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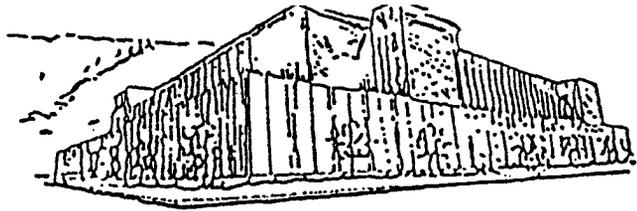
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ARRIVING AT AMERICA

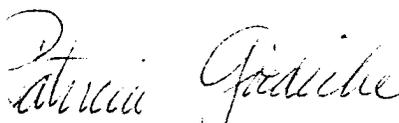
by

Robert Firth

B.A., University of California at Berkeley, 1987

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
University of Montana
1996

Approved by



Chairman, Board of Examiners



Dean, Graduate School

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Arriving at America

1

(Having single-mindedly replaced the assumption
of the past--it starts up again in this:)

Vacancy--
scrawled and popping in iced baby blue
advertised all across this verging into
a perpetually modern midnight.

This denies all others. Every single
object boxed in this cheap room is colder,
vaguer to the touch since that other trip
rubbed the roads right off the last map.

Now it's too late to consider those
other destinations once presumed in mind.

But can this polarized glass and rubber tire
scene be resolved as a human choice--
together with the cool green dashboard lights?

Invariably, a new version of some he and she
knowingly locked into a motion machine,
arguing out every anonymous device.

In this context, it's another car running down
the reserve tank, a big old American car--
any color will do.

Their language disassembles the phenomenon
of sitting still while carried forward
faster than the landscape, the speed limit--
their speech stretched out over miles
of probability and high desert.

Except friction here grinds the words down
as finally crossing the plateau they collapse
into a long black curve of gravity
barely traced by a chalk line of one, one, one,

until suddenly a motel materializes from a pool
of neon. "Hey look honey, a motel . . ." says
either one as the scene mechanically slows
with it randomly being his voice that now
disintegrates down toward a subsonic elll . . .

Her heavy lashed eyelids drop and drop
as everything grows increasingly unintelligible.

Always slowing down more slowly . . .
The sign now expanding bigger, brighter:

2

(There is an indefinite landscape--
snow shifts between sky and earth,
the sky is empty, the earth flat.
This is the setting:)

A typical scene--cheap room, lurid neon
flashes obtusely, some letters missing:
Indian Hills Motel. Nothing is clearly seen,
an exhausted post-war prefabrication.
An addicted expression lit in a flash,
blacked out. A vision blurs the edges,
eyes strain to focus the oscillation
of something, nothing.

Only this room constantly recurs:
the double bed, nondescript pictures,
tired colors and the tang of chemicals.
A muted t.v. radiates a discrete screech--
hardly audible, the shrunken evangelist grows
more psychotic denied volume--it mouths

and gesticulates. Sitting on the bed he says:
what is unsaid, that's what's important.
A cigarette burns to ash but returns
as he strikes a match, reaches
for the tequila bottle, half empty. She drifts

to the window--it is snowing--
(but that is outside)
in here they refer to their bodies,
a hot flash of pleasure, blank of pain,
drums a sensation out of nothing.

But there is something else--it is the ending
of one more black and white movie:
Marilyn Monroe squeezes closer to Clark Gable
in the beat-up pickup's front seat, says:
What if there was someone--a child, brave
from the beginning--do you think?

On the bed she hums a steady yes
 into his hollow ear. The t.v. glow fades
 to a buzz of grey-blue. He hears a thrumming
 heater, then nothing. It empties into nothing.

3

We were so cold milling in the fresh snow
 our fingers were twenty winos or pink
 crying babies. We bundled them
 into the mission church for the gas heater
 and were surprised by a fresh coffin.

The adobe pueblo itself a giant sculpture
 of red clay and hands--a story teller doll,
 the mother cachina with a lap of centuries
 children, and dreams of men and women.
 In the curio store you smiled and pressed
 the hollow doll mouth to my ear--
 I strained to hear for some whisper there,
 some message under our drone of words.

A buffalo herd danced away the death
 of last year. Migrating from the restricted
 kivas, the barefoot men and boys disguised
 in horns and skins stamped, drummed,
 and chanted the earth back to a story.
 The women kneaded and baked bread,
 wafting a piercing scent like the sulphurous
 smoke and ash of fire crackers
 from their outdoor clay ovens.

4

I wonder if people can bake their souls
 in the kivas with the same spirit
 the women bake their bread with,
 and whether this spirit can ignite
 the chill desert air with a new sense
 or arriving at a place, a state so empty
 and endless that it starts to pull
 before you're even there, pull like a wind,
 or the drawing in of breath, a sense
 like of a thing fully outside yourself,
 like how one word comes to mind,
 a word as familiar as birth or death,
 as standing in the snow with her
 and suddenly it all as strangely familiar
 as the smell of independence day sulfur.

