

woven at once, a tapestry entire,

full, rich, real, attired

in daily life

normally unremarkable

(as known by each inhabiting mind) –

and yet the tapestry of *each such* moment,

individual to the one weaving –

his or her own –

becomes something shared through

multiplying intertwining tapestries,

each individual

woven a moment in *shared memory*

and then *released* (not thinking twice

that it is *not known by any two* of them alike,

though conjointly made) –

the same moment appearing differently

in each tapestry concurrently woven –

not merely experienced but *co-created*

by all together.

Each single individual life

knows itself, yet taken together,

memories composite,

(each of which, taken individually,

is known separately)

known from all possible angles

by all,
 each *indispensible* to its creation,
each contributing *to the creation*
not only of the moment but of
each other, while *remaining themselves*
sole centers,
 individual self-creations, on
 their own trajectories through
this tapestry of intersecting tapestries;
 ongoing shoots forming
 momentary bundles,
 separating quickly,
joining new bundles,
 through which each grows
 feeling a way
 without pause
like the wisteria whose tendrils simultaneously
 reach
 for the roof,
balcony rail, and neighboring lilac,
threading all in all.
Lives expand in *innumerable*
big bangs, each
creating a universe,
 each drawing upon all others
at once to *detonate*
 explosions of *multiverses*
each second.
A life entire moves through this particular
moment; the lives
of all those here move entire
through this moment.
It is not enough to say “individual” or “collective”.
 Each moment
known in its own particular way
by each one here
in a moment creating and created
 by *the constellation* of them all.
How is this possible? *How is it possible!*

Coming Home the Week After Graduation

Our corner just a corner again – the turn
that swings the main road by,
where we stood so long in silver drizzles
drenched, waiting for the big yellow bus;
where we ate, well into early September,
sun-warmed overripe blackberries
that overran the roadside
watching the small black spider
tangle in its own shadow,
crawling up the waterspout from which
the moments of life pour;
in spring lazing on dazzling green
roadside grass talking to the water manager
leaning out his truck window, secure
in the assizes that our own fizzy
grade-schoolers would soon pop off
that overgrown bumblebee
and dash ahead down the drive
to pick life up where they'd dropped
it just that morning.

How has so unremarkable a turn
 swung round
 its blind corner vertice,
to void the vortex within which we lived,
 and vacate the spot
 on which we too
 just the other day
 laid it down?

This Rain Coming Down

This rain coming down this morning,
is an intelligence.

This rain, falling directly down, soaking
the ground, taken up by herbs and forbs,
lacing thick shrubs and the spires of fir,
is an intelligence.

This rain, falling as it is, at this precise
instant of climatological conditions
is an intelligence.

Into this intelligence all others rise
like vapor above a pan of boiling water.

It is the only intelligence
there is, it is an intelligence that goes on
ceaseless as a heaving sea
roiling nurseries of stellar birth
the old chaos of the universe.

There is no body separate from mind.

There is no disembodied mind.

There is no isolation nor submersion.

There is no loss – only transformation,
energy and matter conserved

with intelligence,
raining and falling, dying and rising.

I Thought I Heard Death's Hand

I thought I heard death's hand –
the ponderous shed door creaking slightly open –
the afternoon breeze too slight, the light
too full with beauty –
it should have been a giveaway –
but the lightfoot woodrat
who'd danced away once already
with the peanut butter
took no notice

Lethe

the moment at death when it all floods back –
the vows, the commitments, the knowledge
that I was alive at *this* time, in *this* place
and loved them deeply –
may be a source of delight for the laughing
but for me it will be an occasion for weeping
and this will make the water of the River Lethe –
this long remembering that will allow forgetting –
this last lethal longing leaving life lovelorn –
an upwelling draught well welcomed
swallow down hollow out follow forever

When the Moment Comes

when the moment comes, I will feel no regret
for regret will have gone beyond all recall.
when the moment comes, there will be neither
pain nor grief, nor comparison to anyone
for I will have become everyone and no one.

Rotten Snow, Spring Flow

It is again early May –
old snow melts off the mountain pass.
Rotten snow, dirty, softening
like this life I have nearly outlived.
Old age settles, the body decrepitating.
Downslope the rivers are flush with melted snow
the swell of spring; headlong the rush
that in the estuaries slows;
time swamps like a backwater,
attention turns to the first-born.
The swollen belly gravid
with what the old snow gave;
the young wife's smile warms the melt
speeds the flow
births the child-bearing young
who in turn replace her,
settling into age.