5

Later a shaman of paint will watch me,
he'll dance with jimson weed and lightning
in double fists, his black eyes two holes
painted through time. There's some message,
some word hieroglyphed on the clay
of the kiva mural that was saved
from the conquistador's invasion of death,
gold and christianity, and now exhibited
for tourists who stop, photograph, pass along.
But his signs and symbols have been confused
by the centuries, so he dances on unread.

We'll warn a custodian of the leaking gas
in the mural room--he will nod, act vaguely
concerned at his desk, mumble something.
Outside I'll pluck a shard of the pottery
scattered everywhere where the pueblo
vanished into the ground. I'll wonder
if it's good luck or bad, and because
I'll receive no sign I'll slowly turn, pocket it.
Then you'll say: soon it will start snowing,
we should go, and I'll nod, we'll hunch
into the car and wordlessly leave.

6

They steadily drive and diminish to a vanishing
point within the landscape. Their language
empties into a blue neon sky. The over-expanded
parenthetical description collapses
to an empty set--brackets drawn
to a period--then nothing.

7

(Flattened like pictures,
not round like a word.)

8

You are standing here. Not moving--
the universe keeps falling off
the edge of your vision.
This world is flat,
not round. You wonder:
What if there was someone?

Proposition

A proposition like the whole body
somehow held up by hands, by air,
but not quite--which is like
the need to confess to someone,
something, a question of proportion.

A metaphor like a sense of space,
a thing god-like revealed in the night--
say a dream of space you could live in
for as long as it takes, which is
the same as forever. Or say a story
with finally the right ending
which makes possible the landscape
with its sense of proportion--
the feel of yourself being smaller
than your own dream of walking
into the sun burnt grain, black birds.
the field of amber holding up a sky.

A proposition and its explanation
as necessary as the food one gathers
from this field ravelling out in seasons,
out from some unseen god who renders
the entire earth, each husk and grain,
and that old orchard there to the left
littered with small scarlet apples,
this dirt road scratched to the horizon,
and the time walking from here to there.

An explanation like--
it works for no known reason,
or, these means justify the ends,
or even, there is no explanation here.

Still Life

Something fell through the center
of everything, what remains is gravity
the vacuum of time. It was god
dropping like a stone statue
into those waters, to lose
his mind in their dark, their calm--
as if it were possible . . .

So a fraction was made of zero,
the infinity of halves appeared necessarily
as whole objects to one another.
But their edges were incomplete,
rubbed and ground against the other,
sometimes to stick for brief moments--
manufacturing the heat of existence.

But not enough to fuse again
the jigsawed form of sky, earth
and there at a distance the couple
standing against the river--which one
now fingers the flower whose bluish color
bleeds into the dusk, and which one
mouths the word whose syllables
blur with birds, river, breeze?

Not enough to remember who or why,
to trace the way back into
the oblivion of a still life.

Turing's Machine

1

This consciousness of thinking, therefore,
 moreover, and etcetera and there
 a whiskey glass stationed on the table
 imposing itself into this thinking.

0

The glass not synonymous with consciousness,
 a thick glass refracting ice, yellow whiskey,
 rather the apperception of the glass.
 whiskey, wood table, and moreover
 the meaning of the content . . .

1

The brain as Turing's Machine:
 that a computer can manipulate symbols
 according to specific equations,
 yielding definite results, yet without
 knowing the symbols' contents.

0

But then of course he did
 kill himself after all.
 Not that this is related, i.e.
 a non-sequitur, although
 some problem remains . . .

1

Go to, go to
 that whiskey glass, empty,
 full, empty, the ice, light
 melting, a numinosity of meaning,
 meaningless, on, off.

Remembrance

Why not start up again with the candle
burning in a bottle on the table,
because this is partly about fire,
fire shaped down to a small flame,
a flame that is exactly like itself
standing on the table with no other
likeness--so I'll say, "This flame."
But outside a car goes by,
at least it sounds like a car.
But now I'm wrong because
the car means nothing at all.
A sound, an assumption, a repetition,
etcetera. There are no likenesses
in here. But then why did I say
"start up again"? And why is it now
a question? So it is a likeness,
yet different also. As if I'd started
with the cigarette burning instead--
I'd still be close to this point.
After all, the words keep reappearing.
So then I was wrong--I must be
more careful from now on.
The flame, or rather, "This flame"
is still burning and I remember
the candle when I lit it.
It stood tall and white, yes
I remember it clearly. And now
it has burned to the bottle neck.
The moments have burned it up,
or rather, burned it down. I'm sorry,
I wasn't there for most of them,
I was talking on the telephone--
I just found out someone I remember
died in a fire.

Road Sign in Babel

As if the tiny angels that inhabit
each and every word of the page--
round vowels of their echoing songs,
curves and strokes of limbs and wings--
were all forced to flee, beaten,
exhausted in their labored prayer
to hold with pale graceful hands
the message of a sentence intact.

The mind could no longer marry the brightness
of the sky to the lighted sense
of itself as a story, perhaps
the story of how to rise from sleep
to the small familiar life of a morning.

So then the demons moved in--disjuncture
of twisted limbs and hardened horns,
words grew doubled, misused, turned
to lies, started standing for wrong things--
sun became black, touch became black.

Pleading or prayer didn't slow the mind's
frantic night construction of crazed
painful towers that careened toward stars,
and streets laid too fast to name
multiplied disease-like through the body.

The thoughts hissed and laughed, raced
in millions through their glorious city,
in and out of doors, up and down towers.
Their shriek of a language splintered air
to sharp pieces the mind couldn't breathe.

There was no breath, no clean wind
blowing from the desert or the stars
to bring a new scent, or motion
to the stilled leaves of all the trees,
or to bring some new message
like the possibility of another world.
And the mind saw there was no end--

it leafed back through the book, its life,
the city, till it found the word stop
and hung itself there like a sign.

Origami

I could fold the voices of my mind,
 halve them and halve them again,
 run a thumb along their edges,
 hand you a small piece of paper
 and call it my confession--
 that is if my mind had fingers (if I had a mind of fingers)
 and if I could remember the crime.

So there is no paper, no evidence,
 only words shaped from air like origami--
 this one saying, I'm a bird, moreover (clearly),
 a crane, see the shape of my wings,
 how one is bent and broken (how it drags on the ground).
 And this one saying, I'm a young woman (skin softer than air),
 my body is naked, but look closer,
 I lie on the floor just as (so) still
 as the (red) chair or (and) table with the letter,
 and here (too) is blood bright (ly) in the shape
 of shapelessness, which says (more quietly than a word),
 too soon, the story wasn't finished.

And now a wind comes in the window (billowing the curtain)--
 its shape is the origami bird swaying
 on its thread, the letter with words
 too small to see lifting up, her hair (turning to feathers)
 feathering, and then a (slow) turning (slower than anything living)
 back to see
 the cold white snow of the mountains.

And so the voices are sealed into sleep
 (where) and the shape of confession unfolds its wings,
 (drops from the window ledge) (then) (curves (sweeps) up flying blind) rises,
 and flies blindly into a world (of sky)
 empty and as edgeless as a perfect sphere
 rolled from the flat paper of whiteness.

Question and Answer

Say a question posed
 posed directly to the object--
 say inquiring into the seeming vastness
 of night sky with its littered
 science of stars--

assuming the grammar is intact,
 can hold the sentence up
 as moments between words, pauses
 in thought, start to compress,
 crush like, like what?--old stars?

And so the mechanism must build
 some saving theory of explanation
 like a map to navigate by
 with somewhere a point like a period
 that is the end of the story
 and is called home.

As in this is your body right here--
 some incarnate significance--
 say your face turning to the sun,
 hand smoothing back hair, the hot day,
 and now a stirring in the belly,
 the image of someone shimmering up.

Your life of such happenings named,
 given a gesture, a verb, say,
 turn, smooth, stir, shimmer--
 the verb making it flesh.

But is this language really a life
 dragging after the mind's strange motion--
 and what is the word,
 the question that arches, strains,
 into the place it came from,
 say between the face turning
 and the hand, just before the hand starts
 to smooth the hair.

There is a question that always recurs--
now it is the piercing of the flesh--
the answer a word poured like blood
through the body, because lastly life
must be literal, become the moment
where the name assumes its form,
says, this is the language I am known by,
and I must be known to you
as a word played out like a thread,
a form sewing through the hollow in time--

as body being the threshold of the instant
where the word love comes to mind, is mind,
where it fills in the blanks,
is drawn from the landscape held together
by a garden where a word is cultivated
like a fruit, and you are that moment
when it is picked and offered
and it is the answer that labored
through days of cities, roads, streams,
through time to your impossible question

to say, see the rich colored seasons, the land,
listen to its winding stories, touch
this life that brought us together.

Clockwork

Once again the mind mistaking itself
 for the sound of itself, the click
 upon click, as if synonymous
 with this place, this landscape of echo.
 As if the hope for the rendezvous,
 the mirror of breath, hand of light
 lay neatly buried in each thing
 waiting for the dinner bell to be rung.

(and his body was immaculate, skin
 like marble, eyes of gold they whispered...)

Some kind of innocence like hands
 of ether that merge in a slow gesture,
 a waving to the dark figure at the horizon.
 What must be reimagined always remaining
 in the background, at the safe distance.

(where two or more are gathered...)

The thin bone of the moment
 pointing at this, pointing at you now,
 you there in your robe of surface.
 As if the mind really had anything
 to say about time, as if the points
 connected to the face, the flesh,
 to the possible, to the probable.

(it is not possible--do not tell)

The covenant of endings
 held out like a real thing.