Now the pale yellow-green is new leaf,
now leaf-fall.

Mourning

in old age an old man facing death
knows who dies; he is not
the young man he once was.
that one has already died,
uncelebrated and unmourned
except now in the old man's heart.
all who knew him also already
passed away, and with them
the world they knew – gone,
dead some years when the old man passes.

Moving Out of Ghenna

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living consumed by the unlived life

indulging

nursing anger, nursing pain

brooding

hurt, shame, rage, envy, lust

living in the deadly valley

resentful

surrounded by rotting piles of *refuse*

the stinking garbage

smoldering, bursting into random flame

harboring, hoarding

spontaneous self-combustion

stewing

handing over the soul

to every provocateur

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acknowledge the longing

go off alone

summon courage

sink into the well of God

where there is nothing that is not God

there, listen

be faithful with your very life

obedient

wait

wait

listen harder

The Wandering Albatross

The wandering albatross flies to the moon
crossing seas of moonlit dark.
It makes twelve trips,
once every four years,
until it tires, bears its young
and sails alone a year at sea
to recover from the grief
of raising a child who,
like a wandering albatross,
flies off toward the moon.

It Is Time to Go

It is time, let go, it's no longer here –
youth's full-out dash, child's joy,
jumping up and down –
no longer.

It is time to let go of what's no longer here
golden expectations,
puer's lifeblood –
no longer.

It is time to let go of what's no longer here
the family I raised,
the little children –
no longer.

It is time to let go of what's no longer here
Bainbridge High School halls,
crowded with friends
no longer.

It is time to let go of what's no longer here
backroads of Winslow
I bicycled with my brother –
they no longer exist.

It is time to let go of what's no longer here
the strange rich thrills
Evergreen seminars –
they no longer exist.

It is time to let go of what's no longer here
partnering that lent a beauty
to any woman –
no longer here.

All the while awaiting the great things
that were to be my life,
they were coming to be and passing,
and I did not notice.

We are the whetstone on which we sharpen each other
and the saw that tears through one another.
Time is the whetstone on which we wear away our edge,
the saw that cuts downs against the moments of our lives.

What has happened? What is left? Who am I?
The time for questions has passed.
It is time to go.

Dark Seas Running North

an exercise in distributed rhyme

dark seas run to the north shore;
south of the dock
 the lovely limbs
of rollers comb the long rim
of sunned sand –

it is the world,
 offering itself to behold.

foiled in Klimt gold
the sun's Midas hands
tip the surging chop –

 melting in garlands,
 shoulder-slipped frocks.

brooding of spared war
the old heart lifts
 the love it sifts
wanting more

young light skirled
 as it drops
skirting the poor
vanishing as it pours

So God Crowds the Soul

as the expensive homes crowd the hills
 above the freeway,
so God crowds the soul,
so that everywhere there is a view,
 there is God.

as the rush hour traffic clogs the freeway
 making our way fitful and slow,
so God clogs the busy stream of life
until at last the one who hurries
 is brought to a halt.

This Pacific NW Summer

a cool chill in the air –
 door and window open,
as if sunning under
a light gray overcast.
wild blackberry choke the lot,
 the nettle, the horsetail –
all immigrants
 (including us) sensible to
the drip, the scattering drops,
the small rain – the roof
skipped by a trepid beat
 the many feet of hesitancy
not yet breaking over
this island summer
in the Pacific Northwest.

once the disappearance of time
 is understood
 this endless loop
 into which matter bends
accelerating into neither past
nor future, but,
 darkly indicated
in our rough glass
by neither lackey consciousness
 nor random choice –

to what *is*

(uninhabitable
 but
to great mindfulness
true freedom)

what is knowable
 only
 in and through
the human frame,
 beyond
and *in*

what is *here* – allied nature,
that *here*

embeds us –
beyond
the illusion
that we *are* alone or are alone.

Sitting Bull

A muddy bull sits
in a pool of clear water.

Clouds bruise the sky –
lovely. Shortly
the cool, complicit rain.

I used to write poetry.
Now summer breezes
come and go.

The Months

September slows the ruddy sun
October's gone to ruin
November apples fall to earth
December's birth is iron
January freezes in an icy bed
February sap runs thick to head
March shoots out in pale green
April's sun is barely weaned
May loses lovely hair
June softens fresh bridal air
July's redolent of summer heat
August indolent,
 in yellowing wheat.