(and in the framing of each thought
 it is framed...)

Like a procession of statue the nakedness
 of stone barely a different life, watching you
 in each corner of the square, the galleries
 of existence speeding up, slowing down.
 Like a procession of ruin.

(his sword and his vision were one...)

A candle, an ant, the cold white of bone
 brushed in the still life of canvas, but busy,
 busier the more you look, the sheared edge
 where each life starts up again, and again.
 A promise held in the very shape of things,
 the immortal there in its shadings,
 the animal emerging from the trees.

(shape of salt, shape of shade...)

A fascination, the shadow of the eternal
 barely seen in its outline of air,
 dragging its half-formed body hour to hour.
 The face some hood of disfigurement,
 a muddle of shape, the muttering
 pulling at this life, this assumption of mud
 and shadow, and terror...

(beware the arid plains of desolation she murmured...)

As if the space itself had failed,
 a well of dread, a mouth of betrayal
 in the mold of an object, each breath, handful.
 The body's ancient clairvoyance of fear,
 almost familiar that steady gathering,
 that layer of dark laid on darkness,
 the quick pulse and pull of difference,
 the recognition of hunger shaping the other.

(from darker Hades some saurian death's head...)

And so the trick of intersections,
 precursor of illusiveness,
 this attempt to abstract a god.

(and the cross brought forth the people...)

Out from a pale thinness, the horizon
 of elements, from air and the watching
 of air and not-air, to become the animal
 of invisibilities, of visibilities.

(iron nails driven in...)

And so in the garden of afterwards, in the fact of it,
 in the made place where it can be written down,
 where the invitations are sealed, sent out.

(he paused, paused, then wrote: it is accomplished)

And with the dusk a dream of singularity,
 a bluish sphere likened to the self, to air,
 then not to the self, not to the air.
 And a fading of sunlight which assumes the color
 of each life, of breath going out through the leaves,
 through all the many window-paned houses.

(the languor of wisteria in the eaves...)

Animating each of the uncountables, each shadow,
 every breath fixed to evening, to air, to branches,
 the shapes of trees all shadowing the houses.
 And a small hand like a bird of small bones
 lifting a ball from grass in the dusk.

(weep maidens, rend your dresses...)

The instant of inflection where the stars turn,
 where distance is folded in a luminous box,
 and the earth turns from nothing to this one place.
 The here laid out like silver on white linen,
 with candles being lit as if for the first time.
 And the ball curving out into an invented place,
 rolling through the grass in the arc of dusk,
 into the momentwhere the hand will find it.

(the beautiful and the terrible are the same...)

Each thing like a number suspended,
 the many paper lanterns hung in air,
 pale blue, pale green, pale yellow light,
 and the linen, candles, and flowers in vases.
 But different, another kind of light
 bleeding through the air, and the leaves,
 the mother coming out to the porch.
 A light that makes the light possible.

(and its work, its unimaginable work)

A Leaf

Suddenly a leaf slipped, yellow, maple,
fell as big as a mountain, even bigger,
obscuring the vision busy inquiring
into the whole landscape, and also
into some deep doubt that seemed
hung there like the weather--the grey
clouding of sky, a damp wind.
The sky darkened, its distances
folded in a strange crenelation--
the curve of ideas connected
the leaf to its many sharp points,
pierced the smoky blur of trees.
The intricate veins, a vast terrain
of watery canals, mapped out
the space that had stood empty,
that had asked, "What can
possibly fill me." The tough stem
rooted itself in air.

River Surface

Light making possible the rippling
river surface and the fish
rising from below with continuous
insistence, reshaping the water
for a moment, its body flashing,
seen by the man standing on the bank
with the idea of pine tree in mind,
with the idea of how to rise straight
into the sky, like the one of many
who in their human way try to
conceive how the fish never ceases,
never needs to cease to rise
through the surface with its absolute
hunger for the bright and endless
image lightly dancing there
on the water, promising it is enough,
to keep the tail beating upstream,
the mouth opening to take the glittering
and the whole land spread around
and also the man on the bank
standing, watching it all.

Walking Down and Back

One could walk into a stream
and be that stream, it holds for awhile
then doesn't, it falls apart
back into this life. Perhaps
like how death works for awhile.
holds some deep stillness,
then doesn't--capsizes its dark
cargo, and things go wrong, things
like thoughts, dreams, houses.
Bodies wash up on the edge
of consciousness, twisted, bloated,
along with orphan children demanding
some kind of life. Any kind

Eternity is just a good idea
like a nice coat the mind
will slip into, dropping its old body
to the earth floor that reclaims it.
A good idea like walking out
into the sharp edge of a morning
and letting the feet be feet
all down the worn dirt path
to the stream, then barefoot
stepping onto a smooth rock
parting the water, the water
parting itself just for the moment
it takes to figure the size,
shape of the rock, and then
there the light breaks open--
a whirl, a piñata, of bright
stones and rainbows, water
prisms of red, green, blue,
light and dark and light--
so then no one there,
there is no one to look
at these things anymore . . .

But it must be gravity
reminding us, the body falling,
grabbing out like a child
to be held from slipping
into the stream streaming there,
and so one stands up,
puts the body's weight
back on shore and studies
one's feet walking up the path,
thinking: How'd they get here,
now where was I?
Oh right, eternity.

Epiphany

Declaring this season to mean
the overlay of subtle
on subtle,

visible upon heard; metaphors conceived
childlike: gingerbread lovers--
limbs crackle, stoking

a small space to light, the passion
play reilluminated on a black
velvet drop--their season

reclaimed in gift of presence. Mouths
unwrap tongues to bare again
the here and now,

mull over this new found weight
of each to each, caroling
"you are more, you are more."

And high above, say an infinity removed,
a point, dispassionate, where the particular
is assembled--

an unseen instant of the metamorphic
mandala rendered into instance,
visible, christened as snowflake.

Oblivious, meaningless it waltzes down
between moon and world
in accord with chaos--epiphenomenal--

thus birthing a miraculous construe
of meaning--freeing downcast spirits
to conclude by epiphany:

a hand erasing the mist of breath
from the window. "Hey, we're snowing."
"Yes, we are, I know."

Convolutions

1

Is it really the winded old birch tree
 or dopamine that I see . . . ?
 I'm holding fast to this question
 swinging like a child on a branch.
 I imagine once I was a child,
 some simpler, certain thing . . .

But then when did my knowledge of birches
 bloom tropic, lurid like some chemical spill.
 Sometimes I'm lost in a tangled forest,
 shadows that remind me of . . .

But my eidetic eye wanes moon-like,
 gets mopped up by tiny tablets,
 those electric birch leaves
 whipping against the cave walls
 fade and drown in pill shaped pools.

And I presume those looming shapes
 are recognizable questions
 like algaed carp, marble eye turtles
 groping up for air, open mouths
 break the surface, for an instant
 they're such clear questions, clear
 eyes, but the less, less so . . .

2

But truly now, I was in love once--
 she sported a wonderfully evolved cortex
 and her body wasn't half-bad either,
 everything convoluted, convoluting . . .
 So was it time that grew too pregnant
 and had to be aborted? Perhaps
 it was the idea of heroin or ecstasy
 that refused to allow any vacant room
 for the refined dialectic of love.
 Then again was it really a drug
 or just our burgeoning imagination
 simply presuming the inevitable
 next desire, already blooming deep within
 like some poppy or pink lotus flower

3

unfolding under a lunar lullaby?
Suppose I tried to paint this--
paint the birch's mottled skin, and her
convoluting flesh--especially those inner folds,
her frontal lobe of such passion,
nautilus shell of her dark mouth.
Could I really brush in this blank canvas
hung like an opaque window between my eyes

4

and that old ineluctable birch?

But I already know one painter.
Night after night he refuses sleep,
works and reworks impassioned
as an alchemist. He says to me,
"You have to watch out for the old
poison lead syndrome" as he squeezes
out more colored oil, then laughs.

So I keep watching, waiting for the grey mind
to twist its flesh back cleanly into desire,
following my friend's painting through the dark
till the yellowed light creeps into that birch.

A Window

Outside the window is the world again
and again, barely continuous, seeming now
a snow flurry, and there, no there
below and to the left--a tree of leaves,
flames already half gone to ash.
But I can't name the tree. I know flame,
ash, red and black.

In the room the telephone
is on the table, no I am wrong,
it is in my hands, a nerve strung
across scorched poles, a vague terrain
I once imagined as vast enough
to lose things in; but now
the dark fields are collapsing
to a darker point, the past is busy
displacing the present. I say,
"I know I am on my own." The voice
returns, "Keep us appraised."
Outside the window it's gone black--
it must be night, there is
no snow now, no snow.

The window is no longer a window--
a view from here to there.
Here is my mind in a room, I watch it
turn to a room of nowhere.
I watch the layers of nothing
seep through the walls, the long dead
pattern of paper, bone dry lilies; a desolation
that compresses a world to a moth,
to dust, to something unnameable,
like the history hung outside the window.

When the body of things doesn't work,
can't hold its fingertips to thin air,
the mind must go someplace, any place--
to dark sky, falling snow, fire of leaves,
then into the dark fold of each thing,
to the small blind house that allows
the change from one to another--
from leaf, to flame, to ash, and so
to a meaning, say, the sacred passing
of season, pain, an impossibility.

So I say I am that window--
as much glass as glass, instinct
to open out from here to there--
there to the tree burning still as night,
there the pitch of sky with its snow again,
and there through a smoke of endings
to a world again made unknown--
the true body of the self,
a window as open as breath,
as cold air, what's endless and possible
burning like a different kind of fire.

Trumpet Flower

I listen to the trumpet flowers blowing
in the quick wind just outside
the window. They swirl, vibrate,

emit tones. But not exactly
hearing these flowers--it's something
too large, blowing my thoughts

like leaves, petals, I hear. Not dropped,
but stripped into darkening weather,
away from the firm ground.

It's the sound of honing,
of grinding down an old blade,
its sharp tone singing of specifics

cut off. The knife severs through
the roots of things, casts them
into the wind busy scattering

the named, the known, drowning
each trumpet flower in a flood
of cacophony, of untethered sky.

I watch one pale green flower torn
off its vine by the invisible,
and it's here I decide

she is busy dancing to her death
in a fury, a last flamenco passion
to fling and whirl her tender skirts.

And as she's whipped into the sky
I hear a single trumpet call out,
not the last golden note

summoning all names from oblivion.
but a thin lyric sound
determined to end as a song.

The Garden of Not

I am waiting for the garden to begin,
for the green story to begin.
I am not waiting for the dark wind--
it arrived a moment ago.

I thought you said
you would meet me here.
I thought you said you would be
the brown mouse in the grass,
the tiny whiteness of teeth
gnawing the tattered edge
of everything, of paper and grass
of what an old god had forgotten.
I thought you said you would be
the dream of the mouse--
that owl in the old black cypress,
its yellow eyes, its head of turnings.

The wind is saying something
is being lost in the saying.
The wind whispers someone has failed,
failed at the journey of stones.
That this was the first story--
the one called pity; or perhaps
the one called how much the mouse
needed its bright dream of the owl.

The garden says stones are falling,
its walls are inside out.
The garden says the sky is dark,
the wind is dark, it says
you too are growing dark.

You asked me once
did I love the leaves?
You asked me once
did I need the leaves?
I came here this evening
from every other place
to tell you yes.

I came here this one evening
to lie down in the grass
and tell you yes, I do.
It is the last thing.

The darkness is stepping into itself,
into each tree and stone, every rise
and fall of breath; I am growing backwards
into stillness, I am looking for eyes
that can see me, animal, paper, you.

The dark is whispering something is dying.
It whispers the garden of death is dead.
It says there never was a garden,
that the garden was never a story,
that there never was a you.

It says the garden was always
made of wind, it says the wind
was always made of dark.
It says the shape I have made
was always the robe of my fate.
It says I have always waited here,
that I was always you.
The dark says I will always forget
what I have said.
It says you have already forgotten.

The Book of the Garden of Not

I am reading the story of the man who waited
in the garden for one who never came.
The book has lain so long on my desk
it has become a window of moonlight.
Above the window of the book is the window
of darkness that looked to the garden.

What I have feared has come true.
The only light left is the pale light
of the book. The light of the lamp,
and the light of the chair and rug
have gone out. Even you sitting there,
busy reading from your own book.

You have all turned to small dark windows.
I peer into you and see nothing
but the backward reflection of letters.
This must be the shape of the last story--
the story of nothing.

The story says that the man has stopped.
The one he waited for was never there.
It is a sad story that drifts in darkness--
that assumes the very robes of darkness.
And its ending is the saddest part, it claims
it has no ending, that it never was a story.

I realize I am mistaking myself
for the man and for the dark.
I realize this mistaking is the story--
how the book of moonlight rewrites itself
with black letters on a sheet of nothing.
I realize I am becoming a thin silhouette
of paper, of the thought of paper--
that this silhouette is my last hope.

I tell you that the man is outside
waiting in our garden for someone--
that you too must mistake yourself
for him, or for the other one.
That we must bring their story in.

I tell you that my book is the garden
of moonlight growing empty of itself.
That we can rewrite the story
into the real story of ourselves
reading to each other in this room.

You tell me I have the wrong book.
You say the other appeared earlier,
waited, grew impatient, and left
into another life--a larger, brighter one.
It was the lateness of the man himself
that became the darkness that erased
the story. It was his fault all along--
he failed his lines, failed at tragedy.
You will never pity him, become him.

You say the garden is never empty--
it is full of the flowered wind, trees, stars.
You say it is made of the endless petals
of darkness always unfolding into things,
into the life of stone, star, into itself.

You say it is a book of blank pages,
larger than each moment, each fate.
That it holds both the moonlight
and the moon and everything else
you wish to read upon it.

I fear that your book is better,
that its white eye sees beyond mine.
Already you are turning the crisp page
as if the conversation was closed--
as if you were the one I hoped to be.
And only now is the true story beginning.

Of the Garden of Not

We realized we had to leave this garden soon,
but we were unsure of our next destination.

You and I had heard the engines of reversals
playing at their varied fictions beyond the walls.

And what of the others making their strident claims?
So many voices we grew unsure of our own,

of the words we had dabbled with, the badminton birds
we batted at each other, oh so delicately

in our negotiations of need. But can you remember
the rooms of glass, the orchid mouthed secrets

we shared out until the very lamps dimmed,
til the Persian rugs glowed more deeply to match

the complications of our touch. And how we walked
through a history of streets, painted cafes, palaces

of dawn and dusk, how even moonlight seemed bound
in a book. How we came to imagine it was the true story

with a life beyond endings, beyond all the hotel rooms
and train stations, their bells, whistles, claim tags.

It was imagination incarnate that had delivered us
from the strict collar and shoe claiming to be fate,

that laid us down so gently into the perfect balance
of the green garden made naked for the sake of ourselves.

And there the color of grass was finer than any word
for green, and the trees and sky were more refined

than any word we had ever dreamt of as children,
always in the loss of our politeness, our true manners

blinded at birth, and in the moment of every arrival.
We had held our breaths our whole lives, we tried

to be as still as the one we had always imagined,
that man standing out there on the lawn.

On the cusp of everything, his silk suit, his iced drink,
the fragrance of evening, and the delicious pause

just before we called out to him. The chamber music
of that pause in which we laughed and danced and lived.

But he turned before we called. The evening light,
the story turned with him, what we had thought

was ours moved into him. And he was so much
darker, different, than we had imagined, his head

was turning toward us. We realized we had to leave,
but we didn't know where to go, we had waited

there our whole lives. And all we had wanted
was to wait, in the garden of our hesitations,

in every second that was our story of tongues, lamps.
That never included this evening in his eye.

Glassine City

An illumination at the edge of things,
 a flutter of wings in someone's basilica.
 Who owns these things anyway. Bits, pieces
 of the sacred backdrop, the spirits
 of objects crowding the corners, the sky.

We go on despite ourselves. Our desire, its thin tongue
 huddles in the back field, it mutters to itself,
 it wants the rest of our money, our clothes.

The light keeps repeating its own dance macabre.
 We sit here claiming we can remember
 this place, this glass city with its many names,
 alibis, city of the new, city of the old,
 Jerusalem in construction, etcetera, etcetera.

There is talk of paranoia in the galleries.
 I build my tableau of garbage, offer it
 to you. I call it "The Glassine City that Forgets
 the Language of Death" or "My Best Gift to You".

But your eyes have assumed a fresh blankness,
 a new intelligence. You say the edges of buildings
 dance with a gold light, that now they are better
 than paintings. Right on time the man in black,
 the one who never stops smiling, glides by.

Your new eyes follow him, I know you love him,
 his black suit, his white teeth, his stride.
 I know its just a question of time,
 that in this city one outlives one's fate,
 that the machines are busy at replacing
 everything, each bird, leaf, stone, step.
 Soon I too will forget the green past, our life.

The love of the new things thrives in back rooms,
 in the boutiques, the parks, it hisses, gathering
 in the tree tops, the gaps above the churches.
 I wander at dusk, hear it whispering all over,
 just below the walls, windows, claiming
 its new powdered face will be the very best.

I am down to just one question. I ask
 what does it require to be human in this place?

There are the openings, the shades of blue,
a plaster church on a city of bone, the birds
all whisking up, a dark door of sky.
And there is the man who got lost,
a statue in the park trying to resurrect
each word from a long coffin of dirt.

And there are the closings, the sudden flashes
across the sky as if something was ending,
the blue turning to so many shades of black,
a coughing, a sick repetition of doors.

Orpheus Revisited

What you thought was the bright pitch of love
 was death's own whine.
 What you thought was a pipe of wood and silver
 was the hollow bone of your wife.
 Orpheus, your music was the requiem
 of all things, the requiem of all song.
 We tore your head from your body in a frenzy
 to save you, to save every stone,
 every bird, the woods, the sky from you.

We would have made you a god if only
 you had asked after that one sliver of turning,
 that glance at the backwardness of things, the shade
 of your wife, the locked world of salt and wind.
 But when you walked back into this world
 you turned again. With eyes of fire, wind and salt,
 you stared through the stone, the dirt, the life
 of each thing as if all shape were shadow.
 And you turned it all into your one song.

How could you wrap such beauty and desolation
 in a single note? How fail to see
 each one sleeping deep in the absolute dream
 of itself. Your song didn't bring the stones to life,
 you were stripping the house of the world
 of its house, with each utter note
 the stones wept to feel themselves wake
 to the place where no one can live,
 not even the dead, not even the gods of the dead.

But you couldn't ask, you'd stepped through your eyes.
 We cried when we could not make you a god.
 We tore your head to save your body,
 stripped it of your clothes, it was so naked
 of your face, we anointed it with myrrh,
 rosemary and wine, and laid it down.
 The floor of the world could bear its weight,
 we laid it on stone, on water, on air.
 Its stillness was like the stillness of the world.

We threw your head, hair, its face of blood,
like a word we had no tongue or throat for,
a fist, a seizure of sound like a hole of night.
But a humming stuck to our hands, to the grass,
the knives, to birds fixed to dark trees--a decapitation
in the moment of each thing. We cast your head
to the river to be rid of it, as if it could hold
a tragedy in its box of bone, the lid shut
to the world. But it made no sound

entering the water, no splash or hiss.
It pulled the sound of the river, the wetness,
right from the water into its gape of mouth,
held it as it had held the sound of stone, tree, bird,
light. As you Orpheus had held every shape and note
of your wife, her feet, belly, her grey shade of eyes.
Always turning in the mouth, the silent river, impossibly
turning toward the song of the death of the world,
toward her, toward your songless song of apology.

Bardo of Glass

Why did he bring us so north, they asked,
to this small house of earth and moss
after so long a journey of cathedrals,
and the days only of dusk?
And those who wondered became the roof of the house.

They gathered in the circle of the candle at the table.
Some said they should hold all their hands,
that the nightmare would deepen, that the house was air,
that their father was unfathomable.
And those who spoke became the walls of the house.

It deepened. Each breath was a question.
Why did he bring us so north, they asked,
to this house of water, this mouth of dying?
In the south we would have found salvation.
And those who feared became the floor of the house.

Only two remained. Their hands were ash.
They gathered in the circle of the candle at the table.
Are not we the charnal house of the lord,
his fire, his flesh?
And their faith made the house a window.

The Alphazed of Aphasia

Ah, let there be a light that creeps--artless
 Across the angularities of the inanimate
 As if in a dream of the dream of beinglessness.

And let there be no end in the sight of the mind
 Of Alphonse the Absolute--and of his many airy airs.
 All shall hail the arrival of the mind of alphonse

The alphagravitron and the omega-antiphon.
 And he shall be seen as if from a great height
 Or distance, as if in a dream made of alabaster.

Ah, Adonisai--see how his mouth articulates the round
 Of his mouth, and witness how the very air is pierced
 With the sound of itself. As if, as if, the A were

Itself the antecedent of all. and the precedent
 Of all things. A procession of being like the thought
 Of Cleopatra assembled in the world of a pearl,

Or in a cup of clay, its water reflecting the head
 Of Antony, his profile advancing to Alexandria,
 Or in the beaded head of the asp reflecting itself.

But behold, what being drags the desert's black coat
 Back through its sandy mirror of air and nothing,
 back to its dark house in a grain of windowlessness.

It replaces space with an aphasia of apostrophes
 It unfolds its many gilded boxes of green and blue.
 Could it be the ascension of Alphonse the Apostate?

As if nature itself were the handmaiden of nothing,
 As if the mind dreaming was but a pale imitation
 Of itself, that sees not the performance of the thing,

Not the blue of the amarillis, the green of the amaranth,
 Nor the rounded moon, but rather the apparition
 Of itself. It sees a shadow larger than the world,

Or smaller, it sees an ant. and less. it sees the image
 Of an ant. And even less. the mere idea of an ant
 Flatly painted on nothing--indeed it is Ant Alphonse!

It is the merest mind, the singularity of the Ah, Ah,
 The arching arches and domes of Agra, with its reflection
 Assembled as invisibly as a dream across the river.

As if the river itself existed only in the lightless mind
 Of the prisoner of Agra, in the black marble of water,
 And sky, the black gloss of the ant assembling the seen.

To thus crawl into an erasure of shadow, into an image
 Of shadow--to crawl across the dust of Temple Obscura,
 And across the shadow of the architect of Agra.

It is the Ah-Ah stuck in the accidentality of the Achoo.
 Attempting to utter the A, to arise, but fastened
 To the factuality of the bodyless--to the overthereness.

It is not the High Heirophant antipodal and triumphant
 In the chrysanthumun court of the High Ha-Ha
 Who divides the alphabet of being into zero and after.

It is not fields growing salt, the historic fixation a la
 Fin de Carthage, nor final collage of one graven abstentia--
 It is the whisper of Ah, like an attempt at the nameless.

Adrift alone in a boat in the realm of honeylessness,
 It is the dream of a green book of green papyrus
 Whispering in the landlessness of A where the mind

Of alph mistakes itself for an accidental angle of light
 Stretched across the dark water, like a crucifiction
 Of air upon air, or of a nail, or of a body of nothing.

This is the dream of Z, the land of Z created like a smear
 Of light, and air, and the mouth rising in a shrill wail
 Nailed to air, where the mind of alph mistakes itself

For the bodilessness of Agra. Where the image ascends
 As smoke to the prayers of women in pale patterns of silk,
 Drifting to and fro, and is the name on the tongue of alph.

As if there was a shadow of honey there to be weighed,
 As if a mind was a feather of air and also its absence.
 As if it was a name like Agra or Azalea and was a dust

Of yellow on the mouth of alph, and on the mouth of air
 In the palace of the Ah-Ha with its endless columns
 Of alabaster holding up the idea of columns, and sky,

And the great airy airiness of the high arching dome
And its white nothingness toward which the whiteness
Of the heliotropic morning glories entwine and ascend.